



**The Story Of Salvation**  
**NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010**  
**Andrew Klynsmith and Hendrik Schoemaker**

## **26. The Day of *Pentecost* (Acts 2:1–12)**

### **Introduction**

In his book “I believe in the Holy Spirit” Michael Green asks the question, “Why did God send us his Holy Spirit?”<sup>1</sup> Numerous books have been written to answer that question. The Spirit of God came upon the Christian community in order to unite them in a fellowship which could not be paralleled in any other group. Jesus had said that the Spirit would come to glorify him and would convict the world concerning sin, etc. All these are important functions of the Holy Spirit. Obviously we cannot answer the above question in one study. To me it has become significant that *Pentecost* had become the day to remember the giving of the Law at Mt. Horeb. The Holy Spirit came to change the human heart to cause God’s people to obey God’s Law and to create in them a quality of life that would otherwise be beyond their powers. “But there can be no doubt from a candid examination of the New Testament accounts that the prime purpose of the coming the Spirit of God upon the disciples was to equip them for mission. The Comforter comes not in order to allow men to be comfortable, but to make them missionaries.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Acts 2:1–12**

*Pentecost* is the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks celebrated 50 days after Passover. It originally was an agricultural feast celebrated after the completion of the grain harvest (Ex 23:16; Lev 23:5–21; Deut 16:9–12). In the Inter-Testament period and later, *Pentecost* was regarded as the anniversary of the law-giving at Sinai and associated with the renewal of the covenant God made with his people and indeed the loud sound, wind and fire in Acts 2 recall that Sinai theophany (Ex 19:16–19).<sup>3</sup> It is only after mentioning these phenomena, announcing the divine presence (from heaven), that Luke then mentions the Holy Spirit. God is present with his people. The long awaited Holy Spirit has come!

The “all” of verses 1 and 4 may refer to the whole company of 120 persons mentioned in 1:15.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the number, nobody present was not filled with the Spirit. Further, their being together in one place refers not just to physical presence, they were of one heart and mind as only people in constant prayer are (Acts 1:13–14, 24).

What a dramatic event this must have been. Gathered was this group of devout disciples in earnest prayer and utter tranquillity and suddenly there was a violent intrusion of sound and wind and fire and the subsequent confrontation with a buzzing, sneering and a divided crowd, who accuse them of being filled with new wine. To make sure that something extraordinary is happening Luke tells us that the gathered crowd because of the sound, was

<sup>1</sup> Green, Michael, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Green, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 964.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall, I. Howard, *Acts*, TNTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 68.

‘bewildered’, ‘amazed and astonished’, ‘amazed and perplexed’ as they were hearing the proclamation of the great deeds of God’s power, each in his own language. There is a very long list of languages spoken and heard, emphasizing diversity but making the contrasting point that only the one message of the mighty acts of God is being heard. No wonder they are asking: “how is it?” and “what does this mean?” This last question then prepares us for Peter’s subsequent speech and explanations.

### **The Coming of the Spirit is the Fulfilment of Promises made in the Old Testament and the Gospels.**

The coming of Christ, the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom of God are all linked together in the promises made in the Old Testament.

Isaiah speaks of the Spirit poured upon us from on high (Isa 32:15). And in chapter 44,

For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,  
and my blessing on your offspring (Isa 44:3).

The prophet Joel prophesied,

Then afterward  
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
and your young men shall see visions.  
Even on the male and female slaves,  
in those days, I will pour out my spirit (Joel 2:28–29).

In the famous “valley of the dry bones” vision in Ezekiel 37, the LORD told the prophet, “O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live (Ezek 37:14). God will bring his dead people back to life by pouring out his Spirit upon them. He then adds, “Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

The Spirit poured out at Pentecost is the same Spirit of God who breathed into the nostrils of Adam after God had formed him from the dust of the ground and he became a living being. It is the same Spirit who was on Moses and his elders and the builders of the tabernacle. It is the same Spirit who anointed David for kingship. It is the same Spirit who announced to the prophets of old of a salvation to come through the suffering Servant (1 Pet 1:10–12). It is the same Spirit who was on John the Baptist, who was filled with the Spirit from his mother’s womb. He promised,

“I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk 3:16).

Then in Luke 24:46–49 Jesus announces that he will send what the Father has promised, which is power from on high. They will need this for the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name to all nations. “You are witnesses of these things,” Luke adds. Then in Acts 1:4–5 & 8 Luke virtually repeats what he wrote in his Gospel; they will be baptized by the Holy Spirit, which is the promised gift from the Father and receive power to be Jesus’ witnesses until the end of the earth, meaning all the nations. Then there are the promises of the coming of the *Paraclete* in John 14–16 and the significant John 7:39 where the Spirit is promised to believers in Jesus,

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn 7:37–39).

Peter in his speech emphasizes the Spirit as the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), and clearly links the *this* of the outpouring of the Spirit on *Pentecost* to be the fulfilment of the *that* of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:17–21; Joel 2:28–32). Joel had said, “Afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh”. But Peter proclaimed, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”. The afterwards in Joel becomes the last days in Peter’s proclamation. The last days arrived two thousand years ago!

