

Acts 2:1-47 (Part 2) Sinai “Fulfilled” at Pentecost

Introduction

Last week, we took a deep-dive into Israel’s three annual harvest feasts. We saw that each of these feasts was a celebration of Israel’s redemption, which included three aspects: deliverance from Egypt, the gift of the law at Sinai, and entrance into the Promised Land of Canaan. Each of Israel’s annual harvest feasts are connected in Scripture with all three of these redemptive realities. And yet we saw last week that the seven-day Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread at the beginning of the harvest season (in the 1st month) emphasized especially the exodus from Egypt, the seven-day Feast of Ingathering/Booths at the end of the harvest season (in the 7th month) emphasized especially the blessings of Israel’s inheritance in the land of promise, and the one-day Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (in the 3rd month), as the conclusion and culmination of Passover, reminds us especially of the gift of the Law at Sinai and the people’s obligation to keep that law *if* they would continue in the land, enjoying its harvests.

How are these three different aspects of Israel’s redemption fulfilled in Jesus Christ? Israel’s redemption from slavery in Egypt and from God’s judgment in the death of the firstborn was a type (a shadow) pointing to the greater redemption from slavery to sin and death that Christ would accomplish for His people (**the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread**). Israel’s entrance into the promised rest of the land of Canaan—a land flowing with milk and honey, was a type pointing to the eternal rest that Christ would accomplish for His people and all the spiritual blessings that would be lavished on us in Him (**the Feast of Ingathering/Booths**). And what about the law covenant at Sinai (**the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost**)? How is this aspect of Israel’s redemption fulfilled in Christ? Certainly, in one sense it’s fulfilled in His keeping the law for us and suffering the curse of the law in our place. But is there any evidence in Acts chapter two for a “fulfillment” of the law covenant at Sinai in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at the Feast of Weeks—on the day of Pentecost?

I. Acts 2:1-3 (“A gale force rushing wind” and “tongues like fire”)

When God came down on Mt. Sinai to give the people His law, His coming was powerfully manifested to all the people—to the whole nation of Israel—with both audible and visual signs.

- Exodus 19:11, 16, 18–19 — [O]n the third day Yahweh will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of **all the people**... So it happened on the third day, when it was morning, that there were **thunder** and **lightning flashes** and a **thick cloud** upon the mountain and a **very loud trumpet sound**... Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because Yahweh descended upon it in **fire**; and its **smoke** ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. And the **sound** of the trumpet grew louder and louder; then Moses spoke and God answered him with **thunder**.

Never again since that day had God manifested Himself in a similar way to all the twelve tribes of Israel together (cf. Exod. 24:12). That was a unique day in redemptive history; the only one of its kind for many hundreds of years. But when we come to Acts chapter 2, we read:

- Acts 2:1 — And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, **they were all together in one place.**

The emphasis here is on the complete number of the disciples. In chapter one, after listing the eleven apostles (minus Judas Iscariot), Luke said:

- Acts 1:14 — **These all** with *one accord* were continually devoting themselves to prayer...

Then, immediately after recounting how Matthias had been added to the eleven apostles to bring the number of the apostles back to twelve, Luke says: “And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, **they [these twelve apostles] were all together in one place.**” No doubt there were more than just the twelve apostles gathered there. Earlier, there was a crowd of about 120 persons including Jesus’ mother and brothers and other women (1:14-15). But Luke’s focus is on the twelve apostles as the New Covenant fulfillment of the twelve tribes of Israel. With the twelve apostles all together in one place, what we have is the representative nucleus of the entire New Covenant community that’s about to be birthed. Even as the twelve tribes of Israel were gathered at Sinai, now the twelve apostles, representing all of Jesus’ disciples, are all gathered in one place. And even as God manifested His presence at Sinai with audible and visual signs when the twelve tribes of Israel were being birthed as the Old Covenant community (Exod. 20:4-8; 24:1-8), so now He manifests His presence at Pentecost with audible and visual signs when the twelve apostles together with the rest of the disciples are being birthed (or marked out) as the New Covenant community.

