

The Great Awakening

Lesson 3: Acts 2:1-36

INTRODUCTION

I am presenting an extended introduction to this study that needs to be read prior to gathering together. ***Please read Acts 2:1-36 before reading the rest of this introduction.***

Acts 2 presents us with one of the great moments in the history of salvation! Christ has been raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. Chapter 2 presents the fulfillment of His promise to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in all believers (Ezekiel 36:27; John 16:5-11). Below I will explain a few elements that will help you understand what is going on in this passage.

The Baptism of the Spirit

As was mentioned back in Lesson 1, we at Grace Church believe the *baptism of the Spirit* and the *filling of the Spirit* are two different aspects to the Spirit's work in the believer. The baptism of the Spirit is a very descriptive and metaphoric title for the Spirit's work of incorporating every believer into the Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul tells us, "*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.*" When John the Baptist wanted to describe Jesus' ministry in a succinct way, he chose to say, "*I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit*" (Mark 1:8). John summarized all Christ's ministry with this imagery. Jesus sending the Spirit to us was the culmination of His entire ministry. The Spirit was coming to apply what Christ accomplished for us. This is described in other biblical passages as the Spirit indwelling us (Romans 8:9-11) and being sealed for the day of redemption with the "*Holy Spirit of promise*" (Ephesians 1:13-14). We believe that the phrase, "baptism of the Spirit" is a vivid, metaphorical way of describing the Spirit's work of indwelling, sealing, and enveloping every believer into the Body of Christ and applying the forgiveness, regeneration and redemption that was purchased for them.

The Day of Pentecost and the Birth of the Church

As stated above, the baptism of the Spirit is what formed the Body of Christ. We believe that the "body of Christ" and the "Church" are the same thing. God chose to form the New Covenant Church, the Body of Christ, on the Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost was one of Israel's seven major holidays that God commanded they celebrate. It was one of the three holidays for which God required all male Jews to go to Jerusalem. Due to this requirement, the population of Jerusalem would swell well beyond the normal population. In the Old Testament, it is called by many names, but the most common is the *Feast of Weeks* (Exodus 34:22 and Deut. 16:9-12). The word "weeks" refers to the seven weeks between the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Seven weeks is 49 days, so the 50th day is called *Pentecost* in Greek (it comes from the Greek word for 50). The end of the barley harvest also coincided with the Passover celebration, so the common way to refer to Pentecost

is to say that it occurred 50 days after Passover. The Jewish believer was to offer a grain offering to God in thanksgiving for the harvest. It was also customary to offer free-will sacrifices during this celebration also.

So, why did God decide to send the Spirit on Pentecost? Why didn't Jesus just give it to them when He ascended a week earlier? Why did He make them wait? All the Jewish holidays are fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17); so the Feast of Weeks, i.e., Pentecost, is symbolic of Christ's work in some way. But the Bible does not always tell us the full relationship between the historical meaning of the festival and the spiritual significance that is fulfilled in Christ. Some Bible teachers have suggested that since the Feast of Weeks represents two kinds of grain, barley and wheat, God chose to create His Church on this day. You see, the Church was designed to be two kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles, joined into one group of people: the body of Christ, the New Covenant Church. Since the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred for the first time that day, the Church was born then.

Speaking in Tongues

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is and has been a fascination for a long time to modern Christians, but this fascination has become acute in the 20th century starting with the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. Christians have become deeply divided over the nature and purpose of this gift. Here is my understanding of this gift—You are free to disagree with me.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues occurs in Acts 2:4 (when the Jewish believers received the Spirit), Acts 10:46 (when the Gentiles believed in Jesus), and Acts 19:6 (when some followers of John the Baptist believed in Jesus as their Messiah). Something visually amazing happened with the Samaritans in Acts 8, but there is no mention of tongues specifically; it is quite possible and likely that they did speak in tongues, but it isn't mentioned. Besides Acts, the only other place that mentions speaking in tongues is 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Acts 2 clearly mentions that these tongues are actual human languages. The Greek word for tongues is *glossa*. It occurs 50 times in the New Testament and has a range of meanings. It is mostly used to refer to the actual tongue in our mouth. It is used metaphorically to refer to speaking ("my tongue exalts God," Acts 2:26). *Glossa* is also used to refer to a human language. It is used in different ways in Acts 2 alone (see verses 3, 4, and 11). The three mentions of speaking in tongues in Acts and in 1 Corinthians 12-14 all use this same word. I conclude that all mentions of the miracle of speaking in tongues refers to speaking an actual human language that you have never learned; it is not simply some unidentifiable sound, as some have taught. 1 Corinthians 13:1 does mention the tongues of *men and angels*. I believe Paul is being hyperbolic in verses 1-2 and not actually saying this happens (just as he is not saying that someone actually has all knowledge in verse 2). He is exaggerating to make a point: love is supreme.

I believe that the act of speaking in tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians are referring to the same miraculous phenomenon, but there are different purposes to these two

contexts. In Acts, God is bringing a miracle on four very distinct people groups (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and uniformed followers of John the Baptist). The coming of the Spirit is manifested with a miracle in order to cause the believers to understand the New Covenant has been inaugurated. Peter, by quoting Joel, says as much. The Samaritans and the Gentiles had to have similar experiences in order to be received as equals in the Church, the newly created “body of Christ.” Remember that Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles did not get along. Something miraculous needed to happen to join them into one Body as equals. This is Peter’s point in Acts 10 when he says, *“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”* In Acts 11:15-17, after speaking the Gospel to the Gentiles, Peter has to defend himself to the Jewish church in Jerusalem as to why He ate with the Gentiles: *“So if God gave them the same gift (i.e., the Spirit) as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”* Making these experiences normative that all believers must have and seek misses the point of these passages and the importance of the Spirit falling on all flesh to make them One Body.

