

FPFWC Christian Development



The Birth of the Church

May 2023

Spring Quarter

May 6, 2023

Lesson #1 – The Day of Pentecost

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39

ICE BREAKER –

1. What does it mean to be “Filled with the Holy Ghost”?
2. How can believers present the gospel in a way that will pierce hearts of unbelief?

Key Verse – “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.—Acts 2:39

LESSON BACKGROUND

The descent of the Holy Spirit “like a dove” on Jesus at His baptism might suggest a picture of peace and acceptance (Luke 3:22). But the work of the Holy Spirit was not always a pleasant experience for those affected, since Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (3:16). Imageries of fire in the Bible are associated with the destruction of God’s enemies (Ezekiel 22:17–22, 31; Hebrews 10:26–27; 2 Peter 3:7; etc.) and the testing or purification of His people (Zechariah 13:8–9; 1 Corinthians 3:12–13; 1 Peter 1:6–7). The depiction in Luke 3:16 speaks of the power to do both, especially in light of the “fan” imagery of Luke 3:17.

C. Lesson Context: The Jewish Calendar

The most important observance on Israel’s calendar was Passover. It was a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt, when God’s angel of death “passed over” Israelite households that had been marked with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12).

Within a few weeks of leaving Egypt, the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:1; 31:18; etc.). There they entered into a covenant with God, agreeing to be His people while the Lord promised to be their God. For centuries thereafter, the Old Testament covenant people celebrated their deliverance on Passover and followed it 50 days later by celebrating God’s giving of the law. Pentecost occurs seven weeks after the Passover Sabbath plus one day, which equals 50 days; it was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:9, 16). This celebration is also called “the feast of harvest,” “the feast of weeks,” and “the day of the firstfruits” (Exodus 23:16a; 34:22a; Numbers 28:26).

The Jews in the time of Jesus had a marvelous temple in Jerusalem (see Mark 13:1). The city’s economy centered on that structure, as the periodic influx of visiting Jews brought in money (compare John 2:14–15). We might say that the

Jerusalem of the time had a tourist economy, and the height of the tourist season was the period from Passover to Pentecost. Many visitors would stay for the entire 50-day period between those two observances.

LESSON COMMENTARY

a. The Coming of the Spirit (2:1–4)

Acts 2 can be divided into four sections: (1) the gift of the Spirit (1–13), (2) Peter's message explaining the phenomenon of the gift of the Spirit (14–36), (3) the response to Peter's message (37–41), and (4) the description of the early church (42–47).

Approximately six weeks after His resurrection and only days after His ascension, the exalted Lord Jesus fulfilled His promise to supernaturally empower His disciples by pouring out the Holy Spirit on them.

2:1. Pentecost means "fiftieth" because the Feast was on the 50th day after the Feast of First Fruits (Lv 23:16). It was originally one of three harvest festivals, but in early (intertestamental) Judaism it was commemorated as the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai because it was thought that God gave the law to Israel 50 days after the exodus. Pentecost would come in May or June on our calendar. It is possible that God gave the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to contrast with the law. The law was an external means of restraining Israel from sin, but in the new era of the church, the Holy Spirit would provide internal power for believers to live righteously (Jr 31:33; Ezk 36:26–27).

2:2–3. The initial giving of the Spirit was accompanied by the phenomena of powerful wind and flashes of fire. The wind symbolized the power of the Lord (cf. the appearance of the Lord to Elijah in 1Kg 19:11) and the fire His presence (cf. the appearance of the Lord to Elijah and Moses in 1Kg 19:12 and Ex 3:2). Luke's statement that the Spirit **rested on each one of them** is significant: every believer (men and women) was filled with the Spirit; no one was excluded (see 1Co 12:7). Plus, in contrast to the selective and temporary giving of the Spirit in the OT era (See Samson, Jdg 14:19; 16:20; Saul, 1Sm 10:10; 16:14), in the NT era the Spirit is a permanent gift (Jn 14:16).