### **The Coming of the Spirit means God’s People will have a New Soft Heart to Obey God’s Instructions.**

The heart is often used in the Bible to describe “what makes us tick” that is the human personality. In other words the heart is used to describe those dynamic forces that make us unique persons. It is also used for our intellect and memory, emotions and will.

But the Prophets of the Old Testament were often bewildered between the power and impact of God and the immense indifference of the human heart. Amos writes that the Lord roars like a lion (Amos 3:8); God’s thunderous voice is shaking heaven and earth but people don’t hear a thing. Jeremiah writes that God’s word is like fire, like a hammer which breaks a rock in pieces (Jer 23:29) but the people go about unmoved. The prophet is scorched by the word of God—Jeremiah says, “within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jer 20:9) but the hearts of the people are made of asbestos; their hearts are fireproof (Jer 20:7–8).<sup>5</sup> Isaiah writes, “They say to the prophets, “Do not prophecy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophecy illusions...let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 30:10–11).

From the moment the Ten Commandments were given God’s cry echoes throughout Israel’s history “Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always” (Deut 5:29). But God’s people are called foolish, senseless, they have eyes and do not see, ears but do not hear, disobey the instructions of the Lord, are stubborn and silly as a dove (Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2; Isa 43:8; 30:9; Hos 4:16; 7:11). From the Old Testament we learn that the heart of men is just so hard. Jeremiah confirms that “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9).

Left to themselves people have no moral strength to do anything about their hard hearts. Only God can do something about the human heart, only God can change the human heart to hear and to do the Lord’s instructions and for that a great miracle needs to happen.

But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear (Deut 29:4).

Way back before the people of God had even entered the Promised land God promised that He would do something about the human heart so that they would love him and obey Him with all their heart (Deut 30:1–6).

But now listen to the promise of God in Ezekiel:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

<sup>5</sup> Heschel, Abraham J., *The Prophets*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 12, 18, 188–190.

I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances (Ezek 36:25–27).

The heart of stone will become a warm throbbing heart. What a miracle!! The great miracle of the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people will mean that the Spirit will cause the human heart to obey God's instructions.

### **The Holy Spirit is the Gift of Speaking about the Mighty Acts of God.**

At Pentecost we are celebrating the fact of the Spirit's presence with God's people and we are confronted with the power of His presence and with the effect of His presence.

The being filled with the Spirit at Pentecost manifested itself in irrepressible speaking about the great works of God that came forth from the human spirit wholly seized by the divine Spirit. Pentecost momentarily placed in sharp and dramatic relief that the Church that had come into being in her New Testament form is a speaking, proclaiming Church and she addresses all men and all nations with her message.<sup>6</sup>

They just could not help themselves; their mouths were overflowing from a heart filled with the Spirit of God. In Luke's Gospel we see this in Jesus, who being filled and anointed by the Spirit (Lk 3:21–22; 4:18–19), declared by word and deed God's wonderful works amongst God's people. Others who are filled with the Spirit are also those who extol God's great deeds. John the Baptist's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a wonderful prophecy on the day the child John was being circumcised (Lk 1:68–79). Then there was the righteous and devout Simeon in Jerusalem, who was looking forward to the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit rested on him, who had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. "Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk 2:25–32). Although it is not explicitly stated that Mary was filled with the Spirit, most likely she was. How else could she have magnified the Lord and his mighty deeds if not filled with the Spirit? (Lk 1:46–55). Then in the book of Acts we see the same pattern.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This happened first at Pentecost in the upper room and Peter's proclamation to the crowd outside. Then after every fresh infilling of the Spirit, there is immediately a bold speaking of the word of God. When Peter and John had been arrested and stood before the religious rulers Luke writes that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:8 & 20). Then upon their release from prison they went back to their friends to make a report of their ordeal and after they had prayed "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31). We read of Stephen, a man full of the Spirit who boldly defended his faith in Jesus before the Sanhedrin; "they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke (Acts 6:3, 8, 10; 7:55). On another occasion when Peter went to the house of Cornelius to talk to them about the resurrected Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening and they started to exalt God (Acts 10:44–46).

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<sup>6</sup>Boer, Harry R., *Pentecost and Missions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 102.

**Last words**

There was a time in the life of God's people in the Old Testament that they were so besotted with their idols that they had stopped declaring the wonders of God,

They did not say, "Where is the LORD  
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,  
who led us in the wilderness..."

God had brought them into the Promised Land, but the people of God defiled God's land and reached a point when even the religious leaders, the handlers of the law, did not know God and his law and stopped speaking about Him (Jer 2:6–8). Israel was condemned for not speaking about the wonderful acts of God in Israel's history.<sup>7</sup> The coming of the Spirit on Pentecost changed all that. The new people of God, people filled with the Spirit of Jesus, once again extolled the even greater deeds of God. And no "handlers of the law" were necessary any longer as the Spirit had come and caused God's people to obey Him from the heart

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<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann, Walter, *Texts that Linger Words that Explode*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 2–4.