

The Book Of Acts: Lesson 2

Pentecost

Memory Text: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” (Acts 2:32, 33)

Setting The Stage: Pentecost (Gr, *pentekostes*) meaning “fiftieth” is a reference the fifty days between the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of the First Fruits (Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost). The date of Pentecost hinges upon the date of the Passover. The date of the Passover was held on Nisan 14. The 15th marked the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and on the 16th a sheaf of the first fruits (of the barley harvest) was waved before the Lord (Lev. 23:5-11). From the 16th, seven weeks and a day, 50 days, were counted the Feast of First Fruits (of the wheat harvest), which was also known as the Feast of Weeks, because of the seven weeks that intervened. It is this feast that came to be known as Pentecost. Of interest, the interval between the first Passover and God speaking the law from Mt. Sinai was 50 days.

Pentecost, of all the feasts of the Jewish year, attracted the largest number of pilgrims from distant lands. The dangers of travel and sea and land in the early spring and late autumn prevented the coming of the people from abroad in any large number to the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. But the Pentecostal season was favorable, and no other feast would there have been present at Jerusalem representatives from so many nations.

Also, the character of the offerings, which were mainly those of peace and consecration, put a joyous stamp on the day. Even the bread was leavened, indicating a new spirit of release and fellowship working through the celebrants. Pentecost had much of the air of a harvest festival.

Each aspect of the old Feast of Weeks presented a symbolic meaning that made it typical of the work now about to be accomplished. At the Feast of First Fruits, it was fitting that it should be the occasion of the great gathering from the fields that were “white already to harvest” (Ex. 23:16; John 4:35). At this feast, the Israelites, remembered that they had been slave sin Egypt and could feel again the liberty the Exodus had given them (Deut. 16:9-12). It was a fit time for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, because “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17). That Spirit was to guide the church into all truth, which makes all who receive it free indeed (John 16:13; 8:32)

Sunday – The Coming Of The Spirit

Acts 2:1-4; Matthew 3:11, 12

Acts 2:1-4. There was unity among the disciples. The jealousies revealed in their failure to heal the demon-possessed boy (Mark 9:14-29), in their striving to be number one (Luke 22:24), and in refusing to wash one another's feet (John 13:3-17), had all been swept from their hearts by the Cross, the resurrection, and His ascension.

Jesus had risen on the day of the offering of the wave sheaf of barley, which typified Himself, the First Fruits. Over a period of 40 days He had repeated contact with them on earth. Ten more days remained till this day, which they waited for the "promise of the Father." What would this promise bring? The ten days of expectancy had been ten days of prayer (Acts 1:14), offered in unity of desire to make Christ known to others. This is the unity that must characterize God's people whenever they aspire to a special experience with their Lord, or expect from Him a manifestation of His power.

"In one place." It was likely the same room in which the Lord's Supper was eaten in, the same room the disciples hid in for "fear of the Jews", and the same place they gathered after Jesus ascended.

"A sound...a mighty rushing wind." This word is used by Luke in his Gospel to describe the "roaring" of the sea and the waves (Luke 21:25), and by the writer of Hebrews for the "sound" of the trumpet from Sinai (Heb. 12:19). The sensory impression made upon those going through the experience was as though it were a wind. This divine "breathing" must have brought to the disciples mind the time Jesus "breathed on them" and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

"Cloven tongues of fire." The Greek conveys a picture of an initial body of fire that divides itself into small tongues, which settle on each member of the waiting assembly. The figure "tongues" is fitting in view of the gift of speech the Spirit bestowed on the believers. And they weren't actual flames ("like as of fire"). Divinity and fire are often linked in the Bible, doubtless because of the power, glory, and purifying effects of fire. This was a fulfillment of the words of John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:11, 12: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." This filling was for all present, not just the disciples. The OT is clear about the existence of the Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2; Num. 24:2; Judges 6:34; 1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 51:11; Isa. 48:16; Ezek. 11:5; Joel 2:28, 29). But no manifestation of the Spirit in the OT can compare with that made to this gathered

crowd on Pentecost. This day is often referred to as the birthday of the church. Once the inaugural ceremony of the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and enthronement with the Father was completed in heaven, Christ's first intercessory act on behalf of His people was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Monday – The Gift Of Tongues

Acts 2:4-13

Acts 2:4-13. In Acts 2:4, the gift of the Spirit was manifested through speaking in tongues. Yet, this gift was only one of many different manifestations of the Spirit.

The gift of tongues at Pentecost did not occur because it is the most important evidence of having the Spirit. It was manifested in order to launch the church's world mission. If the apostles were to cross cultural barriers and reach the ends of the earth with the gospel, they would need to be able to speak in the languages of those who needed to hear what they had to say.

