

ACTS 2 – THE CHURCH BEGINS AT PENTECOST



After Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot, the Church again had twelve apostles—just what Jesus had established as the leaders to begin the Church. So the resurrected Jesus started appearing from that first day of the counting of the fifty days of Pentecost. It started with the *wave-sheaf offering* on that Saturday evening and Jesus then continued to teach them for forty more days. Lastly, He told them to wait in Jerusalem where they would receive the power of God's Spirit (Luke 24:49).

Jesus actually begins the spiritual firstfruits harvest, so He is called "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:22). After Pentecost, when the Church received God's Spirit, they fully realized the Feasts and God's Plan of Salvation were connected. They saw themselves as part of that 50-day spiritual Pentecost harvest that began with Jesus Christ. As Paul explained, "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 5:23). James adds, "Of His own will He brought *us* forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of *firstfruits* of His creatures" (James 1:18).

So in Acts 2, we arrive at that special Pentecost—the birthday of the Church. It says, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 1:1-6).

First, the Gk. term, *pentekoste*, means fiftieth, or one part in fifty, implying counting fifty days. This is why the verse says, "When Pentecost *had* fully come." The count had reached the fiftieth day.

Nelson's Bible Commentary aptly notes about Pentecost, "From the Greek word for 'fifty,' Pentecost was so named because it fell on the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of the Passover.

Pentecost was also known as 'the Feast of Weeks,' 'the Firstfruits of the Wheat Harvest,' and 'the Day of Firstfruits.' During this harvest celebration, the Jews brought to God the firstfruits of their harvest in thanksgiving, expecting that God would give the rest of the harvest as His blessing. This particular Day of Pentecost was the day of firstfruits of Christ's church, the beginning of the great harvest of souls who would come to know Christ and be joined together through the work of the Holy Spirit. There are also some scholars who believe that Pentecost was an observance of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. This day in the Book of Acts is significant because it marks when God would begin writing that Law within our hearts."

Barclay adds, "The Passover fell in the middle of April; therefore Pentecost fell at the beginning of June. By that time travelling conditions were at their best. At least as many came to the Feast of Pentecost as came to the Passover. That explains the roll of countries mentioned in this chapter; never was there a more international crowd in Jerusalem than at the time of Pentecost.

"The Feast itself had two main significances. (1) It had a historical significance. It commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. (2) It had an agricultural significance. At the Passover the crop's first omer [sheaf] of barley was offered to God; and at Pentecost two loaves were offered in gratitude for the ingathered harvest. It had one other unique characteristic. The law laid it down that on that day no servile work should be done (Lev. 23:21; Num. 28:26). So it was a holiday for all and the crowds on the streets would be greater than ever."

So these 120 humble people in Jerusalem met for their holy and appointed convocation, probably in the same upper room, near the Temple, used before (see Acts 1:13). Then, suddenly, they heard a powerful noise like a roaring wind and something like flames appeared above their heads and then rested on them—signaling the receiving of God's spirit—which was the first time a group of people had ever received the Spirit of God. Previously, it had only been given to individuals.

Expositor's Bible Commentary says it well, "Also significant is Luke's statement that these tokens of

the Spirit's presence 'separated and came to rest on each of them.' This seems to suggest that, though under the Old Covenant the divine presence rested on Israel as a corporate entity and upon many of its leaders for special purposes, under the New Covenant, as established by Jesus and inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit now rests upon each believer individually. In other words, though the corporate and individual aspects of redemption cannot actually be separated, the emphasis in the proclamation of redemption from Pentecost onward is on the personal relationship of God to the believer through the Spirit, with all corporate relationships resulting from this."

As a sign of having received God's Spirit, they obtained a gift along with it—the ability to be understood in different languages. It was quite effective since others coming there would witness a great miracle which did get their attention.

As *Expositor's* mentions about this miracle and the beginning of the Church, "...the tongues in Acts 2:4 are best understood as 'languages' and should be taken in accord with Philo's reference to *understandable language* as one of the three signs of God's presence in the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (*De Decalogo* 33)...With regard to the church as an instrument of service, called by God to take up the mission formerly entrusted to Israel, Luke is certainly presenting the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost as the church's birthday. So he *parallels* the Spirit's coming on Jesus at his baptism with the Spirit's coming at Pentecost on the earliest followers, for neither Jesus' ministry nor the mission of the early church would have been possible apart from the Spirit's empowering. So also Luke emphasizes Jesus' explicit command to the disciples to stay in Jerusalem till they were *empowered* from on high by the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8, emphasis added throughout)."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary adds, "These were undoubtedly *spoken living languages*; the word used...is *dialektō*, which means 'language' and not ecstatic utterance. This gives insight into what is meant by 'tongues' in Acts 2:1-47; 10:1-48; 19:1-44; 1 Cor. 12-14. This event marked the beginning of the church."

Luke continues, "Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we

hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'Whatever could this mean?'

Others mocking said, 'They are full of new wine.' But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel' (Acts 2:7-16).

Why did they single out those speaking in different languages as being Galileans? In short, because Galileans had a hard time pronouncing guttural words (those produced in the throat) and they also left out syllables, so they were looked down upon as country folk by Jerusalem's more cultured class (see Mark 14:70). They reasoned, surely all these simple people couldn't have learned so many different languages on their own.

So Peter explained what occurred is the partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of men and women being filled with God's spirit and having the gift of utterance (Joel 2:1-32). Besides, Peter said they couldn't be drunk, for it was nine in the morning.

He goes on to say, "'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full

of joy in Your presence.’ Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to My Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:23-36).

Peter’s mention of God having “loosed the pains of death,” refers to Jesus having been *born again* in a resurrection. *Robertson’s Word Pictures* states, “How Peter or Luke came to use the old Greek word *ōdinas* (birth pangs) we do not know. Early Christian writers interpreted the resurrection of Christ as a birth out of death.” Here we see the analogy of birth as a new life after a resurrection (*Kittel’s Dic.* explains the same point).

Also, since David’s tomb was within their view in Jerusalem, Peter could now explain what David had prophesied was concerning the Messiah and how Jesus had fulfilled that prophecy. Many in the crowd couldn’t deny the facts they had recently witnessed and were ashamed of their complicity.

As Luke says, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in

the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:37-47).

So from a group of 120, now there were 3,000 new Jewish converts and members. Remember, many of these people had witnessed Jesus’ preaching and miracles. They knew there was no rational explanation for the recent empty tomb or of the many appearances of a resurrected Christ. So now, seeing these followers all having the gift of languages, they had repented of their sins. Notice though, no mention of speaking of tongues occurred among the 3,000 baptized that day.

These baptisms took place in Jerusalem, probably using the large public ritual pools. Jews had considered baptism as only a rite for converted Gentiles, so this was a break with the past and a completely new spiritual life. Then they all met daily to be taught by the apostles, eating meals together, and pooling their funds so all the needs were met for the incipient work of God and to take care of the most needy among them.

Regarding having things in common, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* makes this vital point, “The selling of property and the common possession of the proceeds may imply that the early church expected the Lord to return soon and establish His kingdom. This may explain why the practice was not continued. Holding everything in common was *not* socialism or communism because it was *voluntary* (cf. Acts 4:32-35; 5:4). Also their goods were not evenly distributed but were given to meet needs as they arose.”

Yes, the Church began with a great impulse given by God and now they had a core group where they could eventually expand to the ends of the earth. By the way, we have the honor of being part of those who are still doing that Work started way back then—and there is still so much to do!