

# Pentecost

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## Text:

Acts 2: 1 – 21

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and

they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

## **Introduction:**

Acts chapter 2 is a highly significant chapter. It gives us the last piece in the foundation of what we call the Christian Church or the Body of Christ. You will hear it said that the Church began at Pentecost. That is not an incorrect statement, but neither it is entirely correct. A more correct view would be that the church was first gathered and instructed during the ministry of Jesus. It was then redeemed through the events of Good Friday and Easter, and finally it was empowered and fitted for its mission of taking the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations of the earth on Pentecost. All three steps are essential. Without these three things there would be no Church. This being the case it is important that the truth of this chapter be clearly imprinted in our hearts and minds, and that we understand the significance of the events that it records.

There are four distinct divisions within the chapter:

- The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost: Christ's witnesses endued with power, vv. 1-13
- Christ's witness bearing witness: the first preaching of the Gospel, vv. 14—36
- The reaction of the Jews of Jerusalem to the preaching: the first converts, vv. 37—41
- The first summary passage: portrait of the Jerusalem church at its beginning, vv. 42—47

Today we will look at the first section, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. First, we will consider the significance of the day, then we will look at what happened, and finally we will consider the significance of this event for us.

## I. The Day of Pentecost

Pentecost comes from a Greek word that means “fiftieth” and was so used because the celebration took place fifty days after the offering of the first harvested sheaf of barley which was to be presented to the Lord on the first day after the Passover Sabbath making it the fiftieth day from the first Sunday after Passover.

In Leviticus 23 God gives orders concerning what are called his “appointed feasts”. In verse 4 we read: "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them". They are then taken up in their order of annual occurrence beginning with Passover. We read in verse 5: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover”. On the first day after the Passover Sabbath the first sheaf of the barley harvest was to be offered to the Lord, Then they were to count seven weeks from the offering of this sheaf, giving the feast its Old Testament name, the feast of weeks, which began on the day after or the fiftieth day as stated in Lev. 23:15: "You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD”.

Notice then the fulfillment of these feasts: Jesus, our Passover lamb was sacrificed for us on Passover fulfilling the meaning of Passover. On the first day of the week following the Passover Sabbath he rose from the dead and became the “first fruits of them that slept”. On the fiftieth day after the presentation of that resurrection sheaf the Father sent the Spirit to empower his Church and gather in the first fruits of the great harvest that continues to the present and will be

completed at the return of Christ when the third and final appointed feast, the Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled.

## II. The Coming of the Holy Spirit

On this particular first day of the Feast of Pentecost something happened that had never happened before and will never happen again. It was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy which Peter points out by quoting a lengthy passage from Joel 2. It was also a fulfillment of a prophecy of John the Baptist who had said: "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16). Finally, it was the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus that we saw earlier in chapter one when he told his disciples "to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5). The fullest form of this promise is found in John chapters 14, 15, and 16 where Jesus promises his followers that when he returned to the Father he would ask his to send another to take his place, one who would be with them teaching them, making his presence real to them, and making their witness powerful; convicting the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come. What happens in Acts 2 is the fulfillment of that promise.

What happens is a unique event. Later when we get to chapters 10 and 11 we will look at a parallel event that we will call the "Gentile Pentecost", but what happens here is unique. It happened only once. What happens is also the initiation of the pattern that we talked about when we discussed how the gospel advanced. We indicated that there were five elements which I will give in the order that they appear in this passage. First, there is prayer. As we have seen in the time that the followers of Jesus were waiting they were praying and we will see when we get to the end of this chapter that one of the four enduring practices of the first Christians was prayer. Secondly, we saw that mission is accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit. There had been no mission, no witness to this

point because the Spirit had not come, but now he is poured out upon the assembled followers of Jesus filling them or empowering them to declare the “mighty acts of God”. The third element is a mighty act of God that gives opportunity for witness. In this case it is a miracle that, as far as I know, has never occurred since. Jews were gathered in Jerusalem from the four corners of the Roman Empire and beyond, as the Holy Spirit comes upon the followers of Jesus they all begin to speak, but they begin to speak in languages that they do not know so that as the crowd that is assembling around them begins to listen to what at first appears as noise each begins to distinguish his own language being spoken. This phenomena gives Peter the opportunity to address the crowd powerfully bearing witness to them of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, so that they are convicted of the great wrong that has been done and ask Peter: “what shall we do?” Peter replies that they must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and they too will become participants in the outpouring of God’s Spirit. The result is that 3,000 accept his invitation. Only the fifth element, opposition and persecution, is missing from this account, but it will quickly make its appearance in chapter 3.

### **III. The Meaning of Pentecost for Us**

Now that we have seen what happened on the Day of Pentecost, the question that remains for us is what significance does this day have for us? Different people might give somewhat different answers to this question. Some Christians see such importance in what happens in this chapter that they call themselves “Pentecostals”. Where Pentecostals differ from other Christians is in seeing what happens in Acts 2 not as a unique event, but as a repeatable event. They would say that just as the first followers of Jesus were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, all believers need to have their own personal Pentecost; that we need to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and that as the sign of the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was speaking in other tongues so the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for us will be speaking in other tongues.

The greatest argument against this idea is that throughout the rest of the New Testament the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not something that believers are exhorted to seek and to wait for, but rather something that is present as an accomplished reality. For example in I Corinthians 12:13 Paul writes: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit”, and in Romans 8:9 he says: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

The best way to think about this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is that just as God sent the Son to earth at a specific moment to accomplish a mission, and the Son remained until his mission was accomplished, so at a specific moment, the Day of Pentecost, he sent the Holy Spirit to accomplish a mission, and he has been here since and will remain until his mission is accomplished. Melody Green expressed this idea simply and beautifully in the refrain to her hymn, “There is a Redeemer” in these words: “Thank you O my Father, for giving us Your Son, And leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done.”

So, you might say, if I do not need a personal Pentecost, if I do not need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, what do I need? First, we need to understand and acknowledge that the baptism of the Spirit is a part of conversion. When we become believers in Christ the Holy Spirit came into our lives. He is an essential part of our walk with the Lord. What we need to do then is to understand how he works in us and how we hear what he is saying to us, and as Paul says “walk in the Spirit”, that is live in harmony with what he telling us and empowering us to do. As we make our way through the book of Acts we will have many opportunities to come back to this.

We can conclude with on final observation about the Day of Pentecost. For the Jews, their first feast of the year, Passover, commemorated the Exodus, God’s great act of redemption on their behalf. Pentecost was connected to the giving of the law at Sinai, and Tabernacles anticipated the coming of the Messiah. They believed that it was fifty days after Passover that they had arrived at Sinai and God had given them the law. For them the law became the foundation of their mission and conduct. As the Old Testament progresses however, it becomes

evident that as Paul will write much later, “the law was weak because of the flesh”. That simply means that humans, because of their inclination to sin, cannot keep the law. Thus the prophets began to speak of a coming day when God would send his Spirit to transform us and to write his law on our hearts so that obedience would no longer be an external obligation, but an inner compulsion. Ezekiel prophesied: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Eze. 36:26-27). This is what happened on Pentecost, and this is the reason Paul can say in Romans 8: 2-4: “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”