- Acts 2:1-3 — And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, *they were all together in one place.* And suddenly there came from heaven a **noise** like a gale force rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there **appeared** to them tongues like fire dividing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

This is, as it were, the New Covenant Sinai. There’s a dramatic sensory display here that mirrors Mount Sinai, and that even, in a very real sense, surpasses Mount Sinai. We see the parallel between Sinai and Pentecost, but we see also a fundamental difference. At Sinai, God said to Moses three times:

- Exodus 19:12 — “And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.’”

And again:

- Exodus 19:21 — Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to Yahweh to see, and many of them perish.”

And again:

- Exodus 19:24 — Then Yahweh said to him, “Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh, lest He break out against them.”

Moses tells us in Exodus 24 that “the appearance of the glory of Yahweh was like a consuming fire on the mountain top” (Exod. 24:17).

- Exodus 20:18 — And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and the people perceived it, and they shook and stood at a distance.

But in Acts chapter 2, instead of warnings and boundaries and a consuming fire at the top of the mountain, we see tongues like fire dividing themselves and coming to rest upon each one of the twelve apostles (and probably also the rest of the disciples)—without their being consumed. God is still a consuming fire (cf. Heb. 12:29); but on this day, and for this New Covenant people, the fire of God’s presence—rather than provoking fear and trembling—is to be the source of a new boldness and joy. Looking back at Mount Sinai, the author of Hebrews depicts a scene of “darkness and gloom and *whirlwind*” again associated with fear and trembling (Heb. 12:18-21). But this noise like a gale force rushing wind in Acts 2—rather than provoking fear and trembling—is, again, the source of a new boldness and joy (see message on Acts 2:1-4a; also compare Exod. 19:18 & Acts 4:13, 31; 5:41-42). Pentecost is in some sense the New Covenant Sinai. We see the obvious parallels, and yet at the same time, everything has changed. All things have become new! But how are we to understand and explain this “newness”?

II. Acts 2:4-13 (“We each hear them in our own language”)

The law covenant at Sinai was accompanied by covenant blessings (if Israel kept the covenant) and covenant curses (if Israel broke the covenant). The ultimate covenant curse was to be led away into exile by a foreign people—by a people whose tongue (or language) the Israelites would not understand. Moses said:

- Deuteronomy 28:15, 48–49 — “But it will be, if you do not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep and to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I am commanding you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you... Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose tongue you shall not understand [lxx: *a nation whose voice you will not hear/akouo*]...”

Some seven hundred years later, the prophet Isaiah warned:

- Isaiah 28:11 — Indeed, [Yahweh] will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue.

And perhaps one hundred years after this, we hear God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah:

- Jeremiah 5:15 — “Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” declares Yahweh. “...a nation whose tongue you do not know, nor can you understand [lxx: *hear/akouo*] what they say.”

The unintelligible tongue of foreigners would be the sign that the curses of the covenant at Sinai had come upon Israel for all their covenant breaking. But the prophet Isaiah also spoke of a future day of restoration:

- Isaiah 33:14–15, 19–22 — “Who among us can sojourn with the consuming fire [think Mount Sinai]? Who among us can sojourn with continual burning?” He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly... You will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends [lxx: *hears/akouo*], of a stammering tongue which no one understands [lxx: *no comprehension for the hearer/akouo*]... For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us.

Notice how the one who can sojourn with the consuming fire and the continual burning is the one who walks righteously and speaks uprightly. And notice how the day when God’s covenant people would “no longer see... a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends [hears]” is closely linked with Yahweh as Israel’s “lawgiver.” One day God would give the people His law *in such a way* that they would all walk righteously and speak uprightly. The covenant at Sinai with the law written on tablets of stone was a covenant that Israel broke (Jer. 31:32). So God said that He would “cut a new covenant” with His people (Jer. 31:31). He said:

