

MONDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

May 22, 2023 – Acts 2:1-21

Immediate Context

Acts 1:1-5	The Promise of the Holy Spirit	Acts 2:43-47	Life among the Believers
Acts 1:6-11	The Ascension of Jesus	Acts 3:1-10	Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar
Acts 1:12-26	Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas	Acts 3:11-26	Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico
Acts 2:1-13	The Coming of the Holy Spirit	Acts 4:1-22	Peter and John before the Council
Acts 2:14-36	Peter Addresses the Crowd	Acts 4:23-31	The Believers Pray for Boldness
Acts 2:37-42	The First Converts	Acts 4:32-37	The Believers Share Their Possessions

The Text

Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, 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, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Key Words

PENTECOST – πεντηκοστής – The word "Pentecost" is Greek, meaning fifty, reflecting the fifty-day countdown. The term originated as the Greek name for what is otherwise known as Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks (cf. Exod. 23:14–17; 34:18–24; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). The term "Pentecost" is used to refer to that festival twice in the LXX (Tob. 2:1; 2 Macc. 12:32) and three times in the NT (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8).

In Exod. 23:16, the Festival of Weeks is identified as an agricultural observance; it is a time for celebrating "the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year." Thus, the focus appears to have been on showing gratitude to God for the early harvest. It is not accidental, of course, that the birth of the church, this great 'harvest' of souls, should occur on this important (harvest) festival.

Leviticus 23:15-21 requires Jews to observe the Feast of Weeks fifty days after the offering of the barley sheaf at the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It says, "You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days;

then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord" (Leviticus 23:16). Thus the feast became known as the Feast of Weeks, because the countdown was seven sabbaths — seven weeks — a week of weeks. Numbers 28:26-31 and Deuteronomy 16:9-12 provide details about offerings to be offered and persons to be included.

It is one of three great pilgrimage festivals (the others being Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles), which Jews living near Jerusalem are required to attend and to which Jews from other nations make pilgrimage as they are able. As many as 180,000 people attend— two-thirds from foreign lands.

Scholars believe that, at some point,— but it is uncertain whether this meaning prevailed at the time of the first Christian Pentecost. Parallels between Moses' experience and the first Christian Pentecost include:

At some point, the day also became strongly associated with the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai; a celebration of God's gift of the Law of Moses to Israel, (serving to remind the Jewish people) of the fifty-day interval between Passover in Egypt and the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Exod. 19:1 was interpreted to mean that the interval between Passover and the arrival at Sinai was fifty days. Perhaps, Luke wanted to parallel the giving of the Spirit with the giving of the law by locating the former event on a day set aside for observing the latter.

Parallels between Moses' experience and the first Christian Pentecost include:

- Pentecost wind and fire parallel Sinai thunder and lightning (Acts 2:2-3; Exodus 19:16).
- Peter parallels Moses as God's spokesman (Acts 2:14-40; Exodus 31:12).
- The Spirit-inspired speaking in languages by 120 disciples at Pentecost parallels God's gift of the Spirit at Sinai to the Seventy, who prophesied (Acts 2:1-4; Numbers 11:16-30).
- On both occasions, there is a focus on the Lord's salvation and the offer of a new relationship between the Lord and the people (2:21, 38-39; Exodus 19:4-6).

HAD COME – συμπληροῦσθαι (“had come”) can also be translated as “was fulfilled.” It means: “to come to the end of a period of time, with the implication of the completion of an implied purpose or plan— ‘to complete, to come to an end.’”

The events associated with Pentecost constitute the fulfillment, not only of the prophecy of Joel, but also of the promise of Jesus. In Acts 1:8, just prior to his ascension, the risen Jesus had said, “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” (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5). Thus, the events of Pentecost are presented in Acts as the fulfillment of this promise—on that day the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon the apostles and empower them to witness to Jesus the Christ.

A SOUND LIKE THE RUSH OF A VIOLENT WIND – “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.... Divided tongues (glossai), as of fire, appeared among them.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages (glossais — tongues), as the Spirit gave them ability” (vv. 2-4). Christians retreated into hiding after the crucifixion and waited quietly for God to act. Now the time has come! The heavens roar! Fire burns! The Spirit of God fills! Disciples preach! Crowds wonder! The first gift of the Spirit is the gift of speech, the gift of speech in different languages..., and the first fruit of the Spirit (is) the gift of proclamation.

