



The Birth of the Church Acts 2

Introduction

There were only a few days between Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of that promise, but during those days the apostles kept a low profile. They stayed close together, possibly in the upper room mentioned in 1:13, and devoted themselves to prayer. But the pouring out of the Spirit changed their lives dramatically. In fact, it changed the entire world!

The pouring out of the Spirit came at a time when many Jews were present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Because of the manner in which the Spirit was sent forth, they witnessed the miraculous event with their own eyes and ears. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached a convincing and convicting sermon to explain what had happened and thousands of Jews were compelled to recognize Christ as their Messiah and repent of their sin. Thus, the church was born and began to grow. What could be a more exciting topic of study!

This chapter of Acts takes us back to our christian roots. Try to imagine what it would have been like to be there in person.

Outline of Acts 2

- I. The Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-13
- II. Peter's Sermon - Acts 2:14-36
- III. The People's Response - Acts 2:37-47

I. The Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-13

The Day of Pentecost was originally an agricultural feast celebrating the conclusion of the spring harvest. It is described in Leviticus 23:15-22 and Deuteronomy 16:9-12 as the Feast of Weeks. It was also called the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) and the Day of First Fruits (Numbers 28:26). In the Greek language it came to be called Pentecost (meaning fiftieth) because it was celebrated fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits, a harvest feast which marked the beginning of the barley harvest. The Feast of First Fruits took place on the first Sunday of the Passover season.

A. Pouring out of the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:1-4

On the Day of Pentecost, all the apostles, including Matthias and probably most of the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:5, were gathered together in one place, possibly the same upper room where they had met following

Jesus' ascension. Suddenly and without warning, three simultaneous and miraculous incidents occurred.

1. *A sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind - 2:2*

Luke does not say that the sound was a wind but it was like a wind. Actually, the Greek word *pneuma* can mean either *wind* or *spirit*. The sound came from heaven and it filled the entire room. This would certainly have caught the attention of the apostles and heightened their expectation of what was to follow.

2. *Divided tongues, as of fire - 2:3*

Again, Luke does not say that the tongues were fire but that they were like fire. One of these tongues sat upon each person assembled in the room. In the Old Testament, fire portrayed the presence of God (see Genesis 15:17; Exodus 3:2-6; 13:21-22; 19:18; 40:38). This miracle surely gave the assurance of God's presence to all who were in the room.

3. *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit - 2:4*

The Holy Spirit baptized and filled all those who were present. Acts 1:5 had looked forward to this event. Peter looked back and recognized this as the baptism of the Spirit in his speech in Acts 11:15-16. The first effect of the pouring out of the Spirit was that those assembled began to speak in other tongues. These were definite spoken languages, as revealed in verses 6 and 8, or at least they were definite languages in the ears of the hearers.

As the Holy Spirit was given to men, the disciples were baptized and 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' The baptism of the Spirit is described in 1 Corinthians 12:13. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to join people of diverse racial and social backgrounds into one body - the body of Jesus Christ, which is His Church. In the strict sense of the word, Pentecost was the birthday of the Church. (The Wycliff Bible Commentary, Moody Press).

B. Confusion of the crowd - Acts 2:5-13

Because Pentecost was one of the three great yearly feasts of Israel, a large number of Jews from all parts of the world had gathered in Jerusalem at this time. They were from *every nation under heaven*. When they heard *the sound*, which may have been the sound like a rushing wind (verse 2), or the apostles speaking with

other tongues (verse 4), or both, they gathered together and discussed among themselves what was taking place.

Jews from 15 different nations heard the apostles praise the wondrous works of God, each in their own language or dialect. This was amazing to them because the apostles were from Galilee, a northern area of Israel which was "out in the country." Galileans spoke with a strange accent, very different from the Jews of Jerusalem. How could it be that these unsophisticated men could speak so proficiently in languages which they did not know? The crowd of men asked each other, *Whatever could this mean?* Could they be drunk, *full of new wine?*

II. Peter's Sermon - Acts 2:14-36

As Jesus' close follower, Peter had always been impetuous, speaking out of turn, putting his foot in his mouth, or saying things he later regretted. But now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he stood and addressed the Jews with power, wisdom, and grace. It is a joy to read that the eleven other apostles stood with him in solid support. This is a reminder for each of us to give encouragement and support to our pastors, Bible teachers, and fellow workers.

In his sermon, Peter explained what was taking place. He showed that the speaking in tongues was the fulfillment of Scripture and the fruit of Christ's resurrection and ascension.

A. Gift of the Spirit as the fulfillment of prophecy - Acts 2:14-21

Peter's first focus was to show that the apostles were not drunk but that what had happened was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

1. Peter's defense - 2:14-15

First of all, it was only the third hour of the day, 9:00 a.m. On a feast day, it was customary to fast until after the morning prayer service which would have been around 10:00 a. m. That made it very unlikely that the apostles were drunk.