It is estimated that in the first century there were eight to ten million Jews in the world and that up to 60 percent of them lived outside the land of Judea. Yet, many who were in Jerusalem for the feast were from foreign lands and could not speak Aramaic, the language of Judean Jews at that time. There is no question that most converts at Pentecost were Jews from various lands who could now hear the gospel in their own native languages.

Tuesday – Peter's Sermon

Acts 2:17, 22-32; Joel 2:28, 29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Acts 2:14-21. The charge of drunkenness gave Peter the opportunity to explain what was happening. In his speech, the apostle first pointed to Scripture, describing the outpouring of the Spirit as the fulfillment of prophecy.

By interpreting the Pentecost event in light of Joel's prophecy, Peter intended to stress the historical relevance of that moment. But there is an important difference in the way he quotes Joel. Instead of Joel's introductory "afterward" (Joel 2:28), which pointed quite generally to the future, Peter said "in the last days" (Acts 2:17), indicating that the final act in the great drama of salvation had just begun. This is not, of course, a full description of last-day events but an evidence of the high sense of urgency that distinguished the early church. They did not know when the end would come but were convinced it would not take long.

Acts 2:22-32. **What was the main point of Peter's sermon?** After highlighting the prophetic significance of Pentecost, Peter turned to the recent events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is the resurrection, however, that received greater emphasis, as it represented the decisive factor in the gospel story.

For Peter, the resurrection was the ultimate vindication of Jesus (Acts 2:22, 27), and he quoted Scripture to help make his point about the meaning of the resurrection.

Why was the resurrection of Jesus so pivotal in the preaching of the apostles and in the faith of the early church? Why is it so crucial for us today?

1 Corinthians 15:12-19: “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

Verses 13, 14 stress the emptiness of faith without the resurrection of Christ. If Christ be not risen, Christian witness is condemned on two counts: (1) Jesus repeatedly declared that he would rise from the dead, and if He did not rise, He was an impostor; (2) the apostles were basing their preaching on an event that they alleged did occur, and thus were parties to the imposture, holding out a hope that could not be fulfilled.

Verses 16, 17 reveal the hopelessly lost condition of man apart from the resurrection. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then He was an impostor; faith in Him would not bring pardon for sin, and the sinner would retain his guilt. Such an assumption could not be tolerated by anyone who had experienced the joy of having his sins forgiven. Furthermore, baptism, which is a type of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, would lose its significance if there were no resurrection, for the exhortation is given, to rise and “walk in newness of life,” even as Christ was raised from the dead (see Rom. 6:3, 4).

Wednesday – The Exaltation Of Jesus

Acts 2:33-36; Psalm 110:1-3

Acts 2:33-36. In the third part of the speech, Peter went back to the issue of tongues, which had attracted the people in the first place. Instead of being drunk, which would have been strange at nine o'clock in the morning (Acts 2:15), the believers were speaking in tongues because the Holy Spirit had just been poured out from heaven.

What is the connection between Jesus' exaltation at the right hand of God and the outpouring of the Spirit?

Psalm 110-1-3: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.

Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.”

The right hand of God is a position of authority. Peter’s argument, which he based on Scripture, is that it was because Jesus had been elevated to such a position in heaven that He poured out the Spirit upon His followers. The exaltation did not grant Jesus a status He did not have before (John 1:1–3, 17:5). Instead, it represented the Father’s supreme recognition of His prerogative as Lord and Savior (Acts 2:36).

This event actually brings us to one of the most important themes in Scripture: the great controversy. The point is that the Spirit could not fully come if Jesus were not exalted (John 7:39), and Jesus would not be exalted if He had not triumphed on the cross (John 17:4, 5). In other words, Jesus’ exaltation was the condition for the coming of the Spirit because it signified God’s approval of Jesus’ accomplishments on the cross, including the defeat of the one who had usurped the rule of this world (John 12:31).

Thursday – The Firstfruits

Acts 2:38, 39

Acts 2:37-39. Peter’s hearers were cut to the heart by his words. Some of them might have been among those who asked for Jesus’ crucifixion a few weeks before (Luke 23:13–25). But now, persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed God’s appointed Messiah, they cried out in sorrow: “What shall we do?”

What are the two basic requirements for forgiveness? Repentance means a radical change of direction in life, a turning away from sin (Acts 3:19, 26:20), rather than simply a feeling of sadness or remorse.

Since the time of John the Baptist, repentance was associated with baptism (Mark 1:4). That is, baptism became an expression of repentance, a rite symbolizing the washing away of sins and the moral regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 22:16; compare with Titus 3:5–7).

Friday – Further Thoughts

“Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. . . . When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished.” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 38, 39)