WIND AND FIRE – Wind and fire, two great symbols of Pentecost, testify to God's presence:

- At the creation of the world, “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Then God breathed breath into Israel, the first people of God, and their dead bones came to life (Ezekiel 37:7-10). Now at Pentecost God's great wind/breath breathes life into the new people of God — the church. But it isn't the wind that

fills the house, but "a sound like the rush of a violent wind." The purpose of these signs (sound/fire) is to announce the presence of the Spirit. No tornado or hurricane is required — just the sound will do.

- In the Old Testament, God showed his presence as "a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" (Genesis 15:17) — and "a flame of fire out of a bush" (Exodus 3:2-6) — and "a pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21) — and smoke and fire at Sinai (Exodus 19:18) — and "a devouring fire" (Exodus 24:17).
- God used fire to demonstrate his power and the powerlessness of the prophets of Baal — and to execute judgment on the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40). God used fire to execute his judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24) — and Egypt (Exodus 9:23-24) — and the Israelites who made the golden calf (Exodus 32:20). God also instructed Israel to make offerings burned with fire to atone for their sins (Exodus 29:18).
- Now, at Pentecost, tongues of fire draw the crowds to the disciples and the message that they proclaim. Tongues of fire and speaking in tongues are miracles that proclaim God's presence and validate the disciples' status as God's people — serving at God's pleasure and by God's power.

DIVIDED TONGUES – Note the wordplay in verses 3-4 between tongues (γλῶσσαι; glossai) of fire and speaking in other languages (γλώσσαις; glossais) — a subtlety sometimes obscured in translation.

ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT – This theme recurs throughout the book of Acts:

- As the conclusion of his Pentecost sermon, Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38).
- When Peter and John are arrested and required to appear before the council of rulers, elders, and scribes in Jerusalem, "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit," addressed the council with a compelling sermon (Acts 4:8).
- After Peter and John are released from jail, they gather together with other Christians to pray, "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).
- When the work of feeding widows fairly becomes more than the apostles can handle, they direct the church to "select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom" to take care of that task (Acts 6:3; see also 6:5).
- When Stephen is stoned to become the first Christian martyr, he is described as "filled with the Holy Spirit" as he gazes into heaven to see "the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (7:55).
- When Saul has his Damascus road encounter with Christ and Ananias comes to lay hands on him, Ananias says, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17).
- Barnabas is described as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (11:24).
- When Paul encounters the magician Elymas in Cyprus, Paul is described as "filled with the Holy Spirit" (13:9), while he describes Elymas as "full of deceit and villainy" (13:10).

THE CROWDS – "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs (vv. 9-11a)."

Luke not only tells us that the crowd has gathered "from every nation under heaven" (v. 5), but also lists the nations (listed below with rough present-day equivalents):

- Parthia = Northern Iran, southwest of the Caspian Sea
- Media = Northern Iran, southeast of the Caspian Sea
- Elam = Southwest Iran, near Kuwait, north of the Persian Gulf
- Mesopotamia = Iraq and eastern Syria
- Judea = The West Bank of Israel and west to the Mediterranean
- Cappadocia = Eastern Turkey
- Pontus = Northern Turkey on the Black Sea

- Asia = Western Turkey
- Phrygia = West-central Turkey
- Pamphylia = Southern Turkey
- Egypt = Northeast Africa on the Mediterranean
- Libya = West of Egypt on the Mediterranean
- Cyrene = A small part of Libya on the Mediterranean
- Rome = Rome, Italy
- Crete = An island southeast of Greece (and belonging to Greece)
- Arabs = Saudi Arabia

To see the scope of the nations involved, look at a modern map of the area. Start with Rome, and move east to Turkey and Iran — then move west and south through Iraq and Saudi Arabia — then move west through Egypt and Libya — and then move north across the Mediterranean to Rome. You will find that you have traced a rough circle with Judea and Jerusalem at the center.