

The Purpose of Pentecost Acts 2:1-13

Introduction

Set up

Our passage this morning is **Acts 2:1-13** which deals with the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. As we address this passage we must wrestle with the matter of its significance to us today. It's a passage that is filled with miraculous phenomena and we have to try to determine the meaning of those phenomena and whether we should expect to see them repeated in our day.

I won't be spending a great deal of time on the whole question of "tongues" this morning as many do. Because, when we make Pentecost about the miraculous phenomena and whether we should be experiencing any or all of them today we miss the point of both the phenomena and of Pentecost itself. Perhaps we will have occasion to revisit the issue at another time but for this morning we will be seeking to understand the meaning of Pentecost and what message it has for us today.

I have broken the passage down into four topics that are represented by the four Roman numerals on your note sheet.

- I. The Preparation of the Apostles
- II. The Coming of the Holy Spirit
- III. The Confusion of the Crowd
- IV. The Continuance of the Church

Significance of Pentecost

Thanks to Luke, we know the apostles waited 10 days for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke is the only biblical author who tells us that Jesus appeared to his disciples during a 40-day period after his resurrection.

Today we will see that the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost which is so named because Pentecost is observed 50 days after the Passover.

And when we subtract the 40 days of appearances from the 50 days we come up with a 10-day wait.

But we are faced with the question as to whether there is some significance to the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Let's consider a bit of historical background.

On the day after the Passover Sabbath, the children of Israel would harvest a token sheaf of grain and present it to the Lord.

And then seven weeks later - or 50 days after the Passover - they would observe Pentecost.

Therefore, Pentecost is also known in Scripture as the Feast of Weeks because it occurred a week of weeks after Passover at the end of the Spring grain harvest.

In other places it is also called the Feast of First-fruits because the first-fruits of the harvest were presented to God on that day.

Also, Pentecost was the anniversary of when God gave Israel the Mosaic Law on Sinai.

So, the idea of **new beginnings** was prominent in the Jewish mind when it came to Pentecost making it a most significant day for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.

I. The Preparation of the Apostles

We see three aspects to the preparation of the apostles - they waited, they were together, and they were being emptied

A. The Apostles Waited

Early in chapter 1 we saw that Jesus ordered the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and to wait for the Holy Spirit

Jesus reminded them that the Father had promised the Holy Spirit would come and he told them that they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit

And so they were obedient and they waited patiently and expectantly for the arrival of the Holy Spirit not knowing when he was coming or just what to expect when he came

B. The Apostles Were Together

Then, last week we saw how they were all staying together in the upper room

We saw how they were united, of one accord, and devoted to persistent, expectant prayer

Then we saw how the apostles and others were spending their time productively

They weren't just idling the time away; rather, they spent time in the temple;

In fact Luke in his gospel account says they were continually in the temple blessing God

We also saw how they were looking to Scripture and using their biblically informed minds as they replaced Judas Iscariot with Matthias in order to bring the number of the apostles back to twelve

C. The Apostles Were Being Emptied

Try to imagine what the apostles must have been feeling during those ten days of waiting

I suspect they were feeling very empty - in fact, probably more so with each passing day

They had spent the past three years living, travelling, and ministering with Jesus

They had seen him crucified, buried, and resurrected from the dead

They had experienced his comings and goings for forty days

And then they had watched him disappear into a cloud as he rose in glory to heaven

I can only imagine that they felt more alone with each passing day and more aware of their desperate need as the likely remembered Jesus' words from **John 15:5** - "apart from me you can do nothing"

I believe they were being prepared during this time of waiting

Because in order to be filled one must first be emptied

And I believe with each passing day they apostles were coming to the stark realization that they were powerless without the Holy Spirit and that they were shedding any ideas of self-importance

I can only imagine that their expectancy became yearning and their prayers became more passionate and fervent as the days ticked past

