



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Day of Pentecost, Part I

The Holy Spirit Descends

Acts 2:1-13

February 11, 2007

- I. **The Fulfillment of Pentecost**
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I. **The Fulfillment of Pentecost**

A. The Fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost

- Luke writes, ‘When the day of Pentecost had come...’ (Acts 2:1)
 - This Verse literally means, ‘when the day of Pentecost **was fulfilled**.’
 - The events of Acts 2 are not simply isolate miracles; rather, they represent the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost.
 - The Feast of Pentecost was the **fourth feast** [out of seven total feasts] in the Jewish liturgical calendar:
- 1. **Passover** (*pesah*, Hebrew) [Exodus 12:1-28, 43-49; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 28:16; Deuteronomy 16:1-8]
- 2. **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (*matsot*, Hebrew) [Exodus 12:15-20; 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:6-8; Numbers 28:17-25; Deuteronomy 16:3-8]
- 3. **Day of Firstfruits** (*bikkurim*, Hebrew) [Leviticus 23:9-14]

4. **Feast of Pentecost** (or Weeks: *shabuot*, Hebrew) [Leviticus 23:15-22; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12] (Purpose: To dedicate and consecrate the firstfruits of the wheat harvest).
5. **Day of Trumpets** (*rosh Hashanah*, Hebrew) [Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 10:10; 29:1-6]
6. **Day of Atonement** (*yom kippur*, Hebrew) [Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11]
7. **Feast of Tabernacles** (Booths or Ingathering; *sukkot*, Hebrew) [Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-38; Deuteronomy 16:13-17]

Pentecost was the second of the three great harvest festivals of Judaism, coming between Passover and Tabernacles. In the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:8) it is referred to as ‘Pentecost,’ which means *fiftieth* in Greek. In the Old Testament it is referred to as the Festival of Weeks or of the First fruits, the first term referring to its coming a ‘week of weeks’ after Passover, the second to the fact that an offering of two loaves prepared from the wheat harvest was made on this day. Although there was a difference among the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the precise reckoning of the day, the Pharisaic procedure seems to have been followed in the period prior to A.D. 70 in which Pentecost was reckoned as coming exactly fifty days after the first day of the Passover. It was a day of ‘solemn assembly,’ and all work ceased. It was also one of the most popular pilgrim festivals, even more so than Passover, which was likely due to the improved weather conditions by the time of Pentecost.

John Polhill

Biblical references to the Feast of Weeks include Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12; and 2 Chronicles 8:13. This feast was observed early in the third month on the 50th day after the offering of the barley sheaf at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It included a holy convocation with the usual restriction on manual labor. Numbers 28:26-31 describes the number and nature of offerings and Deuteronomy 16:9-12 describes those who were to be invited to this feast. They include servants, sons and daughters, Levites, the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger. The feast was also known as the Feast of Harvest as well as Pentecost (a Greek word meaning ‘fifty’).

Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The day of Pentecost was so called because it fell on the fiftieth day after the presentation of the first sheaf to be reaped of the barley harvest, that is, the fiftieth day from the first Sunday after Passover (*pentekostos* being the Greek word for ‘fiftieth’). Among Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Jews it was known as the ‘feast of weeks’ (Exodus 34:22a; Deuteronomy 16:10) and also as ‘the day of firstfruits’ (Numbers 28:26; Exodus 23:16a) because on that day ‘the firstfruits of wheat harvest’ (Exodus 34:22a) were presented to God. At a later date it was reckoned to be the anniversary of the giving of the law on Sinai – a not unreasonable deduction from Exodus 19:1, according to which the Israelites arrived in ‘the wilderness of Sinai’ on the third new moon after their departure from Egypt (i.e., at the beginning of Siwan, about forty-four days after the first Passover).

