

## The Birth of the Church (Acts 2:1-4)

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### Today's passage (Acts 2:1-4)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.<sup>1</sup>

### Importance of Passage

1. **TWO SESSIONS** - This passage is immensely important to understand!
  - A. **TODAY** - The importance of understanding the historical setting, not an experience to be sought by believers today.
  - B. **NEXT TIME** - The significance of the events in relation to God's communion with man, the relationship of Pentecost to God's Temple program.
2. **NATURE OF THE CHURCH** - When did the Church begin historically?
  - A. **TERMINOLOGY** - In what follows, I'm using "Church" in the sense of the historical institution, not an individual local assembly or building.
  - B. **ALL AGES** - Is the Church comprised of all believers in every age who have ever lived?
    - I. Does "the Church" == "the Redeemed of all time" — every person who has ever come to faith?
    - II. Did the Church begin with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as some believe?<sup>3</sup> Is Job a member of the Church?
  - C. **ABRAHAM** - Or did the Church begin with the calling of Abraham (Genesis 12) as others believe?
  - D. **PRACTICES** - What practices should the Church follow?
    - I. **PRIESTHOOD** - If the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood was simply

part of the "Old Testament Church," then perhaps there should be an established priesthood today?

- II. **THEOCRACY** - If the theocracy of Israel—with a government established by God—was simply an Old Testament form of the Church, what might that imply the role of the Church to be today?
  - a. Should the Church be seeking to reestablish a similar theocracy in our own time?
  - b. Should the death penalty be reestablished for adultery (Lev. 20:10)? For homosexuality (Lev. 20:13)? For disrespect of parents (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 19:3)? For proselytizing non-Christian beliefs (Deu. 13:6-9)?
  - c. Is Sabbath-keeping relevant for the Church today?
- III. **CHILD BAPTISM** - If the Church began with Abraham and the sign of Abraham's covenant was circumcision on the 8th day perhaps baptism of children prior to faith should be understood as the "New Testament Church" equivalent as some maintain?

#### E. ISRAEL - The Role of Israel in the Plan of God

- I. **ROLE** - If the Church began with Adam and Eve, then how are we to understand the role of the nation of Israel?
  - II. **ELECTION** - Is the election and calling of Israel by God simply the form which the Church had for a time?
  - III. **NEW ISRAEL** - In a similar way to which Israel was the "Church in the OT" is the "Church in the NT" now a New Israel?
  - IV. **PLAN** - Is Israel subsumed within the Church of all ages? Or do Israel and the Church have different roles to play in the plan of God?
- F. **BEGIN → END** - If the Church has an historical beginning, does it also have an historical end?
- I. If the Church is not comprised of all believers for all time, then what is it comprised of?
  - II. How is the Church defined by Scripture?
  - III. If it is unique in history, is it also unique in purpose and role? In

## identity with Jesus (as His bride)?

- IV. **A clearer understanding of the beginning of the Church and its unique role in God's plan clarifies when and why it also comes to an end: the Rapture!**
- G. **KNOWING HOW TO ACT - When we know who we are and why, we will act accordingly**
  - I. **ROLE AS INDIVIDUALS - Avoid confusion about how to apply passages in parts of the Bible which are for our learning, but were not written to us.**
  - II. **ROLE AS THE CHURCH - Do we serve the same role and walk in more-or-less the same relationship with the culture as Old Testament believers?**
- 3. **CONTINUITY/DISCONTINUITY - Handling a bazooka requires enormously greater responsibility than a squirt gun!**
  - A. **What remains the same? What changes?**
    - I. **Nobody brought a lamb, goat, or pigeon this morning**
    - II. **We aren't meeting on the Sabbath (Saturday)**
    - III. **Many traveled more than a Sabbath day's journey to get here**
  - B. **CROSS - What changed before and after the cross?**
  - C. **PENTECOST - What changed before and after the birth of the Church?**
    - I. **MY BACKGROUND - Born again in a Pentecostal church. First five years as a "practicing Pentecostal."**
    - II. **PENTECOSTALS - Is everything recorded in the book of Acts to be experienced by believers today?**
    - III. **CONTEXT - Is there a historical context which is frequently ignored or misunderstood?**
    - IV. **FOUNDATIONAL - If the Church began on Pentecost, how often does it begin? Over and over? How often is a foundation laid?**
    - V. **RELATIONAL - If the events of Pentecost are associated with the**

coming of the Spirit to begin a new baptizing ministry, is He coming over and over still? If Spirit baptism forms the body of Christ, is the body of Christ being recreated over and over today? Or was it created once: soon after the departure of the literal body of Christ?