2:4. The internal and invisible gift of the Spirit was manifested by the external and visible phenomenon of speaking in tongues.

In the OT era, the gift of the Spirit was often corroborated by prophetic proclamations (e.g., Eldad and Medad, Nm 11:26–29; Saul, 1Sm 10:6–12), but after the ministry of Malachi, the spirit of prophecy ceased (for support, see 1 Macc 9:27; 4 Ezra 14:44; Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.41). The Jews expected, however, with the coming of the messianic age, God would once again give His Spirit and people would prophesy (Jl 2:28–32; Ezk 36:25–27). That hope was realized on the day of Pentecost, but the prophecy was of a special type. They **began to speak with other tongues** (*heterais glossais*).

To understand this phenomenon it is necessary to answer four questions:

First, did the disciples speak a foreign language, or did they speak in a language they knew but the hearers heard it in their own language? Judging from the infinitive **to speak** (*lalein*) in 2:4, the disciples spoke in other languages. In

addition, the audience did not receive a special capacity from the Spirit to understand the language spoken by the disciples in their own languages.

Second, was it a foreign language or ecstatic speech? More than likely, it was an earthly foreign language not learned formally by the disciples. In 2:6, 8 the word “language” is the Greek word *dialektos*, which means “the language of a nation or region” and not an ecstatic utterance (BDAG, 232). Plus, the list of fifteen ethnic regions in vv. 7–11 suggests foreign languages.

Third, what was the purpose of the phenomenon? In Acts, speaking in tongues was a “sign” indicating the beginning of a new era in God’s program of redemption. It was not confirmation to new believers that they had received the gift of the Spirit. In v. 16, Peter said the gift fulfilled what was predicted by the prophet Joel (Jl 2:28–32). For a fuller discussion of the purpose and nature of speaking in tongues, see the comments introducing the commentary on 1Co 14:1.

Fourth, is speaking in tongues a normative experience for all believers or a unique phenomenon related to the birth and growth of the early church? The evidence supports the latter. The phenomenon is mentioned explicitly only three times in Acts (among the Jewish people in 2:4, among the Gentiles in 10:45–46, and among the disciples of John in 19:6). The Samaritans (Ac 8) and Paul (Ac 9) may have spoken in tongues after they received the Spirit, but it is not stated. In reporting dozens of other conversion experiences, Luke did not mention speaking in tongues. Furthermore, none of the major characters in Acts commanded or instructed others on how or whether they should speak in tongues (which is not the case for many practices in Acts, e.g., baptism). This fact supports the idea that Luke did not intend speaking in tongues to be understood as normative or binding upon the church perpetually. Instead, Acts simply recorded what did happen, not what should happen consistently. The phenomenon of tongues, like many of the experiences in Acts, is a unique event, signaling the beginning of the era of the Spirit who has come to empower believers to take the gospel to all nations.

b. The Reaction of the Crowd (2:5–13)

2:5–13. Some were amazed because they heard them speaking in their own language. Others, unable to grasp what has happened, concluded they were drunk. The Spirit, who had seized control of the witnesses, made them appear as if they were drunk—not in control of their own actions. Apparently when the disciples spoke in tongues they spoke known languages, but when the listeners heard them speaking a language that was not their own, they assumed wrongly that those disciples were intoxicated.

2. The Proclamation of Pentecost

a. The Reference to Joel (2:14–21)

2:14–21. Starting in 2:14, Peter explained how the gift fulfilled prophecy, and then he gave evidence that Jesus is Lord and Christ.

Peter addressed his countrymen (Jews), and refuted the charge of drunkenness. The Jewish day began at 6 a.m.; the third hour was 9 a.m. Only a hard-core alcoholic could get drunk by 9 a.m.