F.F. Bruce

‘Pentecost was the fiftieth day from the Passover. It was the Feast of Firstfruits, celebrating the offering of the harvest (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:15-21). **There is, therefore, a certain appropriateness in the large number and wide ethnic representation of converts on that day – the firstfruits of the gospel in the new epoch.**

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

B. The Fulfillment of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

- The events of Pentecost fulfill the words of John the Baptist:

Luke 3:16-17 states, 'John [the Baptist] answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

Acts 2:4 states, 'And they were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit...'

- The coming of the Holy Spirit fulfills the words of Jesus:

John 14:16-17: 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.'

'The coming of the Spirit is the equivalent of the indwelling of Jesus. This is for the disciples' good, since it implies such a close union with Christ that he dwells *in* them, not merely *with* them. This is why Jesus explains the significance of the coming of the Spirit as follows: 'On that day [Pentecost] you will realize that [a] I am in my Father, and [b] you are in me, and [c] I am in you' [John 14:20]. The Trinitarian union and communion of Father and Son in the Spirit is the analogy for the union and communion between Christ and his people.' Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

C. The Sound of the Rushing Wind

- The events of Pentecost cannot be understood apart from the Old Testament. Pentecost brings to fulfillment several symbols presented throughout the Old Testament text.
- The sound of wind at Pentecost symbolized the presence of God, just as it did throughout the Old Testament.
- A serious student of the Old Testament would have certainly recognized the wind symbolism.
- Recall, that in Hebrew, the word *ruach* can mean 'breath, wind, or spirit.'

'The 'sound like the blowing of a violent wind' echoes the imagery of the powerful operation of the *ruach elohim* of creation (Genesis 1:2), suggesting that the event about to take place marks the beginning of a new world order.' Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

Ezekiel 37 [The Valley of Dry Bones] [see below: Ezekiel 37:1-5]

‘The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ And I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, You know.’ Again He said to me, ‘Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’ ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.’

1 Kings 19:11 [Elijah on Mt. Horeb]: ‘So He said, ‘Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD was passing by! And **a great and strong wind** was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD...’

Isaiah 66:15: For behold, the LORD will come in fire
And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire.

- In the New Testament, Jesus likens the presence of God to that of wind.

John 3:8 states, ‘The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’

- In other words, wind is like God [who is spirit] – you cannot seek it, but you can see and experience its effects.

D. The Appearance of [Tongues of] Fire

Genesis 15 [Genesis 15:17-18 below] states:

‘It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a **flaming torch** which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying,

‘To your descendants I have given this land,
From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...’

Leviticus 6:13 states: ‘Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out.’

Exodus 3:2-5 states, ‘The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a **blazing fire** from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was **burning with fire**, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’

Exodus 13:21 states, ‘The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a **pillar of fire** by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.’

Exodus 14:21: At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of **fire** and cloud and **brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion**.

Exodus 19:18: Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in **fire**; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

Exodus 24:17: And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming **fire** on the mountain top.

1 Kings 18:38-39: Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.’

Deuteronomy 4:24 states, ‘For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.’

Hebrews 12:29 states, ‘for our God is a consuming fire.’

‘...a Sinai-Pentecost parallel is established in the New Testament itself. The revelation of God to Moses at Sinai had been accompanied by fire, wind and a divine tongue (Hebrews 12:18-21). Moses had ascended the mountain. When he descended he had in his possession the Ten Commandments, the law of God. Christ too had recently ascended. At Pentecost he comes down, not with the law written on tablets of clay, but with the gift of his own Spirit to write the law in the hearts of believers and by his power to enable them to fulfill the law’s commands. Thus the new covenant promise begins to be fulfilled (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11).’ Sinclair Ferguson

Luke 12:49-51: Jesus says, ‘I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division...’

- ❑ Fire brings about light and warmth; however, it is also a sign of judgment, division and great distress.
- ❑ As the tongues of fire did not rest upon everyone [without exception] in Jerusalem, so God through His Word causes division as the light of truth pierces through the darkness of the world.

II. The Miracles at Pentecost

- ❑ Luke’s description of the events of Pentecost involved the sound of wind, appearance of tongues of fire, and speaking in foreign tongues.
- ❑ At the beginning of Acts 2, the 120 individuals remain in the upper room where they waited for what the Father had promised.

