

Studies in the Book of Acts – Part 6

“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. 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: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon

into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” – Acts 2.1-21.

In our last study, we considered the prophetic background, in the Old Testament and in the preaching of John the Immerser and Jesus, of the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” We learned that the “baptism in the Spirit and in fire” are two earthly events intended to signal something about the Kingdom of Christ. The baptism in the Holy Spirit would signal the establishment or inauguration of the Kingdom – it would prove that Christ was reigning in heaven – and the baptism in fire (the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple) would signify the total removal of Ethnic Israel as the People of God on earth. In Acts 1.5, Jesus told the apostles that they were going to experience the former – “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” – “not many days from now.” Then, Jesus was taken up into heaven, and as He had instructed the apostles, they waited in Jerusalem for the baptism and the power to come.

Now, **Acts 2.1**: “**When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.**” Pentecost was the fourth of the eight holy days discussed in Leviticus 23. “On the day after the Passover Sabbath” (Lev. 23:11), was the Feast of First Fruits. On this day was the wave offering, where a sheaf of barley, the first fruits of the harvest, was waved before the Lord, and then a lamb was sacrificed, as well as a grain and drink offering. Fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits came the Feast of Weeks, which later Jews called Pentecost, meaning 50th in Greek. They would count off seven weeks (49 days), and the day after the last Sabbath, they would observe Pentecost. Of course, that meant Pentecost was always on the first day of the week – because it was always the day after the Sabbath. On Pentecost, they would take the first fruits and bake two loaves of barley to be offered as a wave offering. Then they would offer several animal sacrifices and grain and drink offerings. And though all of this may seem foreign and strange to us, these feasts were celebrations of praise to God for the harvest on which the land would live that year, and they were very precious to an agrarian society. **The** Feast of First Fruits

related to God's **provision** of the blessings and anticipated a later harvest. The Feast of Weeks related to the **participation** in and **enjoyment** of what God had provided when the harvest came.

But these two feasts of thanksgiving for *agricultural* blessings – celebrated hundreds of times throughout the history of Israel – foreshadowed and pictured two of the great salvation history events of the New Testament, which actually took place on these respective calendar days. **The** Feast of First Fruits was a picture of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the resurrection, Jesus is called “the first fruits of them that are fallen asleep in death” (1 Cor. 15:20), and Paul says the resurrection of Christ **provided** the spiritual blessings of salvation and hope for those who believe on Jesus (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:22). The resurrection of Christ promised and anticipated salvation to follow. And Jesus was raised on the day of First Fruits – Sunday after the Passover Sabbath (Mark 16:1,9). Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the gospel came to man in all its fullness and fulfillment, and humanity was able to participate in and enjoy the spiritual blessings provided through the work of Christ and it all fits together perfectly because it is God's plan! So when Luke announces that it was “**the Day of Pentecost**” that was prophetically meaningful. In keeping with Jesus' instruction, “**they were all together in one place**” apparently in “a house” (verse 2), according to many scholars it might have been a room in the wall of the Temple, and they were “**waiting.**”

Verse 2 continues: “**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.**” Here are the three sensory elements of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit which make it a sign. And I want to stress that idea: a sign is only a sign if it is sensible – you have to be able to see it, smell it, taste it, touch it, hear it, physically feel it, or some combination of these. In the baptism in the Holy Spirit we have something that was heard and seen.

- 1) **First, “there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind...”** The language indicates that there wasn’t any actual wind – they didn’t feel it, and it didn’t blow their hats off or their papers away – but they heard it; the noise without anything to perceptible generating it. Professor Garreth Reese says that the words literally mean, “as a violent blast born along.” To the ancients, this would have been an easy connection with the Holy Spirit. The words “spirit” – “wind” – and “breath” are related and often interchangeable. And the work of the Spirit throughout the Bible is often described in terms of wind and breath (Genesis 1.2; Ezekiel 37.9; John 3.8). And the Bible says that the noise “**filled the whole house where they were sitting,**” which seems to refer to out deafening volume.
- 2) **“Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.”** The NASB says, “**tongues as of fire distributing themselves...**” or “**being distributed...**” Garreth Reese says, “Our mental picture probably should be of one great flame, first seen by the apostles and the others gathered in the temple area, then splitting up and a part going to each of the apostles and resting on their heads” (Commentary on Acts). Like the Holy Spirit descending and resting on Jesus in the form of a dove, this was on not a permanent display, but momentary to visually symbolize that the Spirit of God had done some work on these men. What that work was, became immediately evident –
- 3) **“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”** The statement “**they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**” explains why this is called “a baptism” metaphorically. The Holy Spirit is not a substance, like water, in which a person could be immersed. And later in the chapter when God uses another figure to say that Christ “poured out the Spirit” that does not mean that baptism is effected by pouring. In this case, baptism is a metaphor for an overwhelming influence. The Spirit of God took control of the faculties of these men in such an extreme way that without knowing

