

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS CONTINUED WORK
(SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017)

SCRIPTURE: 10 WORDS; ACTS 2:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Our focus today is on the greatest event in Church History after the ascension of Jesus Christ – the Day of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Part of our purpose in looking at Acts 2 is simply to direct us in praise of God and His wonderful works as did the 120 disciples.

Truly what we see described in Acts 2 is amazing and awesome.

One of the questions we might have is do we continue to see the Holy Spirit's presence and work in such a way as is described in Acts 2?

What should we expect as we consider the Holy Spirit's continued work?

As we will see from this passage and others, the Holy Spirit's work continues. The Day of Pentecost is not a repeatable event. We don't continue to expect or look for mighty rushing winds, but the work of the Holy Spirit continues this day.

We praise God for the Day of Pentecost and the continued working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people.

Our focus will first be on Acts 2:1-13 in two parts before we consider other passages which speak of the Holy Spirit's continued work in the lives of believers.

1. THE POWERFUL COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, vv. 1-4

Pentecost is the New Testament word for the Feast of Weeks.¹ It was a one-day feast during the season of wheat harvest.

Pentecost means 50 days, because this Feast was celebrated the 50th day after the start of Passover.

It was one of the three feasts in which the LORD required all men to appear before Him in the place which He chose, which for many years was Jerusalem.²

This Feast or Festival in Jewish tradition was associated with the renewal of the covenant made with Noah and with Moses.

In second-century Judaism, Pentecost was also associated with the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. However, we don't know if this tradition was current during the time of Jesus and the disciples.³

Jesus commanded his disciples to not leave Jerusalem but to wait for the Promise of the Father.⁴ For ten days, the 120 disciples obediently waited, studied Scripture, and prayed until the mighty coming of the Spirit on Pentecost.

Before we look at verses 2-4, I should mention that we see the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit many times throughout the OT.

In Genesis 1:2, we see the Holy Spirit active in the work of creation, hovering of the face of the waters.

Robert Letham notes that the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruach*, is approximately used 90% of the time for the Spirit of God in the OT.

¹ Pentecost is mentioned 3x directly in the NT, Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8.

² **Deut. 16:16** "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

³ I. Howard Marshall, Acts, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 73.

⁴ Acts 1:4.

In the NT, Paul uses *pneuma* for the Holy Spirit 115 times in his letters, which is more than all the OT references to the Holy Spirit.⁵

So there is a progressive revealing of the person and work of the Holy Spirit from the OT to the NT. And in a new and special way we see the work of the Holy Spirit in this chapter even as John the Baptist prophesied.

In verse 2-4 we have three powerful signs of the Holy Spirit's coming.

First, there was a loud sound, like a mighty rushing wind. This sign here can be compared to a number of places in the OT where the presence and power of God were shown through the power of the wind.

Here we should note that the sound was **like** a mighty wind. Perhaps you can remember examples of hearing the rushing sound of wind; it can truly be an awesome sound.

Consider two OT connections with this sign.

First, the mighty sound like a mighty wind connects us with the Lord's presence at Mt. Sinai.

When the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai, His presence was noted by thunder, lightning, fire, cloud, earthquake, and a very loud series of trumpet blasts.

The early Jewish writer, Philo associated the trumpet sounds with the *pneuma* of God.⁶

A second OT connection that we should observe here comes from the book of Ezekiel and his vision of the Valley of Dry Bones.

Ezekiel in chapter 37:9 was called to prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath,

“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’ ”

⁵ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 2004)., 55-56.

⁶ Dennis Johnson, *The Message of Acts*, 58.

Epecially in view of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, reordered and returned to life by the word and Spirit of the Lord, we can see that the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost marked a major step in God's restoration of his creation in the last days.⁷

The second supernatural sign that we see was given to each of the disciples. Luke says this sign was **like** a flame, not that an actual flame of fire appeared to each of the disciples.