From Peter's perspective, the gift of the Spirit fulfilled the promise of JI 2:28–32 (see the comments there). Though debatable, it seems best to interpret the day of Pentecost as only a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy—"an already, not yet" kind of fulfillment. The division between "the already" and "not yet" comes between vv. 18 and 19. The gift of the Spirit marked the beginning of the Holy Spirit's work, but not the complete fulfillment of the events at the day of the Lord. For an explanation of the phrase **BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD**, see the comments on JI 2:30–31. Peter anticipated the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel when Christ returns from heaven (cf. 3:20–21). Another possibility is to recognize that JI 2:28–32 predicts the Holy Spirit's work in the events of the future tribulation period, while Ac 2:14–21 merely applies them to the Spirit's work. The application would be that just as many unusual signs would follow the Holy Spirit's powerful work at the end of days, so here at the birth of the church, the unusual and demonstrative work of the Spirit was evident in the apostles' speaking in tongues.

b. The Reference to Christ (2:22–36)

(1) His Life of Power (2:22)

2:22. His miraculous works proved Jesus is the Messiah. Peter used three different terms to describe Jesus' works. The word **miracles** identifies the supernatural element of Jesus' works; **wonders** describes the effect of the miracle on the witnesses; and **signs** indicates the purpose of the miracle. It is significant that no one protested Peter's statement, since many of those present had been eyewitnesses to Jesus' miraculous works. During his earthly life, Jesus used His divine power to authenticate His messianic claims by healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. If Jesus' miracles had been suspect, someone would have challenged Peter's claim about Jesus' works.

(2) His Death and Resurrection (2:23–28)

2:23. The crucifixion was not an accident. Christ was put to death according to **the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**. **Plan** (*boule*) refers to God's unchangeable purpose when used in reference to His will (BAGD, 182; see Heb 6:17). Yet Peter implicated both Jews and Gentiles in Christ's death. Longenecker states that nowhere in the NT is the paradox of Christian history put more sharply than in the death of Jesus. Though the crucifixion was determined by God's purpose and foreknowledge, it was executed through the instrumentality of wicked men exercising their free will (Longenecker, "Acts," 207). The Bible teaches but does not explain the paradox of God's sovereignty and human freedom.

2:24–28. In spite of the intentions of godless men, God raised Jesus from the dead. It was impossible for death to hold Him. Moreover, His resurrection fulfilled the prediction in David’s prophetic Word. Peter quoted Ps 16:8–11, and in particular, **BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY** (2:27). There David declared his confidence in his own resurrection because he knew that God would not allow His “Holy One,” the future Messiah, to decay in the grave. Psalm 16 uses first-person pronouns throughout except for Ps 16:10b, where the only non-first-person construction is found (“Holy One,” not “me”), suggesting that both David and Peter saw in Ps 16 a reference to the resurrection of someone other than David and in whom David placed the hope of his own resurrection.

The Reaction of the Crowd (2:37)

2:37. It is not surprising that Peter’s audience experienced emotional trauma. The expression **pierced to the heart** is used figuratively for the feeling of sharp pain due to anxiety or remorse (BDAG, 415). They were not merely intellectually convinced, but spiritually convicted of their dilemma.

d. The Appeal of Peter (2:38–40)

2:38. Peter’s answer to the anguished question of his countrymen is good news, yet raises some controversial issues about the relation of repentance, forgiveness, and baptism. The Jews were familiar with John’s message emphasizing repentance and baptism (see the comments on Mt 3:5–12). On the imperative verb **repent**, Louw and Nida write, “Though in English a focal component of repent is the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, the emphasis [in the Gk. words “to repent” and “repentance”] seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behavior, with respect to how one should both think and act. Whether the focus is upon attitude or behavior varies somewhat in different contexts” (L&N, 509). Peter was calling the hearers to change their minds about their participation in and approval of the crucifixion of Jesus. Darrell Bock notes that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. One cannot turn to Christ in faith for forgiveness without also turning away from reliance upon something else. He proposes, however, that there is a distinction between faith and repentance: “Repentance stresses the starting point of the need for forgiveness, whereas faith is the resulting trust and understanding that this forgiveness comes from God, the one turned to for the gift (Acts 20:21)” (*Acts*, BECNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007], 142). Peter introduced two new elements. First, he said baptism must now be **in the name of Jesus**. This means a commitment to and identification with Jesus as Lord and Christ. For an explanation for why the name of the triune God is not used in the baptismal formula here, see the comments on Mt 28:18–20. Second, he promised them the **gift of the Holy Spirit**. This is the Spirit Himself, as in 2:33 (“the promise of the Holy Spirit” is the Spirit Himself), and not the “gifts” that the Spirit gives to believers.

