



The Birth of the Church Acts 2

Introduction

There were only a few days between Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment. During those days the apostles kept a low profile, staying close together and devoting themselves to prayer. But the pouring out of the Spirit changed their lives dramatically. In fact, it has 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 all witnessed the miraculous event with their own eyes and ears. When Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached a convincing and convicting sermon to explain what had happened, 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!

Acts 2 takes us back to our Christian roots. 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). In the Greek language it came to be called Pentecost (meaning fiftieth) because it was celebrated fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits, 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 actually a wind but *as of a wind*. The sound was like a wind. The Greek word "pneuma" can mean either "wind" or "spirit." The sound came from heaven and it filled the entire room.

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

Again, these were not actually fire, but they appeared *as of 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).

Both the wind and the fire were manifestations of the power of God in their midst. Certainly they caught the attention of the apostles and heightened their expectation of what was to follow. Would the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4) now be fulfilled?

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

The Holy Spirit filled those who were present just as Jesus had foretold in Acts 1:5. In his speech in Acts 11:15-16, Peter looked back and recognized this as the baptism of the Spirit. The first effect of the pouring out of the Spirit was that those assembled began to speak in other tongues.

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. Luke writes that they were from *every nation under heaven*. When they heard the sound, which may have been the sound like a rushing wind (2:2), or the apostles speaking with other tongues (2:4), or both, they gathered together to discuss 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 far from the city of Jerusalem. 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 people asked each other, "Whatever could this mean?" Could they be drunk, "full of new wine"?

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.

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

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.

Peter explained what was taking place. The speaking in tongues was the fulfillment of Scripture and the fruit of Christ's resurrection and ascension.

A. Gift of the Spirit as Fulfillment of Prophecy - Acts 2:14-21

Peter's first focus was to show that the apostles were not drunk, but that prophecy was being fulfilled.

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

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 at 10:00 a. m. It was 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 wonderful works of God in the various languages of 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. According to Hebrews 1:1-2 the Christians of the early church believed they were living in the last days. The last days were understood by the Jews to begin with the coming of the Messiah. Later in his sermon, Peter defined Jesus as the Messiah.

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

In the past, God's Spirit had worked powerfully through certain individuals for specific tasks, but now His Spirit was poured out upon all God's people. That is what the

c. Prediction of judgment - 2:19-20

The wonders and signs in 2:19 depict judgment. This part of the prophecy had not been fulfilled at the time of Peter's sermon, but would occur before the "*great and notable day of the Lord*" (2:19). Some believe 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 partial fulfillment was a pledge that the entire prophecy would be realized. Peter used Joel's prophecy to show the last days had arrived and judgment was coming. Therefore, there was a need for repentance and calling on the name of the Lord for salvation. 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 in 70 A.D. This will also be true on the Day of Judgment. Salvation is not difficult. It requires only that you turn away from your sin and call upon the name of the Lord. Have you turned from the futility of loving all that this world has to offer? (See 1 John 2:15-16.) Have you called upon the name of the Lord?

B. Gift of the Spirit as Confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah - Acts 2:22-33

In the remainder of his sermon, Peter explained that the Spirit had been poured out because the Messiah had come. Jesus had been crucified by the Jews but raised from the dead by God, and had now ascended into heaven, the place of perfect power. Furthermore, He had sent the Holy Spirit to fill and empower those who believed. Peter began by giving evidence to show Jesus was truly the Messiah. The first piece of evidence is from God Himself.

1. God's providential plan - 2:22-24

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

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

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

- b. Christ's crucifixion was 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 plan of redemption. The Jews were held responsible for crucifying Christ. They were the ones who had handed Him over to "lawless hands" (the Gentiles). So although this was God's plan, the Jews bore the guilt of their own choices and actions.

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

Jesus is the *resurrection and the life* (John 11:25). Because of His divine power and God's promise and purpose, death could not hold Him in the grave.

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

Peter quoted from Psalm 16:8-11 which deals primarily with David's own experiences of suffering and hope, but the application is to the resurrection of Christ. Peter plainly stated that this is what David had said concerning Jesus (2:25). 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), and Peter's listeners were all familiar with the location of David's tomb. Because he was now dead and buried, David could not have been writing about himself in Psalm 16. He wrote prophetically of his descendant, the Messiah, which is Jesus.

- 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 prophesy and Peter could confidently preach, "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 and those standing with him) were witnesses that Christ had risen from the dead.

- d. God had fulfilled His promise - 2:33

God raised Jesus and exalted Him to His 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

At the right hand of God right now, Jesus has been exalted to reign as both *Lord* and *Christ*. The title of *Lord* points to His position of authority and power over all things. *Christ* refers to His redemptive role as the Jews' promised Messiah. Peter drove home his point that Jesus is the Messiah! He reminded his audience again that this is the Man they had crucified.

How would you have felt if you had been one of the Jews hearing Peter's sermon that day? Would you have been enraged at this unlearned Galilean who dared to offer interpretation of the 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? Will you humbly recognize Jesus as your own Lord and Savior and submit yourself, 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 listened to Peter's sermon that day were

convinced of the truth he had spoken. They were convicted in their consciences. They had put to death their Messiah.

1. Question - 2:37

The people turned to Peter and the rest of the apostles for help. 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 called all those who had responded to "repent". The word "repent" means to change one's mind and reverse the direction of one's whole life.

Repentance involves a change in outlook, a change of heart, and a change of direction. A repentant person is one who has been going his or her own way, fulfilling his or her own pleasures and then has made a 180 degree turn and gone the other way - God's way. Have you repented? Are you living for your own pleasure or for God's pleasure?

b. Be baptized - 2:38

The repentant Jews were instructed to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

c. Be assured - 2:39-40

Repentance results 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 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" (Jonah 1:17-2:10) 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 and this was the beginning of the Christian church. This passage, illustrates the common bond of all the believers.

1. Common baptism - 2:41

All who accepted Peter's words were baptized.

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

The new believers 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 (communion). 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 (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. In what practical ways would Christ have you show His love to others?

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 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, studying His word, or praying together?
4. How often do you open your home to extend simple and joyful hospitality to others?