The word **divided** in verse 3 is difficult to translate. It may be best to understand that one flame divided into separate flames, called here tongues of fire, so that each rested upon one of the persons.⁸

This sign should be compared to the words of John the Baptist.

Luke 3:16 John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Fire can represent both power and purity.

Dennis Johnson makes a good observation about this mysterious tongue of fire.

God used both fire and a cloud to represent His presence among His people.

What we can say here is that each of the believers on the Day of Pentecost was given a symbol, a miniature "pillar of fire," indicating that each was a temple in which God dwelt by His Spirit.⁹

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

The third sign in verse 4, is that each of the disciples began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

I should mention that there is some question exactly about the meaning of other languages as we find mentioned four times in our passage.

⁷ Johnson, 58.

⁸ Marshall, *Acts*, 73.

⁹ Johnson, 59.

The most common understanding is that through the Holy Spirit's power, the 120 were able to speak in other known languages, but languages that they had never studied. This is called xenoglossia.¹⁰

I came across an interesting theory argued by some scholars that the special sign was not the ability to speak in other languages, but rather that the 120 were praising God in Aramaic and Greek rather than Hebrew.

The crowds were astonished to hear these languages spoken in what should have been a more formal setting in the temple courts. Jews expected to hear the sacred language of Hebrew spoken in the temple liturgy on the day of Pentecost. They were astonished instead to hear the disciples preaching (praising) in the profane languages of Aramaic and Greek.¹¹

This is an interesting theory, but I don't think it lines up with how Luke describes four times the disciples speaking other languages, languages which represented a great diversity of nations.¹²

Later we see that these utterances were not just whispered in secret or in relative silence.

120 people speaking these utterances caused a rather large sound to be heard.

The Greek word, which Luke used here, is one that in Classical Greek was used for special utterances.¹³ It is the same word used in verse 14, Peter raised his voice. The word can also imply speaking with a loud voice.¹⁴

Verse 11 shows that the disciples were specifically giving praise to God; they were declaring the wonderful works of God in other languages.

¹⁰ See paper by Daniel Brown, "A More Covenantal Approach to Tongues at Pentecost." 2009. Available online.

¹¹ Keith Mathison, *From Age to Age*, 469-470.

¹² See chapter by Joel Green in the work, *The Word Leaps the Gaps: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*. Portions of this book are available online, which is how I came across it. Dr. Green's article is excellent.

¹³ The Net Bible Notes, ed. W. Hall Harris, (Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2005). "The verb ἀποφθέγγομαι (αποπητηενγομαι) was used of special utterances in Classical Greek (BDAG, 125 s.v.)."

¹⁴ *Speak out, declare boldly or loudly; BDAG, s.v. "ἀποφθέγγομαι," 125.*

Did the 120 disciples leave the house and start speaking these words of praise? We don't know exactly how to describe this mighty scene.

But these three signs showed that the promise of Jesus had come true. The baptism of the Holy Spirit had come. Jesus had poured out the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father.¹⁵

The age of the Spirit in light of the finished work of Christ on earth had begun!

2) THE CONFUSED RESPONSE OF THE CROWD, vv. 5-13

Although Jerusalem was not a large city like cities of today, the population of Jerusalem during the festivals could be rather large.

And since Jerusalem was only about 2 miles in circumference, it would have been a very crowded city, with hundreds of thousands of people in town for the major feasts.

The mighty sound that announced the Spirit's coming along with the sound of 120 disciples speaking in other languages the mighty works of God caused others to notice something special was taking place.

What was going on?

The verses here emphasize confusion and amazement.

There was confusion because the disciples were speaking in the native languages of Jews who had come from all over the ancient world.

There was amazement because it could be recognized that those speaking these languages were Galileans. Did their accents give them away?

This we are not told, but how could these Galileans speak in languages spoken in these distant countries? This was far from normal.

There are 15 nations or regions listed in verses 9-11.

The list starts in the east, places where the Jews had been taken captive.

¹⁵ Acts 2:33.