- Jeremiah 31:33 — “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

In the New Covenant, God is still our lawgiver, but now He has given us the law not written upon tablets of stone but written upon our hearts. Now the law is not something external to us (as a covenant people; cf. Ps. 1, 19, 119), but something within us. And now this law that is within us is that which has been lived and “enfleshed” in history by Christ. What this means is that while the typological Old Covenant could be—and was—broken by the Old Covenant people, the New Covenant (the Covenant of Grace) can never be broken by God’s New Covenant people. And what this means, in turn, is that there are no curses attached to the New Covenant. God’s New Covenant people can never experience covenant curses. Never again will God speak to His people through tongues that they cannot “hear” or “understand.” This is the Apostle Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 14 when he’s showing the Corinthians that *uninterpreted* (or *untranslated*) tongues [praying in an unlearned language] should never be practiced in the church’s public worship. He quotes Isaiah:

- 1 Corinthians 14:21–22 — In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.

Unintelligible speech (spoken by the Assyrians, Babylonians, etc.) was the means that God used to speak to His *unbelieving* and *disobedient* Old Covenant people. Therefore, unintelligible

speech (uninterpreted/untranslated prayer in an unknown language; 1 Cor. 14:2-3, 14-17) can have no place in the assembly of God's *believing* and *obedient* New Covenant people (cf. Ciampa and Rosner). Unintelligible speech is not fitting in the assembly of God's New Covenant people not just because it fails to edify (1 Cor. 14:2-6, 16-19), and not just because it gives the unbeliever who happens to be in the assembly an excuse to mock (1 Cor. 14:23), but also because under the Old Covenant it was the sign of the curse on a law-breaking, unbelieving people (cf. 1 Cor. 14:11). Unintelligible speech in the New Covenant assembly contradicts the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the day when God's law would be written on the hearts of His covenant people: "You will no longer see a fierce people, a people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends [hears], of a stammering tongue which no one understands [hears]." It's in this light that we read beginning in verse four of Acts chapter 2:

- Acts 2:4–11 — And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [in other unlearned languages], as the Spirit was giving them utterance [no doubt in a proper and orderly manner; cf. 1 Cor. 14:40]. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered because **each one of them was hearing [akouo] them speak in his own language**. So they were astounded and marveling, saying, "Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And **how is it that we each hear [akouo] them in our own language in which we were born?** Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the district of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear [akouo] them in our [own] tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God [revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ]."

What's the point of this speaking in tongues [unlearned languages]? Some say this miracle was "necessary" in order that all the Diaspora ("foreign") Jews who had travelled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost could understand the Gospel message. But most of the crowd in Jerusalem would have spoken Greek (the *lingua franca* of the day). It was probably in Greek that they were all addressing each other, saying, "Behold, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that *we each* hear them in our own language...?" Moreover, it was probably in Greek that Peter addressed the entire crowd when he began to preach (2:14; cf. Acts 21:40-22:2).¹ So if these tongues were not necessary practically, then they must be given only as a sign. The miracle of Galileans speaking in unlearned languages was a sign that authenticated not only the things being spoken in those languages (2:11) but also the message that Peter was about to preach (2:14-36). God uses miracles to get people's attention and to authenticate His word. And yet never before in redemptive history has this kind of miracle been seen. So why here? Why now?

Some point out that this miracle is the sign of the reversal of Babel when God confused the people's language and scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:1-9). In this New Covenant community that's being birthed on this day of Pentecost, God is going to gather people from all the different nations and languages of the earth (Acts 1:8) into one people and one "nation" (cf. Jn. 10:16; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). But before we jump all the way to this conclusion (which I think is legitimate), we need to remember that Luke emphasizes only the

¹ <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/59981/can-we-determine-from-the-text-context-in-what-language-peter-preached-his-sermon>

Jewish people or proselytes to Judaism: “Now there were *Jews* living in Jerusalem, *devout men* [observant Jews] from every nation under heaven” (2:5; cf. v. 10). Notice how Peter addresses the crowd in his sermon: “Men, *Jews*, and all you who *live in Jerusalem*... Men of *Israel*, listen to these words... Men, *brothers*... Therefore let all the *house of Israel* know for certain... (2:14, 22, 29, 36). The emphasis here (and for the next five chapters) is exclusively on the Jews. And what is it that these Jews keep marveling at?