And when Pentecost rolled around, they were ready to receive the Holy Spirit

Turn with me if you aren't already there to Acts 2 and follow along as I read the first four verses

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

II. The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the Holy Spirit finally came he made a grand entrance!

And while the apostles were eager and ready for the Holy Spirit to arrive there was no possible way that they could have been prepared for how it happened

They had no previous experience like this to give them a grid to operate from

Sure, they had previously experienced the power of the Holy Spirit temporarily as Jesus bestowed him to them for ministry but this was different

A. Three Outward Phenomena

There was also no way that any of them could have missed the Holy Spirit as his arrival was heralded by three very dramatic outward phenomena

Only appeared to be natural

These phenomena appeared as natural elements: wind, fire, and speech

And they involved the natural senses of hearing, seeing, and speaking

But there was nothing natural about them; they were supernatural

Notice that **there was no wind** there was "a sound *like* a mighty wind"

There was no fire but "divided tongues *as of* fire"

And even the **speech was in some way "other"** that was not natural to the apostles

As we take them each in turn we will see that these specific phenomena carried with them significance beyond being dramatic

1. "A sound like a mighty rushing wind"

First there was "a sound like a mighty rushing wind"

Notice how Luke describes this sound –

It was **sudden** - it didn't build slowly it came all at once with a rush

It was **from heaven** - it was readily recognizable as supernatural

It was like a **mighty rushing** wind - it was a powerful sound and readily recognizable to the apostles

It **filled the entire house** where they were sitting - it was a huge, all-encompassing sound

This gives lie to all the pictures we see or descriptions we read of the apostles' garments blowing as if they were caught in a gale

I read one author who described the apostles' cloaks beginning to rustle and then to whip about them as if they were caught in a gale force wind!

But there was no wind - just the sound of wind - it was a supernatural occurrence

However the fact that wind was involved is significant on a few levels

First, wind is typically connected to the Spirit in Scripture

In both Hebrew and Greek the words for wind and spirit are exactly the same and context alone determines which is meant

We see this truth in **John 3:8** with Jesus speaking to Nicodemus:

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.

There was an essential connection in the minds of the apostles between wind and spirit

Second, loud sounds often accompanied God's presence

Think back to when the children of Israel were camped at the base of Mt Sinai in Exodus 19
Moses went up and when God came to him he came with thunder and loud trumpet blasts

Third, the sound of the wind is a way of illustrating power

In **Acts 1:8** Jesus had promised the apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came
And the sound of wind graphically illustrated that power

The sound was so dramatic and absolute that there would have been no doubt in the minds of those present that a divine presence had arrived

2. "Divided tongues as of fire"

Next we see that "divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them"

Fire is also often associated with God as it often indicates his divine presence

Think back to Moses' encounter with the burning bush and the lightning at Sinai

In Scripture fire is often seen as a **purifying** agent as refining fire is shown burning away impurities
And fire provides **illumination** as it is effective in showing both truth and error

Look back with me at **Luke 3:15-16** where we will see John the Baptist speaking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit which the Messiah would perform

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The apostles would have immediately recognized the fulfillment of this prophecy in the wind and fire

3. "Began to speak in other tongues"

The third phenomenon that heralded the Holy Spirit's arrival was that the apostles "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance"

The word "tongues" here means natural languages

And the word "other" indicates that they were spoken by other people in different parts of the world
These "other tongues" then were the common languages that native speakers in different places used
Unexpectedly the apostles were instantaneously fluent in languages that they had never learned

The **significance** of this is profound

It's as if **Acts 1:8** was being realized in an instant

Just prior to his ascension Jesus had told them –

"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

All at once the language barrier had been removed and they were able to witness in their listeners' native tongues

Speaking to them in their native languages was not absolutely necessary because it's highly likely that they all spoke Greek as it was the common language

But we all know how precious our native language is to our ears and it was important to show that all people groups are valued and included – **The good news of the gospel is for all mankind**