The list moves west to Judea and then north to Asia Minor, from there to North Africa, then to Rome. Finally the list includes two widely separated places, Crete and Arabia.¹⁶

Some commentators seek the list as odd or strange. How do you explain the order of the listing?¹⁷

Another scholar notes how this map locates those who gathered in Jerusalem at the “center of the world.”¹⁸

Although we might not be able to explain all the details, we have a powerful picture of how the gospel was to spread.

First, the gospel went to the Jews. As many of the Jews returned to their homelands, the gospel would go with them, and from the Jews it would reach the nations where they returned.

The 12 apostles and later Paul would also spread the word of God in these same places.

Second, some have compared Pentecost to the account in Genesis 11 of the Tower of Babel.

We can make some interesting comparisons. Joel Green points out very well that Pentecost is not so much a reversal of Babel but a parody of Babel.¹⁹

Multiple languages continued to be spoken but not in praise of man but in praise of God.

The unity is not that of nations and people coming together again under one rule, but rather a unity that comes through the Spirit according to the truth of the gospel.²⁰

We should notice two other points here in these verses.

¹⁶ Reformation Study Bible, ed. R. C. Sproul, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995)., 1713.

¹⁷ Marshall, “Acts”., 76.

¹⁸ Joel Green, 206.

¹⁹ Green, 213.

²⁰ New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition, ed. D. A. Carson, Accordance Electronic ed., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994)., 1070.

First, the gift of tongues was not directly use for evangelism. The disciples were not preaching but praising. They were speaking in all sorts of languages the wonderful works of God.

Indeed, we have this theme in Luke's gospel – the Spirit fills us so that we are led to praise God.²¹

Second, this supernatural sign caused by the working of the Holy Spirit did not result in conversion by itself.

It caused some to ask the right question, while for others it led to them mocking the disciples, claiming that they were drunk.

And the same thing is seen today. God continues to show His power even through what we might say is miraculous.

But miracles do not convince people. The preaching of the Word must occur. And this is what we see in the verses that follow.

The preaching, the sharing of God's truth is what is absolutely necessary. This needs to be always our focus and prayer.

CONCLUDING APPLICATIONS

When Adam and Eve rebelled and sin against God, there were two phases of judgement that came upon them and the rest of creation.

Their sin brought about immediately a separation from God, a spiritual death, such that the presence of God became something from which they wanted to flee.

Physical death came upon them in time.

In contrast and in remedy, God's great work of salvation also has two phases.

²¹ Green, 202.

The first phase came in the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. His life, death, resurrection, enthronement, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit all announce a new redemptive age has dawned!²²

We live in the age now of the resurrection. We live in the age of the Spirit.

But we still await the fullness that is still to come in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As best we can we have to appreciate the incredible blessing we currently enjoy while at the same time being aware that the best is still to come!

It is by faith, by the Word of God, through the working of the Holy Spirit that we grow to appreciate the already and the not yet.

We praise God for the Day of Pentecost and the continued working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people.

What should we expect as we consider the Holy Spirit's continued work?

First, the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we see here in Acts 2 was never repeated in exactly the same way. Now, as we will later see, there are two other mini-Pentecost's still to come in Acts – one among the Samaritans and one among some Gentiles.

But these events are also not repeatable today.

What is the sign of the Spirit's presence?

- Salvation is through the working of the Holy Spirit (John 3)

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

1 Cor. 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

²² Johnson, 55-56.

- Praising God and desiring to praise God is a sign of the Spirit's work and presence.
- Walking in obedience (Gal. 5)

Gal. 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

I read earlier from 1 Cor. 6.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? **20** For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

- Confirmation of our adoption (Rom. 8:16-17)

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

- Longing for the fullness of God's work of redemption (Rom. 8:23)

Rom. 8:23 Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

- Suffering for the cause of Christ (1 Peter 4:14)

1Pet. 4:14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

- Our celebration of the Lord's Supper is made beneficial through the working of the Holy Spirit.

1Cor. 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Prayer

Hymn 357

Benediction and Commission –

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.