

## INTRODUCTION

Luke records in his gospel what Jesus “began to do and teach”. In Acts he records what Jesus continued to do from his place of authority in heaven. He used his people, and he gave them his Holy Spirit.

## WHAT WE OBSERVE

We notice the timing first. It came after Jesus warned them of his impending departure and promised to send them the Holy Spirit. They had seen him ascend to heaven and had waited in constant and harmonious prayer. It happened on a significant religious date - the 50th day after Passover, when the first part of harvest had been brought in. The population of Jerusalem was swelled by Jews from all over the Middle East and Mediterranean world.

The first things people experienced were: a loud sound like wind; objects like tongues of fire descending on Jesus' followers; then they spoke to the gathering crowd about God's work in the native languages of those people - languages they had never learned.

The effect was to draw a crowd, who were amazed at what was happening.

The Apostle Peter addressed the whole crowd saying: God had fulfilled his prophecies (especially Joel 2:30-31) in giving and affirming Jesus of Nazareth; society had killed him but restored him to life and took him to heaven; Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit of God, and that was the explanation for all this; God has made Jesus the Lord and Christ.

Peter's hearers were cut to the heart when they realised what they (as a society) had done. They asked how they could be saved.

Peter replied that God's promise of salvation was for them.

About 3000 people responded by being baptised in the name of Jesus and joining the community of his people.

Those effects lasted. The ongoing life of this growing church is described here.

## WHAT WE UNDERSTAND IT TO MEAN

The exalted Christ sent the Holy Spirit of God to work in and with his people. Authority to send a divine person is incomparably greater than authority to send an angel. It means Jesus has been given the same degree of authority as God the Father.

The Spirit's work is as powerful as Jesus' work when he was on earth. It is more extensive, for it reaches every nation. Jesus is "Lord of all".

This work is permanent. The religious practices of the Patriarchs were superseded by those of Moses' era. These, in turn, were superseded by those of the Messianic era (the era of Christ and his Spirit). But that will never be replaced as long as this world exists, for we live in what Joel and Peter call "the last days".

The Spirit's work has created a new community based on faith in Jesus. Social distinctions have no relevance there.

Pentecost was a one-off event, but its effects are lasting. It is important for us to distinguish what was unique to the occasion from what is permanent.

The three phenomena are significant. A strong wind sometimes symbolises the power of God while fire symbolised purity. John the Baptist used those symbols to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus would send (Luke 3:15-18).

The symbol of tongues showed the importance of verbal communication and the fact that all nations would be cleansed by God's power through what the apostles have taught. The gospel (as Peter told it that day) is God's instrument to change society. He calls us to respond to that message. That is why the prophet Joel mentioned 'prophecy' as a characteristic of 'the last days'. With the coming of Christ we now have God's message complete - to prophesy is to bring this divine message to our fellowmen. It is not an addition to the Bible - it is the Bible.

The phenomena were temporary; publishing the gospel in the Spirit's power is permanent. The events of Pentecost were the fulfilment of God's plan. Peter stated that Joel had prophesied of "the last days". That era would be marked by turmoil, by God's judgements, his mercy to his people, the knowledge and declaration of his Word, and the Holy Spirit's work. Then, "anyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (see also Romans 10:11-13). The timing supports Peter's argument. It happened during the celebrations of the start of harvest following the death of the Passover lamb. It portrays Christ sacrificed in order to give life, and the start of people being brought to life in him.

Joel spoke of those days as an era of divine judgement. So did John the Baptist. It is not surprising the people became alarmed. The nation had broken its covenant with God. Now they were waking up to the fact of Jesus' almighty power and their guilt in crucifying him.

A striking feature of Pentecost was that people of many languages became united in Christ - the tongues showed God extending his message to all. It was the reverse of what took place at the Tower of Babel. There proud humanity tried to reach heaven and was scattered through a sudden multiplicity of languages. At Pentecost heaven came down, and all who humbly received God were reunited in one family. Social differences have no relevance in the church of Christ.

#### WHAT WE LEARN FOR OUR OWN USE

Jesus Christ is Lord. He has "all power in heaven and on earth". We will have to deal with him whether we want to or not.

Jesus Christ is an active presence in the church. If we do not experience this we ought to pray to God to show us what is wrong and to correct it.

The Holy Spirit (whom Jesus sends in the Father's name) is the life of the church. As the body without the spirit is a mere corpse so the church without the Spirit of God is lifeless.

The account of what happened at Pentecost shows us what we can expect when the Holy Spirit is active. There will be conviction of sin – people who ignored Christ will realise their attitude was wrong and will ask for pardon and salvation. There will be conversions – people will have a change of heart and that will be seen in their life, including a public affirmation of their faith in Christ. There will be a community – the church will be a living body in which people will relate to God and one another.

The church is universal – there are no distinctions of ethnicity or social class. That is a fundamental feature of the Christian faith and must be maintained.