B. One Inward Reality – They were all filled with the Holy Spirit

There were three phenomena that bore witness to one reality - they were all filled with the Holy Spirit

We need to be clear in our understanding that they weren't filled *by* the phenomena

The phenomena were merely an outward manifestation of an inward reality that had taken place

They were signs meant to draw attention and to raise questions among those who witnessed them from without

We can't be dogmatic about the scope of the phenomena but it seems as if all who were present, that would include the 12 apostles, the women, and the others totaling "around 120 persons" were included in receiving them

Otherwise, it seems that the unity that they had been experiencing would have been strained or even shattered

The "divided" or individual tongues as of fire were to show that the filling of the Holy Spirit was given to all - but we need to recognize that they were still all together what we see here is not individuality but unity

The church is a unit that is made up of individual believers and all are indwelt with the Holy Spirit

While we live in a culture of rampant individuality we need to look to the example of this group

They were united in prayer and purpose - in the study and application of Scripture

They were united in their desire to know and fulfill the will of God

They were united in receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit that empowered them to do so

And I believe, but cannot prove, that they were united in the outward signs that accompanied the Holy Spirit's arrival

III. The Confusion of the Crowd

In **verses 5-15** Luke turns his attention to the people outside the "house" where the apostles were. They came to see what was going on and they were confused by what they witnessed.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and 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 Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

A. Who was in the crowd?

In **verse 5** Luke records that the crowd was made up of devout Jewish men from every nation under heaven and he gives a list of representative places where these men were from in verses 9-11.

These were God-fearing Jews who were residing in Jerusalem but who had not been born there.

No doubt many if not most of them were in Jerusalem for the purpose of worshipping God during Pentecost.

Luke mentions 15 countries which include people from modern-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and North Africa. He also includes people from the region of Judea, the city of Rome and the two geographical extremes of islands and deserts represented by the inclusion of Cretans and Arabians.

Luke clearly meant for his list to show that the crowd was diverse and international in its makeup.

B. Drawn by the Sound

Luke says that the crowd was drawn to the place where the apostles were by "this sound."

Whether this was the sound of the wind or the sound of their speech in multiple languages or both we cannot be certain.

The point is what they heard brought them running in great numbers to see what was happening. Luke refers to them as "the multitude."

C. Dumbfounded by the Apostles

In **verse 6** Luke relates that when they got there "they were bewildered."

And in **verse 7** he says that they were "amazed and astonished."

And in verse 12 he says they were "amazed and perplexed."

Clearly they were scratching their heads over what was going on.

It's interesting that they weren't confused by the message they were hearing as much as they were dumbfounded by the apostles themselves and the fact that they were speaking in other languages.

They ask in **verse 7** "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

In my studies I discovered that Galileans were considered to be rather unsophisticated.

I found out that they were known to have difficulty with making guttural sounds and they had the tendency to swallow syllables when speaking.

So the people of Jerusalem were amazed and confused by their sudden ability to fluently speak what for them would have been very difficult foreign languages -

They spoke them just like a native would speak them.

I want us to note that the apostles in their speaking were fulfilling **1 Peter 2:9**

They were proclaiming the excellencies of God so that all could understand in their native language
And they were fulfilling **Acts 1:8** by being witnesses to the ends of the earth in a sense even as they were standing in Jerusalem

D. Some were inquisitive; some were dismissive

In **verse 12** we see that their confusion caused them to ask one another "What does this mean?"

Not the message but the means

It wasn't the message that was causing confusion it was the means of communication

They could tell that something out of the ordinary was taking place and some of them were curious
But some were dismissive and they mocked the apostles saying "They are filled with new wine"

With the variety of languages being spoken it's highly likely that many of them sounded like babbling to those who couldn't understand them

I have to admit that I can't find any real pattern to most foreign languages and I wonder how the people speaking them are able to communicate any kind of meaning through them

The experience of the crowd had to be similar as they heard in their own language but also in languages that sounded nonsensical

So they attributed the phenomenon to drunkenness and dismissed it with mocking

IV. The Continuance of the Church

The coming of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying phenomena was an amazing historical event
But what should we take away from it?