a language, they were able to speak it fluently! Speaking in “tongues” never means anything but human languages in the Bible, as we shall see in just a moment. But why did God choose to signal the coming of Christ’s Kingdom by enabling these men to speak different languages? McGarvey suggests that this was “an exhibition of miraculous mental endowments” to prove that God was revealing heavenly truths through these men as his representatives. But I think there is another reason also. In just a moment we will learn that these languages embodied “every nation under heaven” – and the gospel is here being proclaimed in all of them. In Mark 16.15 and Matthew 26.28, Jesus had instructed that His message be preached to “every creature” from “all nations” in “all the world,” and here is a heavenly signal of the literalism of that instruction. Jesus intended that we English speakers become His disciples and made it possible for the gospel to be translated and understood in a language Jesus Himself never spoke!

Verse 5 continues: “**And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.**” This phenomenon, a convocation of men from across the world in Jerusalem, was necessary for the fulfillment of prophecies about the establishment of the **Kingdom** (i.e. Isaiah 2.2-4), but as improbable as it might seem that such a thing would happen, God had made provision for it centuries earlier in the Law of Moses. In Deuteronomy 16.16 the Law says, “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks [Pentecost], and at the Feast of Tabernacles...” The place which He chose was Jerusalem when the Temple was built there, and after dispersion of the Jews in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, that meant that people would be travelling in from essentially “every nation under heaven” as the world was understood by those people at that time. **Verse 6**: “**And when this sound occurred** [this is a different word than “sound” in verse 2, so many think it refers to the tongue speaking rather than the noise of the

wind, but it is possible that it refers to both of them and the general commotion the two events caused], **the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language** [Language here is the same word translated tongue elsewhere – this is what tongue speaking was: speaking human languages. Sometimes people suppose that this was a miracle on the ear of the hearers instead of the tongue of the speakers, but the whole telling of the event makes it clear that the apostles were in fact speaking languages unknown to themselves, but known to some in their audience]. **Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans** [Galileans were notoriously uneducated people (Acts 4.13)]? **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** [Remember all of these nations; through the work done on this singular occasion, the Kingdom of God was able to spread throughout most of the empire as these men were able to learn about Jesus Christ and carry that knowledge back to their respective homelands. The reason that they would have been confused, amazed and marveled to hear their own languages being spoken at first is that on holy occasions such as this, when the Jews were gathering in Jerusalem for the feasts, they did not speak the Gentile languages of the places to which they relocated, but only Hebrew, or Aramaic. In fact, some groups considered it unlawful and blasphemous to speak anything but Hebrew, or Aramaic during these periods].”

Verse 12, “So they were all amazed and perplexed [Now, not simply because of hearing Gentile languages at the feast, but because the speakers were people who shouldn’t have known the

languages to begin with, and the things being spoke were wonderful things about God],” and they were **“saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’”** This question can also be translated: “What will this become?” Or “What will this be?” and it seems to show that this portion of the crowd perceived that something miraculous was going on and that it credentialed the speakers as worthy of consideration. However, there was another response from the crowd that is a little strange and difficult, **“Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’”** Why would anyone accuse the apostles of being drunk on this occasion? Modern sensational religionists who practice ecstatic worship and associate jumping, dancing, convulsions, and rolling around in the floor as evidence of the Spirit’s influence will sometimes rush to this passage as a proof-text for their behavior. But I think we need to emphasize that no such behavior has even been indicated in the scripture thus far. Isn’t it interesting that what the Bible calls the baptism in the Holy Spirit: the sound of wind, the appearance of fire dividing into tongues and resting on the heads of many, and the ability to speak actual foreign languages without knowing or studying them – none of these things ever happen in modern situations where we are told that people are getting baptized in the Holy Spirit, but what does happen: uncontrolled laughter, running, dancing, falling on the ground in convulsions, and non-sensical babbling and screaming – none of that happened when we read about Holy Spirit baptism in the Bible! Evidently, these people who accused the apostles of being drunk, were not speakers of these gentile languages and mistook them, when coming from unlearned Galileans, as the incoherent rambling of a drunk person. **“But Peter, standing up with the eleven,** [Why Peter? Not because he was the prince of the Apostles, but because the time has come to open the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven, and in accordance with Jesus’ promise to him, Peter was given “the keys” (Matthew 16.19). It was his privilege to preach the first gospel sermon and witness the sign of Christ’s Kingdom being granted to both Jews and Gentiles, and here it is offered “to the Jew first”]....” He, **“raised**