2. Joel's prophecy - 2:16-21

Peter quoted from the prophet Joel because this passage *was the clearest and most obvious Old Testament prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Acts, James Montgomery Boice). Peter linked the text from Joel to the apostles praising the wondrous works of God in the various languages of all those assembled in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The miraculous speaking in tongues is what Joel had prophesied.

a. *In the last days* - 2:17

Joel's prophecy describes what would take place *in the last days*. The *last days* refers to the time period beginning with the incarnation of the Lord Jesus and extending through our present time to His second coming (See Hebrews 1:1-2). Peter and Jude refer to the same time period as the *last time* (1 Peter 1:20 and Jude 18). Specifically, it is the time of the new covenant as described in Hebrews 8:7-13.

b. *I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh* - 2:17-18

In the past, God's Spirit had worked powerfully through kings, priests, prophets, and certain individuals for specific tasks, but now it was poured out upon all God's people. That is what the people of Jerusalem witnessed on the Day of Pentecost. The apostles had spoken forth the praises of God in foreign languages by the power of the Holy Spirit.

c. Prediction of judgment - 2:19-20

The *wonders and signs* Joel wrote about depict judgment. This part of the prophecy had not been fulfilled at the time of Peter's sermon, but it would occur later during the period referred to as *the last days* (2:17) and before the *great and notable day of the Lord* (2:19). Some believe that the *notable day* was the destruction of Jerusalem and that the wonders described in Joel took place at that time. Others believe that the fulfillment awaits the second coming of Christ. (For the former view see The Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry, page 1641. For the latter view see Wiersbe's Expository Outlines of the New Testament, Warren Wiersbe, page 281.)

d. *Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* - 2:21

The gift of the Holy Spirit was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy pertaining to the last days. The fulfillment of a portion of the prophecy was a pledge that the entire prophecy would be realized. Peter used Joel's prophecy to show that the last days were upon them and judgment was coming. There was therefore a need for repentance and for calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. As we shall see, the aim of Peter's sermon was for his listeners to repent and call upon the name of the Lord.

Many scholars note that not one Christian perished in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. So it will be on the day of judgment. Salvation is not difficult. It requires only that you turn from sin and call upon the name of the Lord. Have you turned from the futility of all this world offers to call upon the name of the Lord?

B. Gift of the Spirit is confirmation that Christ is the Messiah - Acts 2:22-33

In the remainder of his sermon, Peter showed that the Spirit was poured out at this time because the Messiah had come. He had been crucified by the Jews, but raised from the dead by God and had now ascended into heaven, the place of perfect power. From there, He had sent the Holy Spirit to fill and empower those who were His own. But first Peter had to show that Jesus was truly the Messiah. The first piece of evidence is from God Himself.

1. God's providential plan had been carried out - 2:22-24

Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension were all foreknown by God and part of His eternal plan.

a. Jesus' miracles showed that He was from God - 2:22

God had shown Jesus to be the Messiah by working *miracles, wonders, and signs* through Him. Many of Peter's listeners had seen some of the miraculous deeds Jesus had done.

b. Christ's crucifixion was all part of God's plan - 2:23

When Christ was put to death, it was no surprise to God. It was not an accident, but an act which fulfilled His perfect will as part of His predetermined redemptive plan. The Jews were the ones who were humanly responsible for crucifying Christ. They were the ones who had handed Him over to the lawless Gentiles. So although this was God's plan, the Jews bore the guilt. God's sovereignty is compatible with man's responsibility. Those who killed Jesus acted in accordance with what God had determined, but they were also ethically responsible and accountable for their choices and actions.

c. It was impossible for Christ to be held by the power of death - 2:24

God raised Christ from the dead because *it was not possible that He should be held by it*.

2. David had prophesied of Christ's resurrection - 2:25-28

In this passage, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11. This Psalm was primarily written about David's own experiences of suffering and hope, but the application was to the resurrection of Christ. In verse 25, Peter plainly stated that this is what David had said concerning

Him (Jesus). Jesus was the One whose soul would not be left in Hades (or the grave) and He was the Holy One who would not see corruption (2: 27). He could not be held by death because His way is the way of life (2:28). In a later sermon, Peter called Him the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15).

3. Peter's explanation of the prophecy - 2:29-33

a. David was dead and buried - 2:29

1 Kings 2:10 plainly states that David was *buried in the City of David* (Jerusalem). Peter's listeners were all familiar with the location of David's tomb. Because he was dead and buried, David could not have been writing about himself in Psalm 16. He wrote prophetically of one of his descendants, the Lord Jesus Christ.

b. God had sworn an oath to David - 2:30-31

God had revealed to David that the Christ would be the offspring of his body. He had promised to raise Him up to sit upon David's throne (See Psalm 132:11). That is why David could prophecy and Peter could confidently preach that *His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption* (2:31).

c. There were witnesses to Christ's resurrection - 2:32

The twelve apostles (Peter, plus those standing with him) were all witnesses that Christ had been raised from the dead.

d. God had fulfilled His promise - 2:33

God raised Jesus and exalted Him to His own right hand. Thus, Jesus had the authority to send the Holy Spirit which had been promised by God and foretold by the prophet Joel.