- ❑ The miracle of the wind, fire and tongues in the presence of the 120 further underscores the significance of the witness theme not only in the Book of Acts but in all of Scripture.
- ❑ The picture that Luke is providing the reader, with respect to the appearance of tongues, is that of one flame, representing the Holy Spirit, ‘separating’ into different tongues and then resting on the heads of each individual.
- ❑ The physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit, here, is reminiscent of the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Christ’s baptism (Luke 3:22).
- ❑ There are several powerful miracles, here, that Luke presents:

❖ The Miracle of [Speaking in] Tongues

- ❑ Luke says [of the 120]: ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.’
 - ◇ It is clear, here, that it was the Holy Spirit that was giving the utterance, not the individuals themselves.
- ❑ Luke then says, ‘Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them **speak in his own language**. They were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it **that we each hear them in our own language** to which we were born?’
 - What appears rather likely here is that when the sound occurred, the 120 gathered in the Temple with the pilgrims who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. From Verse 5 onward likely takes place in the Temple area.
 - The ‘devout men’ spoken of here were most certainly Diaspora Jews [Jews living throughout the Empire who spoke the language of the land in which they lived]. During the great feasts, especially Passover and Pentecost, Jews from throughout the empire would make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. This is the context of Acts 2.
- ❑ Throughout modern Christendom, there are many [primarily within the Charismatic community] who assert that the gift of tongues is still present today. However, what is clear **in this context** the ‘tongues’ were not ecstatic jibberish; but, rather, were **discernible foreign languages**.
 - Further supporting this assertion is that, not only is the Greek word for ‘tongues’ [*glossa*] used in this passage, but in Verses 6 and 8, the

word for ‘dialect’ or ‘languages’ [*dialektos*] is used. John Pohill writes, ‘It [*dialektos*] can only refer to a known language.’

- The fact that the disciples were speaking in discernible foreign language is clear by the words of those in the crowds: ‘Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language...?’
 - The disciples, as Galileans, were considered uneducated, even ignorant, second-class, working-class fisherman. The fact that they, of all people, were speaking in foreign tongues astonished those present. **This was clearly a miraculous sign from God.**
- ◇ Finally, it must be noted that the miracle at Pentecost is nothing short of a **reversal of Babel**. At the tower of Babel, God confused the workers by causing them to speak in multiple foreign languages. However, at Pentecost, it is the disciples’ miraculous ability to speak in discernible foreign languages that symbolizes the unity that all Christians have, throughout the entire world. Regardless of race or nationality, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ form one body under one Lord.

❖ The Miracle of God’s Perfect Providence

- The next miracle of Pentecost is one that could be rather easily missed when quickly reading this passage.
- God, in all His providence and sovereignty, ensured that these ‘devout men’ [Jews or proselytes] would be in Jerusalem during Pentecost in order that the ‘mighty deeds of God’ would be proclaimed in all the earth.
- After hearing the Gospel **in their own language**, these Diaspora Jews would now return home to ‘the ends of the earth’ and declare the ‘mighty deeds of God’ in their own homeland.
- It is quite amazing that Acts 1:8 is already being fulfilled.
- Furthermore, as the disciples proclaim the ‘mighty deeds of God’ to those present ‘from every nation under heaven’ they are prophetically foreshadowing the spread of the Gospel ‘to the ends of the earth’ to people of ‘every tribe and every tongue.’
 - Notice, as well, how **context must guide the reader**, as Luke says that ‘men from every nation under heaven’ were present. This figure of speech, of course, is a reference to every *known* nation, not every nation under heaven, as we would define it in the 21st Century.