Is there any part of it that we should expect to see repeated in the life of the church today?

A. What is not repeatable today

Certain aspects of Pentecost will never be repeated

Just as we observe our birthdays each year our birth was a one-time event that will never be repeated

Today the Holy Spirit doesn't come upon us with the sound of wind or tongues of fire and we can't suddenly and miraculously speak a foreign language as the apostles did

I'm sure many missionaries struggling with their language lessons wish that wasn't true

But those phenomena ended with the transitional period described in the book of Acts

B. What is repeatable today

However, there are certain parts of what took place at Pentecost that are repeatable today

Baptism of the Spirit

Prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit came *upon* people and empowered them temporarily for God's service but he did not *permanently indwell* them

At Pentecost that changed - the Holy Spirit came to *dwell within* each believer permanently just as Jesus promised he would in **John 14:16-17**

Whereas the apostles received the Holy Spirit after some delay we are now indwelt at the moment of our salvation

We don't have to wait and the baptism of the Spirit is not a separate event as it was for them and for others as we will see as we continue through our study of Acts

Again, Acts describes a transitional period that has ended and God had his reasons for acting as he did which we will endeavor to discover as we come across those transitional events

Filling of the Spirit

Looking back to **Acts 1:8** we see Jesus tell his apostles that they would "receive power" when the Holy Spirit comes

We also should be experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives

The apostles were not only *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit they were also *filled* by the Holy Spirit

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit that occurs at the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event for each believer

But the filling of the Holy Spirit should happen again and again in the life of the believer

We will see it repeated again and again that the Spirit filled believers as we progress through Acts

When the believer is filled by the Spirit they will be specially empowered to do great things for God

As we began this morning we saw how the apostles had to be emptied in order to be filled by the Spirit

We do must empty ourselves of sin and self-reliance and depend on the Lord

We must be like the apostles who realized their complete inadequacy and yearned for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do what God desires and requires from his children

Conclusion

As I stated at the outset this morning; when we make Pentecost about the miraculous phenomena and whether we should be experiencing any or all of them today we miss the point of both the phenomena and of Pentecost itself

The purpose of Pentecost was threefold:

First, Pentecost was the fulfillment of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit

The coming of the Holy Spirit was the final act of the redemption story before the *parousia* when Jesus will once again return to the earth

Second, Pentecost was the birth the Church

And just as the giving of the Law to Moses at Sinai signaled a new era to the children of Israel

This was the beginning of a new way of how God deals with the world

From this point on relating to the world is the mission of the church and it's our job to take the message of redemption to all people and to make disciples of all nations

As we proclaim the excellencies of God for his glory

Third, Pentecost was when God provided the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to the Church in order that we might fulfill our purpose

We can do nothing in our own strength and we must rely on the Spirit's power if we are to do anything for the kingdom of God

Whereas God had previously worked through Israel, God now turns to work through the church

And by supernaturally giving the apostles the ability to speak in languages they didn't know, God showed his intention to make the gospel available to all mankind

At Babel God miraculously confused the languages and by doing so he separated the nations

At Pentecost God used power of miraculous speech as he began to bring all nations into the church

As believers, as the church, we should desire and seek to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit

We must strive to empty ourselves of ourselves and embrace our reliance on the power that God provides for life and service in his kingdom

Jesus took a ridiculously small group of men and gave them an impossible task

But he also provided them with the power to be successful in undertaking the task

God began a new work through his church at Pentecost

And as we progress in our study we will see how the early church repeatedly relied on the power he made available through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

Next week we will see how the primary tool used to win over the world to Christ was the Word of God as we look at Peter's message found in Acts 2:14-41

Let's pray