- Acts 2:8, 11–12 — [They] were bewildered because each one of them was *hearing* them speak *in his own language*... [T]hey were astounded and marveling, saying... “[H]ow is it that we each *hear* them *in our own language* in which we were born? ... we *hear* them *in our own tongues* speaking of the mighty deeds of God.” And they all continued in astonishment and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

In just a moment, Peter will explain the meaning of the outpouring of these Spirit-inspired utterances, but he will not explain the significance or meaning of the tongues themselves. So why this particular miracle, for the first time ever, right now? It’s a sign that the curse has given way to blessing (cf. Lk. 2:14). Never again will God speak to His people through tongues that they cannot “hear” or “understand.” The curse of the broken Old Covenant at Sinai—and even of the original Covenant of Works in the garden—has been replaced with the blessing of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace which can never be broken. If there is no more covenant curse, then this means that the disobedient Old Covenant people who were formed at Sinai are now being replaced with an obedient New Covenant people at Pentecost. Instead of being defined and marked out by the law written on tablets of stone (Sinai), God’s people will now be defined and marked out by the law written upon their hearts (Pentecost). So listen, now, to Peter as he responds to the mockers who were saying that the disciples were drunk (2:13).

III. Acts 2:14-18 (“and they shall [all] prophesy”)

- Acts 2:14–18 — But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men, Jews, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is the third hour of the day [it was nine o’clock in the morning, before even the first meal of the day; too early to be intoxicated as the mockers knew very well; cf. Bock]; but this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh [in the original context: “all flesh” *in Israel*]; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My male slaves and female slaves, I will in those days pour out My Spirit and they shall prophesy.’”²

We know that even in the New Testament church, not all God’s people were seeing visions and dreaming dreams, and not all God’s people were prophesying (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27-31). Joel’s emphasis, then, is not on the dreams and visions and prophecies (contrary to the charismatic and Pentecostal movement today). That’s not the ultimate point. Joel’s emphasis is on the pouring out

² Visions and dreams were among those means by which Old Testament prophets would receive a revelation from God to then proclaim—or prophesy—to the people (Deut. 13:1; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ps. 89:19; Isa. 1:1; Jer. 14:14; 23:16, 25-32; Lam. 2:9; Ezek. 7:26; 11:24; 13:7; 21:29; Hos. 12:9-10; Obad. 1; Nah. 1:1; Zech. 10:2; 13:4).

of the Holy Spirit as the one who calls the people through dreams and visions and prophecies to keep the law given at Sinai. That was always the purpose of the prophets—to call the people back to the law. We read in 2 Kings:

- 2 Kings 17:13–15 (Jer. 7:23-25; 23:21-22; 29:18-19; 35:13-15; 44:3-6) — Yet Yahweh warned Israel and Judah **by the hand of all His prophets and every seer**, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and *keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers*, and which I sent to you **by the hand of My slaves the prophets.**” However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in Yahweh their God. They also *rejected His statutes and His covenant which He cut with their fathers* and His warnings with which He warned them.

Perhaps now we can understand why Moses said:

- Numbers 11:29 — “Would that all the people of Yahweh were prophets, that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!”

When all of God’s covenant people are prophets, then all of God’s covenant people will be regenerate and born again. When all of God’s people are prophets, then all of God’s people will have the law written upon their hearts—they will all “hear a word behind [them, saying], ‘This is the way [the way of obedience and righteousness], walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21). When all of God’s people are prophets, then the covenant that God has made with them will never be broken—then there will be no more covenant curses, only covenant blessings. And so all the fear and trembling at Sinai (Exod. 20:18-20) is fully replaced now with the boldness and joy of Pentecost—of life in the Messiah’s kingdom (cf. Heb. 12:18-29). Maybe now we can understand more fully what we read in Ezekiel and in Isaiah:

- Ezekiel 36:27 — “I will put My **Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My **statutes**, and you will be careful to do My **judgments.**”
- Isaiah 59:21 (cf. Jer. 31:33) — “As for Me, this is My covenant with them,” says Yahweh: “My **Spirit** which is upon you, and My **words** [my statutes and judgments] which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your seed, nor from the mouth of your seed’s seed,” says Yahweh, “from now and forever.”