Another reason everyone spoke in a human language that they did not learn is better understood when we think about the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. At the Tower of Babel, the disobedient people of earth say, *“Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may **make a name for ourselves** and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”* God does not allow this glory-seeking by man and confuses their languages. This act forces the people to scatter and become many nations. Then, in Genesis 12:2 God says to Abraham, *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; **I will make your name great**, and you will be a blessing. . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* God did not want the people of Babel to make a name for themselves; He wanted to make Abraham’s name great. Ultimately, the great nation that came from Abraham was Israel, through whom the whole earth was blessed because Jesus came from Israel, who came from Abraham. So, the division of humans that God created at the Tower of Babel is reversed at Pentecost, where people were not scattered because of languages, but rather were brought together into the One Church, the Body of Christ, where *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28). I hope you can see why Pentecost must not simply be interpreted as an experience that I should seek for myself; rather, it is the culmination of all God’s work of salvation up to that point. It is a monumental day that should not be reduced to the hope of a personal experience for me.

Now in regards to the purpose of tongues in 1 Corinthians, we see a different aspect to this miracle. Paul teaches us that not everyone speaks in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30), but that it is one of many gifts that are distributed to believers as God the Spirit wills (12:11 & 18). This gift’s primary purpose is for the edification of other believers, not primarily for the one speaking. But for that edification to happen, it must be through an interpreter. The gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues always work in conjunction if the edification of the Body is to happen (see 1 Corinthians 14:1-19 for Paul’s full explanation of this principle). Tongues must never be used in a public service if an interpreter is not present (14:27-27). There does seem to be a personal prayer benefit to tongues. Paul says that if an interpreter is not present, then he is to

Read Acts 2:4-13

2. In some circles, the miraculous gift of tongues is seen as **THE** most important manifestation of the filling of the Spirit. While we don't want to undermine this miracle, there is nothing in Scripture that says this is THE sign of the Spirit's filling. Look up the following passages to see other results of the Spirit's empowering ministry. Share your own stories of how God has used you through the Spirit's power.

- Acts 4:8-9, 13-14
- Acts 4:31
- Acts 6:3, 5, 8; 11:24 (What other virtues are associated with the Spirit's filling?)
- Acts 7:55
- Acts 13:8-12 (I would like to have this ability 😊)

3. Imagine the scene of Acts 2: Thousands of people are in Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean world to celebrate Pentecost. At least 15 languages groups are represented. People are rushing here and there. Sacrifices are being made. The marketplaces are filled with activity. Then, a large group of Galileans (primarily) comes out into the streets speaking languages they had never learned. Everyone in ear-shot is now paying attention to this phenomenon.

- *What else can you envision in this scene? Brainstorm and help each other see how the drama unfolds.*
- *What was the subject matter being spoken of by the disciples in these tongues? (see verses 12-13). Can we only do this if we're speaking in tongues (foreign languages we've never learned), or are we to be talking about Jesus no matter what language we speak?*
- *What were the two conclusions of the onlookers as to source of this phenomenon?*
- *When we see or hear of some report of a miracle, how often do we look for other explanations than God as the source? Why do we do this?*

Read Acts 2:14-21

In this passage, Peter gives a scriptural explanation for the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. He quotes the second chapter of the prophet Joel predicting God's Spirit being

poured on all believers. In verses 17-18, Peter quotes what believers will do who receive the Spirit. He mentions prophecies, visions, and dreams. He does not mention tongues. I believe that the gift of tongues is equal to prophecy when there is an interpretation (see 1 Corinthians 14). But in Acts 2, there is no need for an interpreter because they are speaking the actual languages of those present.

Verses 19-21 of Peter's speech are quoting a section of Joel that does not appear to have been fulfilled that day. I believe that it will be fulfilled at the end of time at Christ's Second Coming (a.k.a., "*the Day of the Lord*"). Peter seems to be quoting the whole context so he can end on the phrase, "*everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved.*" It is at this point that he preaches Christ to them.

Read Acts 2:22-36

Peter gives a brilliant speech demonstrating Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension from the Scriptures. It is this Jesus who has sent the Spirit that has caused this miracle of languages. Let's discuss a few elements of this speech.

4. Notice in verses 23 and 36 that Peter points the finger at them for crucifying Christ. Were all the people listening to Peter guilty of crucifying Jesus? Many of them may not have even been there 50 days earlier.

- *Read Acts 5:27-32 where the Jewish leaders are tired of being accused of killing Jesus. How do we reconcile their words here in Acts 5 with their words in Matthew 27:24-25?*

5. While Peter clearly points out his audience's role in Jesus' death, in verses 22-24, he says that this was exactly what God planned. (Also read Acts 4:27-28 for a similar statement.) How do we reconcile God being the One who originated and carried out the plan to crucify Christ while at the same time humans are held responsible for their choices?

6. The heart of Peter's speech is the person of Christ. Reread John 16:12-16 from Lesson 1. What is the role of the Spirit in relation to the ministry and person of Jesus?

I believe that John teaches the Spirit's purpose is to point to Jesus more than putting the emphasis upon Himself. I think we can either spend too much time focusing on the experiences the Spirit can give us or we can completely ignore the Spirit's work as though He doesn't matter. What are your thoughts on this potential overemphasis, one way or the other?

End this study with a time of prayer. First, ask God for a heart for lost people. Then ask God for faith to believe that the Spirit will give us power if we will only go and tell people about Jesus.