

The Day of Pentecost

Devotional

When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and the other believers on the Day of Pentecost, those who heard them speaking in tongues were perplexed and asked, “What does this mean?” (2:12). The question persists in our day. Many claim that the meaning of Pentecost is that we should have the same experience as the disciples, namely, that we are to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues. You have probably had other Christians ask you, as I have, “Have you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit?” If you have not spoken in tongues, they are eager to help you have this experience for yourself. We all need to answer biblically, in light of the context, What is the meaning of Pentecost?

Acts 2 must be interpreted in light of Acts 1:4–8, where the risen Lord Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained that they would “be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (1:5) and they would receive power to be Christ’s “witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (1:8). Just as the ministry of Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit descending on Him at His baptism, so the ministry of the disciples depended on them receiving the Holy Spirit and relying on His power. While they had experienced a measure of the Spirit’s power before (John 20:22), now He would come to dwell in them permanently (John 7:37–39; 14:17).

Thus Acts 2 must be interpreted as a special historical event, signifying a new period in God’s dealings with His people. Pentecost signals the dawning of the age of the Holy Spirit. And the fulness of the Spirit in God’s people is to empower them for witness to all the nations. Thus, the meaning of Pentecost is God’s equipping His church with the power of His Spirit so that He will be glorified among the nations.

The point of Pentecost is mission, and the goal of mission is that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). **If we properly understand this great historic event, our hearts will be enflamed with cause of seeing some from every tribe and tongue and nation bowing before the exalted Lord Jesus Christ.**¹

Open it

1. Describe a time when you were truly amazed by something you saw.

¹Sermon by Steven Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-4-meaning-pentecost-acts-21-13>

Read it

Acts 2:1-13

Explore it

2. When did the events of our text take place?
3. Where were the disciples when the Holy Spirit came?
4. What happened to the disciples upon the arrival of the Holy Spirit?
5. What was the response of the non-believers that day?

Apply it

Luke's narrative opens with a brief, matter-of-fact reference to the time and place of the Spirit's coming. They were all together in one place, he writes, and he is evidently not concerned to enlarge on this. We do not know, therefore, if the "house" of verse 2 is still the upper room (Acts 1:13; 2:46b) or one of the many rooms or halls of the temple (Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46a). The time is precise, however; it was the day of Pentecost (verse 1).

This feast had two meanings, one agricultural and the other historical. Originally, it was the middle of the three annual Jewish harvest festivals, and was called either the Feast of Harvest, because it celebrated the completion of the grain harvest, or the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, because it took place seven weeks or fifty days (*pentekostos* means "fiftieth") after the Passover, which was when the grain harvesting began. Towards the end of the inter-testamental period, however, it began also to be observed as the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, because this was reckoned as having happened fifty days after the Exodus.²

6. The Jewish people had filled the calendar with festivals and times of national celebrations. Why are such events important for people? What are some examples of these today?

²Stott, John. The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series) (Kindle Locations 980-986). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

7. At the start of chapter two we see that the 120 did exactly what Jesus commanded of them. They waited in Jerusalem. What temptations or complications might have made this waiting difficult?

This initial outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was marked by three symbolic phenomena. First, there was the sound of a violent rushing wind that filled the house. Then, there was the visible sign of tongues of fire resting on each person. Finally, there was the miraculous speaking in foreign languages which none had previously learned.³

8. The disciples were about to experience a spiritual awakening. What reason might be behind God's bringing about this internal change with external sights and sounds?

9. The coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by a show of power. In what ways can we become distracted from seeing God's working in our lives?

The sound of the violent rushing wind was primarily a picture of invisible power. As you know, the wind, which you cannot see, exerts incredible power in a tornado or hurricane. In this case, the disciples heard the noise, but there is no indication that they felt it blowing. It was, rather, a miraculous sound that came from heaven. The noise was loud enough that it gathered the crowd to find out what was happening (1:6).⁴

10. The mighty sound of the Holy Spirit symbolizes the great power that God was about to give His followers. The Bible reminds us that it is through this power that The Holy Spirit empowers you to...

- Be born again (John 3:1–15).
- Live like Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13–14; 5:18).
- Endure suffering (1 Corinthians 12)
- Use the gifts that He gives (Romans 8:26)

³Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-4-meaning-pentecost-acts-21-13>

⁴Ibid.

Look to the different paragraph headings in your Bible for Acts 2–9. How would the disciples utilize this new-found power in the days following Pentecost?

How has the Spirit’s power enabled you to do some of the things listed above?