his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem [Here we gather we are correct that the accusers were “locals” who didn’t know the languages], **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** [This is a sarcastic answer, Peter is not supposing that the apostles would have been drunk later that day, but he is chiding the audience being so irreverent in the face of a miraculous demonstration of God’s Spirit. And now begins the great explanation of the event that just transpired...].”

Verse 16: “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...” This is that! There is something wonderful about connection an event or a teaching or a practice with the word of God. Everything in our religion ought to be such that if God has spoken about it, when can point to a scripture and say “This is that!” **“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel** [the original citation comes from what we would call Joel 2.28-32]: **‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God** [Note that Peter affirms that Joel was speaking the word of God, and he says that God had given a predictive prophecy through Joel of something that would happen **“in the last days.”** The original, as we have it in Hebrew, says “afterward” which, according to most scholars, means after the return from captivity. Peter says, “the last days” which I understand as a reference to the Christian Era, during which time Jesus is reigning over His earthly kingdom from heaven (Hebrews 1.1-2; 1 Corinthians 15.23-28). Through Joel, God said...], **that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh** [Or, “all mankind” but history and present experience shows that God did not mean “every human being,” because the evidence of this outpouring would be miracles that simply are not performed or experienced by every person, and never were. Paul explains that even in the first century, not all Christians were miracle workers (1 Corinthians 12.8-11, 29-30). So, this means something other than “everybody” – the events in Acts 10, when the baptism in the Holy Spirit is experienced by

Gentiles, lead us to the conclusion that God meant: both Jews and Gentiles]; **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy** [This language is what Bible scholars call “apocalyptic” and we shouldn’t take it literally and look for specific cases of these things happening either in Acts 2 or in the subsequent years. The language is simply a prediction that when the Kingdom of God was established on earth it would be marked by a restoration of the prophetic office and a large demonstration of miraculous works, this is certainly fulfilled in the history of the early church. Jesus also prophesied that miraculous manifestations of the Spirit were going to “follow” the believers during the apostles’ ministry and confirm the heavenly origin of the things they were preaching. Mark 16.17-19 says, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” And verses 19-20 summarize how that was fulfilled in the history of the early church starting on the Day of Pentecost: “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs”].” Then Joel’s words shift from the jubilant prediction of miracles and wonders, to a dreadful and ominous message we have heard before, when Jesus was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem: **“I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.”** Remember from our previous study that all of these expressions are common in Old Testament prophecy to describe the judgment of God against earthly nations. As John declared in

Matthew 3 that the Messiah would come to Israel to “clean house” – to separate the good from the bad. He would come with blessing (the baptism in the Holy Spirit that marked the inauguration of His Kingdom) and with curses (the baptism in fire – the destruction of Jerusalem that marked the absolute and final rejection of Ethnic Israel as the special people of God), so here Peter echoes the same message through the words of Job. Pentecost marked the blessing time – the out pouring of the Holy Spirit; but there was another “baptism” coming when fire and judgement would be poured out on those who had rejected God’s offers of deliverance.

In **verse** 21, Joel’s prophecy closes with this awesome announcement, which became a summary of the gospel message in later apostolic preaching: “**And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved**” The ultimate blessing of God in Christ, that which was signaled and marked by the amazing things that happened that Day, was not miracles or prophecies – but salvation from sin, and restoration to good favor with the God of heaven to be offered to all men in all the world.

Before concluding, it should be noted that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, while a specific event with and very special purpose and explanation, has had a lasting effect in this world. When God poured out His Spirit, the Spirit became a present and active influence in this world through and in the Church of Jesus Christ. Since that time, the Spirit has done several distinct and wonderful works. We are going to encounter many of them as we read and study through the rest of this volume and through the other writings of the New Testament. And even though certain works of the Spirit were temporary, and after accomplishing their purposes, ceased in this world, the Spirit of God took up residency in the Church of Christ on that day, and since then has not ceased to dwell among and influence the Lord’s People for good.