

The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21)

BAPTISM OF FIRE



A. Introduction

1. *When and how did the church begin?* On the day of Pentecost, the church was launched with a blastoff. The twelve men were called and prepared. But on this day power was released and the church had been in her orbit ever since. Note the word 'missionary' comes from 'missile', and it means 'sent out one.'
2. There is a parallel between Luke (Vol 1) and Acts (Vol 2). Jesus has a 'new body'. Just like in Luke, Jesus' new body in Acts will be anointed with power. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus like a dove. But when the Spirit came upon the disciples, He came like a rushing mighty wind and consuming fire!
3. Pentecost means 50. Count 50 days from the Passover. There is double significance. (a) Comparison: It was the '*Feast of Weeks*' in Israel's calendar when the 'first fruits' of the harvest were brought before God (Ex 23:16; Lv 23:15-21; Dt 16:19-12). The 'first fruits' missionaries emerged that day. (b) Contrast: It was also the day they *commemorated the giving of the law*. When the law was given at Mt Sinai 3,000 people died. When the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were saved.
 - I. Time: ~29AD. Place: Most probably near the *temple area*. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they were already in a public place. And the crowd was rushing in to see what was happening. Peter just could stand up and preach to the captive audience. It was 9am. Most visitors would have been in the temple area in the festive season. The early Christians met every day to pray together in the temple. Their morning prayer began at 9am. (c.f. Acts 7 - the temple is also called 'house.')
 - II. There would have been around 2-3 million visitors in Jerusalem camping on the hills of Jerusalem and coming into the temple every day. The city would have been very crowded. And the dramatic event that took place was to radically re-define what the temple of God is, and launch into the world the only entity Jesus is committed to building on earth until He returns. On this day, the understanding of how a mortal man could encounter the Almighty God was forever changed. If we cut out Acts 2, and what took place that morning, we will not understand what follows in the rest of Acts.

We will see this chapter in three parts: (1) the experience they had; (2) the excitement it caused; (3) the explanation Peter gave when the 3rd Person of the Godhead came down to dwell in us.

B. The Experience

Much controversy and confusion surrounded the days of Acts 2. 120 people earnestly were praying and waiting for the promise of the Father, their hearts full of earnest desire and anticipation for the Holy Spirit and love for one another. At 9am on Sunday morning in the broad daylight, suddenly it happened! Note, this is not some mystical time. Sunday was a working day then. It is like our Monday morning.

1. *What they heard* – '*wind*.' Suddenly they heard the sound of the 'rushing mighty wind' coming down from heaven and filling the room (2:2). It was unusual in that they heard the sound of this mighty wind inside the building. It was not a 'soft gentle breeze', but a 'mighty invisible power.' The word for the Spirit is also 'breath' and 'wind'. This was a 'heavy forceful breath', not a soft one.

When Ezekiel prophesied to the breath of God in the valley, the dead bones came alive and rose up as an exceedingly mighty army that could not be counted (Ezek 38). Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'You don't see it, you can't explain it, but you can feel it.' When you get baptised by the Holy Spirit you know it! Nobody can have the Spirit poured out on them and not know it.

2. *What they saw* – They saw fire in the shape of tongues, i.e., tongues of fire. God is consuming fire, and He demonstrated His presence in the blazing fire over and over again. God demonstrated His manifested Presence by the pillar of fire when He led Israel out of Egypt. When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, the fire of God fell from heaven and God's temple was so filled with His glory that the priests could not stand to minister. When Elijah prayed at the altar of stone God answered by fire and consumed

the offering. The fire of God represents God's passion, purity, judgment, and consecration (Lk 3:16). When the fire of God fell from heaven in the Old Testament, it fell on the **altar!** The place of dedication and consecration. God authenticated the temple by accepting the sacrifice on the altar by fire. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and our bodies are the sacrifice upon that altar.

3. What they did – Their mouths were overflowing with languages they did not understand. 'They spoke in tongues' and the source of the unknown language was the fire of God upon them. They opened their mouths to speak, and the Holy Spirit gave them the utterance of words. It was not 'ecstatic gibberish', but coherent languages spoken by the Holy Spirit dwelling inside them!

Significance of the tongue: It was the sign that the Holy Spirit came to take permanent residence inside the believers for the first time. The old temple in which they stood was replaced by themselves right there and then. In the Old Testament when God spoke out of blazing fire Israelites were terrified and asked Moses to be God's spokesman for them. Now God began to speak through these people's mouths directly and supernaturally. There is not a word about them freaking out in fear. There is not a word about their feelings in this chapter.

Content of the tongue: What were they speaking about? They were primarily not speaking to men but to God, giving praises to Him in the languages they did not learn. There are 7,000 languages on earth known to men and God knows every one of them, AND He knows heaven's languages. The Holy Spirit was bypassing their mind and enabled their mouths to speak to God directly. Why would God do that? Because our minds are the limiting factor in our prayer and communion with God. Wandering thoughts and shopping list prayers. God enabled their spirits to break through the limitation of their little minds to give extravagant praises to God. The primary sign of being filled with the Spirit is our mouths overflowing in extravagant praises to God.