What we see at Pentecost is the “fulfillment” of Sinai. We see this in the gale force rushing wind and the tongues like fire (2:1-3), we see this in the miracle of tongues (2:4-13), and we see this in the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy about all of God’s people being prophets (2:14-18). But there’s still one more way that we see Pentecost is the fulfillment of Sinai.

IV. Acts 2:22, 32-33 (“this Jesus... having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit”)

As Peter continues to preach, we hear him say in verse 22:

- Acts 2:22 (cf. 4:29-30) — “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with **miracles and wonders and signs** which God did through Him *in your midst, just as you yourselves know...*”

When we hear about the “miracles and wonders and signs” that God did through “Jesus the Nazarene,” it’s impossible not to think about the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through Moses. Of the 17 times that “signs and wonders” appears in the Old Testament, thirteen of these refer to the plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea—miracles that God performed by the hand of Moses (Exod. 7:3; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 78:43; 135:9; Jer. 32:20-21). So we read in Deuteronomy, and then in Psalm 105:

- Deuteronomy 34:10–12 — And there has not yet arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses [cf. Deut. 18:15, 18; Acts 3:22; 7:37], whom Yahweh knew face to face, in regard to all the **signs and wonders** which Yahweh sent him to do in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and in regard to all the mighty power and in regard to all the great terror which Moses did *in the sight of all Israel*.
- Psalm 105:26–27 (lxx) — [God] sent forth Moses, his servant, Aaron, him whom he chose. He set in them the words of his **signs and wonders** in the land of Ham.

In Acts chapter seven, we’ll hear Stephen saying:

- Acts 7:36 — “This man [Moses] led them out, doing **wonders and signs** in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.”

When we hear of the signs and wonders that God did through Jesus, it’s impossible not to think of the signs and wonders that God did through Moses. And so we see that Jesus is the “fulfillment” of Moses not only as the one through whom God has accomplished a greater redemption, but also as the one who is our greater lawgiver (cf. Mat. 5:21-48; Heb. 3:1-6; compare Acts 2:22-24 with Acts 7:35-40). As Peter will say in verses 32-33:

- Acts 2:32–33 — “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [Jesus] has poured out this which you both see and hear.”

If Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the law in order that he might give it to the people written on tablets of stone, Jesus has ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9) to receive from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, in order that by pouring out the Spirit upon us He might put God’s law within us (the law that has been lived and “enfleshed” in Him), writing it not upon tablets of stone, but upon the tablet of our hearts (cf. Jer. 31:33). Here is a miracle beyond all our ability to comprehend. We ask ourselves with the Apostle Paul:

- 2 Corinthians 3:7–9 (cf. Gal. 4:21-29; 5:1-6) — If **the ministry of death, in letters having been engraved on stones**, came with glory... how will **the ministry of the Spirit** not be even more in glory? ... [I]f the ministry of condemnation [the covenant that was broken] has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.

Today, we all hear that word behind us, saying, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isa. 30:21). Today, we all have an anointing from the Holy One, and we all know (1 Jn. 2:20).

- 1 John 2:27 — [T]he anointing whom [we have] received from Him abides in [us], and [we] have no need for anyone to teach [us, saying, “know the Lord”; Jer. 31:34]. But as His anointing teaches [us] about all things [so that we all know the Lord, from the “least” to the “greatest”; Jer. 31:34], and [as this anointing] is true and is not a lie, and just as He [our lawgiver] has taught [us], **[so let us] abide in Him.**