11. What advice would you give someone who professes a relationship with Jesus but shows little change or few signs that point to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

The signs here of sight were also magnificent. The presence of fire in this passage should not surprise us. God’s presence, in fact, is often associated with fire: at the burning bush, in the wilderness wandering, and in the tabernacle/temple (e.g., Exodus 3:1–6; 13:17–22, 25–27; 1 Kings 6–8). Indeed, God is a “consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). **Fire resting on each believer, therefore, may be a sign that believers are new temples.** The Lord is residing in each believer like he resided in the sanctuary.⁵

12. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. What was the purpose of the temple in the Old Testament? What events and activities took place there?

How does the fact that all Christ followers are temples where the Spirit of God resides impact our use of our time, talents, treasures and testimonies?

⁵Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 879-884). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

All Christians are committed to be filled with the Spirit. Anything short of a Spirit-filled life is less than God's plan for each believer.... To be Spirit-filled is to be controlled or dominated by the Spirit's presence and power. ...**We are under the "influence" of the Spirit.** Instead of doing things only with our own strength or ability, He empowers us. Instead of doing only what we want to do, we now are guided by Him (Billy Graham; The Holy Spirit).⁶

13. The crowd in Jerusalem and the Apostle Paul later in Ephesians linked the outpouring of the Spirit in a believer's life to the symptoms of intoxication. How are these two very different activities similar, and where must we be careful not to push this connection too far?

In the loft above, with a hurricane howl inundating their ears and a vision of flame dazzling their eyes, the roomful of Galileans began to speak in languages other than the Galilean-accented Aramaic they'd spoken all their lives. Men and women poured out of the upper room doors and down to the street below, loudly praising God in the new languages. **It was Babel unraveled!**

What sounded to some like mindless babble, to others was clear declaration of the "wonderful works of God." At least fifteen different languages were spoken in this cacophony of praise—Even "Cretans and Arabs"! cried one incredulous listener. Acts 2 gives these facts concerning the "languages" phenomenon:

- Ability to speak was given by the Holy Spirit (verse 4).
- Everyone in the original group was able to speak a new language (verse 4).
- Speakers used their new languages to declare the wonderful works of God (verse 11).
- Some listeners concluded it was the babbling of a bunch of drunks (verse 13).

On two other occasions in Acts, people spoke in strange languages when first introduced to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46; 19:5–6). Other times when people received the Spirit, the language gift is not mentioned (Acts 8:17; 9:17–18). The gift of languages (tongues) also appeared in the church at Corinth. There the languages were not understood and required interpretation.⁷

14. Why would this gift that enabled people to speak in a language previously unknown to them be a great way to show the Spirit's power in those believers?

⁶Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 654-655). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 679-682). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

15. Read Genesis 11:1–9. Why did God confuse the common language of people? What would the gift of languages (tongues) enable the newly founded church to do that was impossible without the arduous work of translation? What does this say about the unity of Christ followers?

Pentecost signaled the intent of the Great Commission—world evangelism! Our vision for the church is often clouded by prejudice and small-mindedness. Too often the burden for missions is kept alive by a tiny minority of eager Christians who struggle to find novel ways to interest other Christians in missions. But the truth is that those who do not have a heart for missions do not have the heart of Jesus Christ.

The gospel breaks down the barriers of race, language, and color, and Pentecost gives us a glimpse of what that looks like. We need to appreciate that Pentecost signals to us the sinfulness of racism and ethnic superiority. Pentecost says to us that the church of Jesus Christ is composed of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation—as the covenant with Abraham had made clear when God said to him, *"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3). Pentecost placards that in Christ *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).⁸

16. Luke tells us that people from every nation under heaven dwelled in Jerusalem at that time and then he lists more than a dozen particular regions or lands that were represented on the day of Pentecost. What blessings can diversity bring to a church?

What things hinder living out this open-armed and color-blind love?

What things can a church do to impact and reach all people with the gospel?

⁸Thomas, Derek W. H.. Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries) (Kindle Locations 727-735). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

17. The baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to every one of the 120 Christians who were together that day. This is a reminder that God empowers His people no matter gender, age, or position. What gifts has God given you to use to further His kingdom? In what ways are you using these gifts at this time?

We have seen what occurred at Pentecost and considered briefly its essential meaning. Lastly, we need to note the twofold response recorded by Luke: **one expressing bafflement and another of a more hostile nature....** Luke uses several words to describe the reaction of some: they were “bewildered,” “amazed,” “astonished,” and “perplexed.”⁹

18. Put yourself in the shoes of the foreigners in Jerusalem that day. What would you have been thinking, and how might you try to explain this amazing event?

19. Luke tells us that some mocked what they had seen. What does this tell us about the human heart and the role that miracles play in changing people’s minds when it comes to faith in Jesus?

20. Luke tells us all this took place through a group of very average people who were filled with the Holy Spirit. In what ways can we seek this same filling in the days to come? What must change in order for His filling to take place?

⁹Ibid.