Heart of the tongue: They were plunged into the Holy Spirit! That was God's way of introducing them to the Holy Spirit, the 3rd Person of Godhead. It was not a casual hello, but they were plunged into the fire of God! And in that fire, God took control of their tongue. The tongue is the most sinful member of our body and the hardest to control. But the raging forest fire of sin gets swallowed up by the holy fire of God! Their tongue was instantly set on fire to spread the amazing news of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus added the 'Great Compulsion' to the 'Great Commission' when He plunged them into the Holy Spirit. Now, these 120 ordinary people could do something extraordinary for God!

C. The Excitement

Thousands must have come to watch what was going on. Pentecost was the best-attended feast, possibly with 2-3 million people in the city. May and June were the best months to travel. 120 people praising God in multiple languages on top of their voices together will not go unnoticed. Tens of thousands must have been there, and 3,000 came to faith in Christ. Peter realised the crowd was watching them critically. So, he began his address to defend the 120 and it turned into a powerful message.

1. Who was this crowd? They were the dispersion (diaspora). More Jews were living outside Israel than inside at the time. It is the same today. They were dispersed throughout the whole Mediterranean world. The crowd consisted of the Jews, proselytes (gentiles converted to Judaism), and devout men (gentiles who observed the law).
2. Where did they come from? They have come from north, south, east, and west and from the islands afar off to celebrate Pentecost. This is the most striking reversal of the tower of Babel. At the tower of Babel (confusion), God saw the evil intention of mankind and came down to scatter them by confusing their language. That's why we have so many languages today. But for the 120 praying men and women, God came down to unite them supernationally from their scattered languages, and to empower them to preach the kingdom of God to all the nations represented there. When persecution came later, they were scattered all over the world. Many would have gone to the languages they spoke here supernaturally.
3. What did they think about it all? The crowd was just curious in the beginning. Then they were surprised to hear the 120 speaking in the various languages of the nations from which they came. They noticed these

120 were Galileans. At that point they began to be afraid and perplexed - it was a supernatural event which cannot be explained away naturally. They began to ask, 'What does this all mean?' When the supernatural happens there will always be people who try to explain it away. They said, '*These are drunk with new wine.*' But wine cannot teach anyone to speak new languages. This was a sign for those who did not believe, and this is the stigma of anointing.

D. The Explanation

Peter stood up and preached. The eleven apostles also stood with Peter.

1. Peter's defence – 'These are not drunk with wine.' *The pub is not even open yet. It is 9am.* There is a parallel between being filled with the Spirit and with wine: (i) You overcome self-consciousness; (ii) You talk more freely to others; (iii) You become bold and establish relationships easily. Peter said, 'I will tell you what you are seeing.' He pointed to the disciples praising God in divine languages, and said, 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel which we have waited for hundreds of years.'
2. The beginning of the last days - In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon special individuals, numbering around forty in total. When they were filled with the Spirit they spoke for God, and God spoke through them. Moses said, 'Would to God that you all prophesy.' But Moses' wish never came true under the old covenant. But centuries later Joel promised that in the last days the Spirit of God would be poured out ('bucketed out') upon all flesh – the young and the old, male and female, rich and poor will all receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They will have visions and dreams from God, and they will prophesy.

This was the great dream of the Old Testament that everybody could be filled with the Holy Spirit and be used by God in special ways.

3. Stages of the last days - (i) The last days will begin with the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. It began with all 120 filled with the Spirit, prophesying in tongues they didn't even understand; (ii) This will lead to signs in heaven and signs on earth. (There is a link between prophecy and sign.)

(a) The signs on earth - 'blood, fire, smoke' (C.f. Revelation). 'Chaos and wars on earth' and 'the offering of sacrifices on the altar'

(b) The signs in heaven – The sun will grow dark and the moon bloodred. When the sun and moon change colour then we are to look up because our redemption is near. The great news of living in the last days before the coming of the Lord is, 'whoever (Jews or Gentiles) calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.'

Now is the time to call on the name of the LORD. The last days started on this day of Pentecost with the coming of the Spirit, and we will continue with the Holy Spirit until the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour. And WHOEVER calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved!

E. Challenges:

Are you hungry to be plunged into the Holy Spirit and fire? 'Receiving' ('lambano') the Holy Spirit means active reception (taking in). 'Being filled' with the Spirit means 'continuous process' of being re-filled and topped up with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). Do you desire to be continuously filled with the Spirit?

When the fire of God fell from heaven, each time it fell upon the sacrifice on the altar of God – the place of dedication and consecration. On the day of Pentecost, the 120 disciples offered themselves as sacrifices to God on the altar of prayer.

Will you place yourself on the altar of prayer and consecrate your life to God's plans and purposes? Will you offer your life as a sacrifice on the altar and give yourself in prayer? Not just any prayer, but the prayer of consecration to God for His plan for your life.

Let's ask for the fire of God to fall on us this year. And when the fire of God falls, let us bear the stigma of the Spirit's fire on us.

Amen.