

Empowered
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Acts 2:1-15

Acts 2:1–15 (ESV)

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

- Pentecost was one of three feasts the Jewish people were instructed to observe (Lev.23). The name is from the Greek word for fifty. It occurred fifty days after Passover.
- ...every Israelite male hoped to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (see Deut. 16:16). During these three festivals, the population of Jerusalem would dramatically increase with the arrival of the many worshipers. ...Sometimes called the “Festival of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16) or “the day of firstfruits” (Num. 28:26), [Pentacost] marked the beginning of the cutting and binding of the barley sheaves (Deut. 16:9). As a harvest celebration, Pentecost was a time of joy and thanksgiving for the recent crop.¹
- God chose this Pentecost (just ten days after Jesus ascended to Heaven) for the birth of the church and the beginning of a great harvest of souls.
- Jesus’ followers were gathered in a house in Jerusalem. He had commanded them to stay there and wait for the promised power of the Holy Spirit. It may have been just the twelve or as many as 120 (1:15.)
- Some say they were in a room in the temple. What we know for certain is their location was within “earshot” of the huge crowds in town to worship.
- Striving for great accuracy, Luke describes the unusual incident in detail:

² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each

one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

- He says the sound came “from heaven.” A sound like a great windstorm.
- **Why would it not surprise us for wind to symbolize the Holy Spirit?**
- In John 3:8 Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit: “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” ²
- Also, the Greek word for spirit (*pneuma*) can...mean “wind”... and the Hebrew word for spirit (*ruach*) can also mean “breath” or “wind.”³
- Luke didn’t say the furniture blew over or that they ran for buckets of water to put out the fire. His wording (“like,” “as of”) makes it clear Luke was using metaphors to describe the almost indescribable!
- The **sound like the blowing of a violent wind ... from heaven** points to the power of the Holy Spirit and the fullness of His coming.⁴
- The **tongues of fire** portray the presence of God. Several times in the Old Testament God displayed Himself in the form of flames (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:2–6; 13:21–22; 19:18; 40:38; cf. Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).⁵
- Notice this “fire” rested on “each one of them.” When Peter preached later in this chapter he quoted the prophet Joel in Joel 2:28–29 (ESV)

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that 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. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.
- What a comfort to see that the Holy Spirit isn’t just for certain disciples. The Spirit resides in all believers. No one is left out!
- The appearance of the Holy Spirit to this group of believers was spectacular. However, we must be careful not to think that the presence of the Spirit only comes in spectacular ways.
- I think of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11–14. As God’s prophet clung to the side of a mountain there was huge wind, an earthquake,

- and fire but God was not in those. His voice came in a “gentle whisper.”
- The presence and filling of God’s Spirit in a believer might be dramatic or it may be a gentle, warm sensation. If we’re seeking the Spirit’s power God will confirm it within us supernaturally.
 - Verse four tells us these believers began to speak in “other tongues.”
 - Some believe this means “unknown tongues” or “ecstatic prayer language.” The crowd’s reaction in verse thirteen (thinking they were intoxicated) might add to the theory. But the next few verses clarify this.
 - The sound like a mighty wind had drawn a big crowd. This was a major festival so there were many Jews in Jerusalem to worship. Some of them were originally from other countries. Look at verses five through fifteen:

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

- This crowd of devout Jews was from all over the known world at that time.
- On today’s map they would have been from modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene in northern Africa. From the island of Crete and modern-day Arabia. Rome represented the continent of Europe. Some believe they first took the gospel back to Rome and became the founders of the first Roman church.⁶
- As the Spirit-filled believers were energetically praising God, their words were understood in the native language of every

- foreign-born Jew. Remember what God did at the Tower of Babel? Luke doesn't say it, but some see this as God "reversing" His judgment at Babel.
- Verse seven says the crowd was amazed that a bunch of people from Galilee could speak foreign languages. That was a bit of an insult.
 - Galilee was home to common and probably mostly uneducated people. Acts 4:13 (ESV) *¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*
 - The other theory for their amazement is that we're told the Galileans spoke with an accent compared to those in Jerusalem. We're told, Galileans pronounced gutturals peculiarly and had a sort of lisp.⁷
 - People in Jerusalem recognized that Galilean accent and they probably looked down on it. When Jesus was under arrest, Matthew 26:73 (ESV) tells us: *⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."* Maybe it was similar to the bias people have against strong regional accents today.
 - Verse twelve says most were amazed, but there were also those who made fun.

¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.

- As supernatural and amazing as this movement of God's Spirit was, some didn't get it. In fact they made fun of these Spirit-filled followers.
- But notice how Peter used the amazement of some and the ridicule of others as an opening to begin to explain the message of the gospel.

- In the rest of this chapter, Peter preached one of the most eloquent sermons ever delivered. In verse 41 we're told 3,000 believed and came to faith in Christ that day!
- **Why is it amazing that Peter would preach so boldly and confidently?**
- Peter is a study in contrasts. Three and a half years before he was a simple fisherman. Yet, he would be the first to understand that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus said that he would be an important part of the founding of the church (Matt. 16:16-20).⁸
- Peter was impetuous yet a great leader. He must have suffered ADHD because it seems he was all over the place. One moment he vowed to die with Jesus and the next he denied even knowing him.
- Before Jesus left the earth He lovingly forgave and restored Peter. In fact Jesus said Peter would be the rock upon which He would build the church. Now Peter got his chance to act like the "rock" Jesus called him to be.
- **What was it that changed Peter from the coward at the crucifixion to the leader of the church in just fifty days?**
- In our final moments together, let's look at how this event applies to us.
- First let's consider the whole church. We try programs and plans of all kinds to reach people for Christ. **What does this passage teach us about the real secret to the church having major impact? How was it unmistakable that what happened that day at Pentecost was God's doing and not man's cleverness?**
- Two points: When God sent this unmistakable invasion of His Spirit it not only got the attention in the room, it got the attention of the crowds. When God pours out His Spirit on a local church you can't keep it a secret.
- Also, The Holy Spirit was so powerful; the impact was beyond anything they could have done themselves (about 3,000 souls were saved.) When God pours out His Spirit on a local church the results will be so big only God can take credit and receive the glory. Example: FBCW since 1986.
- **Think about how these Galileans miraculously communicated in every language. What does this teach us**

**about how God equips His people for sharing their faith?
How does this apply to us?**

- God's Spirit broke down barriers to communication foreshadowing the spread of the gospel to every tongue and tribe of every nation. When God pours out His Spirit on a group of believers He gives them supernatural ability to communicate the gospel both at home and abroad.
- While many heard, understood, and responded; some ridiculed (v.13). **How should these various responses encourage us as we share our faith? How does this relieve us of some of the fear of sharing?**
- When God pours out His Spirit on a group of believers, some will hear and respond and some will laugh and make fun. Get used to it!
- In Acts 2:14-41, Peter preaches the first sermon ever heard in the New Testament church with boldness; clarity; and results! Just fifty days earlier this same Peter was denying he knew Jesus; hiding like a coward; and crying like a baby over his sin. **How does Peter's dramatic transformation encourage you about how God can use anyone?**
- When God pours out His Spirit on a group of believers He raises up leaders and teachers, and it's usually the people no one expects.
- Finally, this Holy Spirit power also changed the way these followers lived. Acts 2:42-47 tells us about miraculous changes in how the early church lived. The lesson for us: When God pours out His Spirit on a group of believers, their attitudes and affections will change dramatically from who they were before.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We've talked about the Holy Spirit's power in the church as a group. Let's talk about individual followers of Christ.
- When Jesus left the earth, **what instructions did He give to His followers? How did they respond?** In ten days they received the power Jesus promised. **What's the lesson for us as we seek to have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives?**
- These followers of Jesus obeyed His instructions: they "stayed and prayed" for the power of the Holy Spirit. The empowering of God's church starts with the obedience of believers.

- Last week we said, if you're a follower of Christ, you already have His Spirit living in you. We also said, if you want the MAXIMUM power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life and be a witness for Christ, it requires time in His word; time in His presence; and obedience to His commands.
- Whether it's in a dramatic way or in a "gentle whisper," Jesus has promised us the power to live as His followers and witnesses.
- Like the believers in the ten days before Pentecost, we just need to pray and obey.

¹ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore The Bible Leader Commentary on Acts 2*.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Jn 3:7–8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore The Bible Leader Commentary on Acts 2*.

⁴ Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 357). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 357). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore The Bible Leader Commentary on Acts 2*.

⁷ Lemke, S. W. (2007). The Academic Use of Gospel Harmonies. In *Holman Christian Standard Bible: Harmony of the Gospels* (p. 198). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁸ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore The Bible Leader Commentary on Acts 2*.