

PENTECOST

Acts 2: 1-13

New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

THREE WORLDS OF THIS TEXT

WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT

Who

The book nowhere directly states what man recorded the inspired words. However, it is generally agreed to be the work of Luke, the author of the Gospel.

Theme

Acts contains historical references of the early church and of the spread of the gospel (note Acts 1:8). It is not a record of all of the acts of all of the apostles, but of just some of the acts of some of the apostles. In the book of Acts of the Apostles the focus of the church's mission expands from Jerusalem to Asia and Europe.

Date

Most scholars date the Gospel after the destruction of Jerusalem (70AD) and opt for a date for the publication of Luke-Acts somewhere between 80-85AD.ⁱ

Pentecost is the Jewish Festival of Shavuot.

Pentecost means "The Fiftieth," and another name for Pentecost was "The Feast of Weeks" or Shavuot. It was so called because it fell on the fiftieth day, a week of weeks, after the Passover. 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.

Although its origins are to be found in an ancient grain harvest festival, Shavuot (Pentecost/Festival of Weeks) has long been identified with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Therefore, Shavuot (Pentecost/ Festival of Weeks) combines two major Jewish religious observances. First is the grain harvest of



the early summer. Second is the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt.ⁱⁱ There were three great Jewish festivals to which every male Jew living within twenty miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to come--the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. The law laid it down that on that day no servile work should be done (Leviticus 23:21; Numbers 28:26). So it was a holiday for all and the crowds on the streets would be greater than ever. What happened at Pentecost we really do not know except that the disciples had an experience of the power of the Spirit flooding their beings such as they never had before. We must remember that for this part of Acts, Luke was not an eye-witness. He tells the story as if the disciples suddenly acquired the gift of speaking in foreign languages. That is not likely because to speak in foreign languages was unnecessary. The crowd was made up of Jews (Acts 2:5) and proselytes (Acts 2:10). Proselytes were Gentiles who had accepted the Jewish religion and the Jewish way of life. For a crowd like that at most two languages were necessary. Almost all Jews spoke Aramaic; and, even if they were Jews of the Dispersion from a foreign land, they would speak that language which almost everyone in the world spoke at that time--Greek. It seems most likely that Luke, a Gentile, had confused speaking with tongues with speaking with foreign tongues. What happened was that for the first time in their lives this motley mob was hearing the word of God in a way that struck straight home to their hearts and that they could understand. The power of the Spirit was such that it had given these simple disciples a message that could reach every heart.ⁱⁱⁱ

WORLD OF THE TEXT

We may never know precisely what happened on the Day of Pentecost but we do know that it was one of the supremely great days of the Christian Church, for on that day the Holy Spirit came to the Christian Church in a very special way. From that moment the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early Church. For one thing, the Holy Spirit was the source of all guidance. The early Church was a Spirit-guided community. For another thing the Spirit was the source of day-to-day courage and power. The disciples are to receive power when the Spirit comes (Acts 1:8).



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The Pentecost scene can be read as an interpretation of the Jewish pilgrimage festival. Along with celebrating the Festival of Weeks and the giving of the Torah, Jesus' followers celebrate the giving of the spirit to the church.

The scene may also be interpreted in light of midrash, an early Jewish interpretation of the Sinai narrative, which explains that God offered the Torah to other nations, but each refused it except for the Israelites. Now, at Pentecost, the other nations can hear the word of God in their own languages. Five thousand (Acts 4:4) join the church that day. ^{iv}

Qualities of the Spirit

The gift of the Spirit was accompanied by extraordinary manifestations or phenomena. These were three and were supernatural. His coming first appealed to the ear. The disciples heard a "sound from heaven," which rushed with mighty force into the house and filled it even as the storm rushes, but there was no wind. It was the sound that filled the house, not a wind. It was an invisible cause producing audible effects. Next, the eye was arrested by the appearance of tongues of fire which rested on each of the gathered company. Tongues parting asunder, tongues distributed among them, each disciple sharing in the gift equally with the others. "Like as of fire," or, more exactly, "as if of fire," indicates the appearance of the tongues, not that they were actually aflame, but that they prefigured the marvelous gift with which the disciples were now endowed.

It was because they were filled with the Holy Spirit that this extraordinary gift was exhibited by them. Not only did the Spirit enable them thus to speak, but even the utterance of words depended on His divine influence--they spoke "as the Spirit gave them utterance."

At Sinai where God gave the Israelites the law, God spoke in one language. At Pentecost the Spirit through the disciples spoke in many tongues. The Law was for one people alone; the gospel is for the whole race.

The sound that accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit filled all the house and all the disciples likewise--token and pledge of the copiousness, the fullness of the gift. The tongues of flame signified the power of speech, boldness of utterance, and persuasiveness which from henceforth were to mark the testimony of the disciples.



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THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

The marvelous capabilities which the witnesses display after Pentecost are most noteworthy. It is common to admire their courage and zeal, to contrast their fearlessness in the presence of enemies and danger with their former timidity and cowardice. It is perhaps not so common to recognize in them the qualities that lie at the foundation of all effective work, that which gives to witness-bearing for Christ its real energy and potency. These qualities are such as:

knowledge and wisdom,
zeal and prudence,
confidence and devotion,
boldness and love.
skill and tact.

These and the like gifts appear in their discourses, in their behavior when difficulties arise and dangers impend, and in their conduct before the angry rulers. It is altogether remarkable with what skill and tact they defend themselves before the Sanhedrin, and with what effectiveness they preach the gospel of the grace of God to the multitude, often a scoffing and hostile multitude. In Peter's address on the Day of Pentecost there are the marks of the highest art, the most skillful logic, and the most, persuasive argument. Professor Stifler well says of it: "It is without a peer among the products of uninspired men. And yet it is the work of a Galilean fisherman, without culture or training, and his maiden effort."^v The like distinguished traits are found in Peter's address recorded in Acts 3.

References

- ⁱ Michael Fallon *Acts Commentary* http://mbfallon.com/acts_commentary/01.introduction.pdf
ⁱⁱ My Jewish Learning <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shavuot-101/>
ⁱⁱⁱ *Acts 2 William Barclay Commentary* <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/acts-2.html>
^{iv} Carter, W. and Levine, A.J (2013) *The New Testament Methods and Meanings*. Abingdon Press.
^v Stifler, Introduction to the Book of Acts; Alexander, Commentary on the Acts; Kuyper, Work of the Holy Spirit; Moorehead,
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/tongues-of-fire/>



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