Some believe that both repentance and baptism are required for the forgiveness of sins (baptismal regeneration). This view, however, is inconsistent

with the overall teaching of Scripture. In addition, in Lk 24:47; Ac 3:19; 10:43; 13:38, and 26:18, **forgiveness** (*aphesis*, the same Gk. word translated with “forgiveness” in each verse) is promised *without baptism* to those who respond appropriately (i.e., with faith or repentance). The grammatical construction of the sentence does not support the idea that baptism is essential for salvation. The command to **repent** is plural (“all of you repent”) as is the word **your** in **for the forgiveness of your sins**, forging a close connection between repentance and forgiveness. On the other hand, the command **be baptized** is a third person *singular* verb, implying that baptism is not directly connected to forgiveness. As in 10:47–48 and 16:33, baptism is the appropriate response for those who have found salvation in Christ, but it is not the *means* effecting that salvation.

Others believe in a second work of the Spirit after conversion, usually signified by speaking in tongues. The context, however, suggests the reception of the Spirit is a one-time experience. No mention is made about the 3,000 who believed speaking in tongues (though admittedly this is an argument from silence—but sometimes the silence is *deafening*), nor is the laying on of hands mentioned as the means for conveying the Spirit as a gift to others, nor for enabling others to speak in tongues.

Clearly, the apostles were believers prior to their reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Nevertheless, this does not teach that all believers must receive the Holy Spirit subsequent to their salvation experience. Rather, the described events demonstrate the transition from the way the Holy Spirit worked in the OT, to the Spirit’s work in the NT church. In the OT, the Holy Spirit came upon some believers to empower them for a limited time to accomplish a specific task. In the NT, the Holy Spirit permanently indwells all believers (Jn 14:16–17). The falling of the Holy Spirit on the apostles marked the transition to the new way the Holy Spirit would work.

The three elements of the conversion experience are repentance (implying also faith), baptism, and the gift of the Spirit. If a person will turn from sin in faith and repentance (essential and internal) and be baptized (nonessential and external), God will forgive his sin and he will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

2:39. The expression **for all who are far off** could refer to either Jews of the Diaspora or Gentiles. The former seems more likely in view of Peter’s restricted understanding of God’s redemptive program prior to the vision leading him to Cornelius. But, at the time of writing, Luke may have understood it as a prediction of the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles without limitation to any ethnic group.

The statement, **as many as the Lord our God will call to himself**, refers to God’s electing purposes, whereby people are drawn to Christ for salvation. In his prophecy, Joel promised salvation to “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” (Ac 2:21); Peter was indicating that God is sovereign over the call to salvation.

LESSON NUGGET – The promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was not just for those present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), but to all who would believe in Christ through out this age: “unto you” – Peter’s audience; “your children” – the next generation: “to all that are afar off” – the third and subsequent generations.

(1) The baptism in the Holy Spirit with its accompanying power was not a once-for-all occurrence in the church's history. It did not cease with Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 8:15; 9:17; 10:44-46; 19:6), nor with the close of the apostolic age. (2) It is the birthright of every Christian to see, expect, and experience the same baptism in the Spirit that was promised and given to the New Testament Christians (Acts 1:4, 8; Joel 2:28; Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49)

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word For Today Bible, The Full Life Study Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*