C. Gift of the Spirit as the fruit of Christ's ascension - Acts 2:34-36

1. David's prophecy - 2:34-35

Peter showed that Christ's exaltation was also prophesied in the Scriptures. He quoted from Psalm 110: 1 in which David wrote of *The Lord*, referring to God, speaking to *my Lord*, referring to Jesus, and inviting Him to sit at His right hand until His enemies are made His footstool.

2. Jesus - Lord and Christ - 2:36

Jesus is on the throne at the right hand of God right now. He has been exalted by God to reign as both Lord and Christ. The title of *Lord* points to His position of

authority and power over all things and *Christ* refers to His redemptive role as the Jews' promised Messiah. Peter drove his point home by reminding his listeners again that this is the Man whom they had crucified.

How would you have felt if you had been one of the Jews who heard Peter's sermon that day? Would you have been enraged at this unlearned Galilean who dared to offer interpretation of your Holy Scriptures and accuse you of killing your Messiah? Or would your heart have broken at the realization of what you had done? Are you aware that it was also your own sin which sent Jesus to the cross and your own lawless hands which put Him to death? How will you respond to Peter's sermon today? Will you humbly recognize Jesus as your own Lord and Savior and submit your heart and soul to Him right now?

III. The People's Response - Acts 2:37-47

A. Cut to the heart - Acts 2:37-40

Those who had listened to Peter's sermon that day were convinced of the truth of what he had spoken. They were convicted in their consciences. They had put to death their Messiah.

1. Question - 2:37

They turned to Peter and the rest of the apostles for advice. They wanted to know what to do to be delivered from their sin and guilt.

2. Call to repentance - 2:38-40

a. Repent - 2:38

Here is the aim and application of Peter's sermon. He told all those who had responded to *repent*. The word *repent* means to reverse the direction of your whole life. It means to change your outlook and change your heart. It means to be going in one direction, going your own way and doing your own thing and then to make a 180 degree turn and go the other way - God's way. Have you repented?

b. Be baptized - 2:38

The repentant Jews were also instructed to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This would be public evidence of their personal repentance and the remission of their sins. Have you made the public statement of your own repentance by being baptized?

c. Be assured - 2:39-40

Repentance would result in two things: the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter assured his

listeners that this promise was for them, and not only for them but for their children and even for those who were far away from God, probably referring to the Gentiles. Peter said that the promise is for all who are called by God. God is the one who does the calling. It is up to you to do the repenting.

The people were exhorted to be saved from their perverse generation — the generation which had crucified the Son of God. That generation had asked for a sign and Jesus had told them that no sign would be given them except the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-40). Just as Jonah had been in the belly of the great fish for three days and then "resurrected," so Jesus had been dead and was raised on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Luke 24:7; John 2:19).

B. Conversion - Acts 2:41-47

Three thousand persons were saved that day. This was the beginning of the Christian church. In this passage, Luke shows the common bond of all the believers in the infant church.

1. Common baptism - 2:41

All who accepted Peter's words were baptized.

2. Common doctrine and fellowship - 2:42-43

They all received instruction from the apostles on correct doctrine. They shared fellowship together by *breaking bread*, probably a meal like our modern day potluck followed by a celebration of the Lord's Supper. They also fellowshiped in prayer. God blessed the new body of believers by doing *many wonders and signs* (2:43) through the apostles as a confirmation and authentication of their ministry. (See Hebrews 2:3-4.)

3. Common life - 2:44-47

a. Sharing - 2:44-45

The early believers held all things in common. The rich sold their possessions to help those who were in need. This was not communism or socialism. It was simply voluntary, heartfelt Christian love showing itself in practical ways.

b. Praising God - 2:46 -47

The people continued to worship daily in the temple as had been their custom, for they were still good Jews. They were merely completed Jews, having surrendered their lives to their Messiah.

c. Practicing hospitality - 2:46

They took turns sharing meals and the Lord's Supper in one another's homes. They opened their homes gladly. Simplicity and love were conspicuous in their lives. God blessed them by giving them favor with all the people and bringing growth to the church as more people were saved every day.

Applications

1. How does your way of life draw others to Christ? Do you live simply so that His glory and grace can shine through you, or are you so surrounded with material things that they become the focus of your life?
2. The early believers worshiped God daily (2:46). Do you take time every day to worship, praise, and honor Him in your life?
3. Is your fellowship with other believers mostly social? How much time do you spend with other Christians worshiping God or praying together?
4. How often do you open your home to extend simple and joyful hospitality to other believers?