❖ The Miracle of God's Salvation

- ❑ Often times, we can focus so much on the physical aspects of God's miraculous works that we miss the spiritual reality [and miracle] to which the physical manifestation points.
- ❑ It is absolutely essential to see that that Pentecost was a once-for-all, one-time, never-to-be-repeated event in redemption history. Just as the birth, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ were one-time events in redemption history, each fulfilling a necessary aspect of our salvation, so was the sending and indwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- ❑ Therefore, the greatest miracle of Pentecost is not the speaking in tongues, but the completion of salvation: the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit in accordance with the will of the Father was now done.
- ❑ Every believer, from that point on, has been filled, indwelt by, the Holy Spirit in accordance with the finished work of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the will of the Father.

III. The Reaction of the Crowd at Pentecost

- ❑ Luke lists [a least a sample of] the countries that were present at Pentecost:
 - Parthians [Iran] and Medes and Elamites, Mesopotamia [Iraq], Judea and Cappadocia [Turkey], Pontus [Northern Turkey] and Asia [the Aegean coast of Turkey, Phrygia [inland from Aegean coast in Turkey], Pamphylia [Mediterranean coast of Turkey], Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Cretans, and Arabs.
 - When Luke mentions Judea, he is most likely referring to Judea 'in the widest sense as the extent of the Davidic Empire, from the Euphrates to Egypt. It would thus come naturally after Mesopotamia and would include Syria as well.'
John Pohill
- ❑ As is the case each time the Gospel is proclaimed, of those present in Jerusalem at Pentecost [in spite of the seemingly 'obvious' miraculous works of God], there were those who:
 - (1.) Were astonished and embraced the message [Verse 6: the crowd was 'bewildered' and Verse 12: 'And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying, 'What does this mean?'] (Notice that the crowd did not say, 'What are they saying?' for it was clear to them. They simply wanted to

know what the significance of this miracle was. Because of this, the speaking in tongues prepared the assembly that was gathered for Peter's speech) ; and

(2.) Those who mocked the disciples over the foolishness they perceived [Verse 13: 'But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."']

- ❑ This truth is perfectly consistent with Scripture, which states, '...a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.' 1 Corinthians 2:14
- ❑ As Martin Luther rightly stated, 'If our gospel were received in peace, it would **not** be the true gospel.'

'Hereby it appeareth how monstrous as well the sluggishness, as also the ungodliness of men is, when Satan hath taken away their mind. If God should openly (and visibly) descend from heaven, his majesty could scarce more manifestly appear than in this miracle. Whosoever hath any drop of sound understanding in him must needs be stricken with the only hearing of it. How beastly, then, are those men who see it with their eyes, and yet scoff, and go about with their jests to mock the power of God? But the matter is so. There is nothing so wonderful which those men do not turn to a jest who are touched with no care of God; because they do, even upon set purposes, harden themselves in their ignorance in things most plain. And it is a just punishment of God, which he bringeth upon such pride, to deliver them to Satan, to be driven headlong into blind fury. Wherefore, there is no cause why we should marvel that there be so many at this day so blind in so great light, if they be so deaf when such manifest doctrine is delivered, yea, if they wantonly refuse salvation when it is offered unto them.'

John Calvin

- ❑ Throughout the New Testament, it is quite clear, that in order to understand the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, one must have ears to hear and hearts to understand.
- ❑ Examples of divine 'blinding' and 'deafening' are found throughout the Scriptures, as they are here: (1) in the Exodus [it appears obvious to the regenerated heart that the plagues, Exodus, parting of the Red Sea, etc. were miraculous acts of God]; (2) The disciples on the road to Emmaus; (3) the Miracles of Christ, such as the feeding of the 5,000 and the Raising of the Lazarus from the dead.
- ❑ It seems as though if anything could 'convince' someone that Jesus was the Christ, it would have been these things. But, miracles alone save no one. There must be a supernatural, sovereign work of God, as was evident at Pentecost.
- ❑ May we never forget, that the Gospel will 'separate' and cause division. It is not our job to save, only to proclaim!
- ❑ In this quarter's edition of the *Simply the Gospel* Newsletter, Tom Wood, in his review of J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* writes that 'it is our job to present Christ, not to produce converts.'