## PENTECOST - The context

1. **FIVE/FIFTY** - From the Greek term **πεντηκοστής** [*pentēkostēs*]. "Pente" denotes 5 (like "Penteteuch" - first 5 books). Pentecost denotes the 50<sup>th</sup> day following the feast of firstfruits (Lev. **23:16**).
2. **MANDATORY FEASTS** - Passover, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Tabernacles (Deu. **16:16**)
  - A. **PASSOVER** - Jesus crucified as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John **1:29**)
    - I. **POST-RESURRECTION** - 40 days (Acts **1:3**) + 10 days = "Feast of Weeks" (7 x 7 + 1) = Pentecost
  - B. **PENTECOST** - Feast of First Fruits
    - I. **UNLEAVENED** - Passover, immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, required the removal of all leaven (Ex. **12:15-19**), but then is followed by Feast of Weeks (7 weeks) where a first fruits offering is made.
    - II. **LEAVENED** - Interestingly, the offering is of leavened bread (Lev. **23:17**)
    - III. **SIN** - Considered unclean and typologically representing sin<sup>4</sup>
    - IV. **Peter and the unclean animals in Acts 10**, then sent to the Gentiles which other Jewish believers complained about
      - a. **ACTS 11:1-3** - *Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"*
    - V. **FIRST FRUITS** - A small offering representative of much more to come: the relatively small group in the upper room vs. the gospel going to the nations.

## EXPERIENCES - What did they experience and why?

1. **WAITING . . . FOR WHAT?** - How were they to know when the "promise of the Father," the "baptism of the Spirit" had arrived?
  - A. **ACTS 2:4-5** - *Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now"*
  
2. **WIND - Manifestation of The Spirit**
  - A. **ACTS 2:2** - . . . a sound from heaven , as of a rushing mighty wind . . .
  - B. **MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT- Πνοή** [*Pnoē*], a similar root to πνευμα [*pneuma*] from which we get "spirit", also translated "breath" (Acts 17:25), "blast", "exhale"<sup>5</sup>, and the source of our English word "pneumatics" — air-powered.
  - C. **ADAM - Body from from dust, then God animated with spirit**
    - I. **GENESIS 2:7** - *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (πνοήν ζωής [*pnoēn zōēs*], LXX); and man became a living being.*
    - II. Another body is now being created: the body of Christ - animated by God's Own Spirit! The promised Comforter or Helper
      - a. **JOHN 14:16-17** - *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells [*present tense*] with you and will be [*future tense*] in you.*
  
3. **TONGUES AS OF FIRE - Manifestation of a work of the Spirit**
  - A. **ACTS 2:3** - . . . divided tongues as of fire, and one sat upon each of them
  - B. **BAPTISM WITH FIRE?** - Do the tongues as of fire signify the baptism with fire which John the Baptist mentions?
    - I. **MATTHEW 3:5-12** - *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them,*

***"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."***

**II. Does the baptism with fire refer to the cloven tongues of fire in Acts 2?**

**III. What are the problems with this view?**

**a. Context**

- i. How would John's listeners understand fire in this context?
- ii. Context is king: language has meaning for the original recipients.
- iii. Get into their shoes, listen from their perspective, forget what you know that they don't.

**b. Where fire is missing, so is judgment.**

- i. MARK 1:4-8 - *John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*
- ii. No mention of baptism with fire.
- iii. Also no mention of judgment.
- iv. Not conclusive, but infers that where one is omitted, so is the other.

**IV. Not referring to Acts 2.**

**V. UNIVERSAL BAPTISM - Most likely referring to the idea that everyone living after the cross will eventually undergo one of two baptisms.**

**a. SPIRIT - Baptism with the Holy Spirit: becoming believers,**

joining them to the Body of Christ, becoming “in Christ”.

b. FIRE - Baptism with fire: destined for judgment and hell.

VI. Jesus initiates both baptisms.

VII. Connected with establishment of the Church-Age Temple (below)

#### 4. SPEAKING IN TONGUES - How, what, and why?

A. **ACTS 2:4** - *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit [notice He is Holy!!] and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*

I. **OTHER TONGUES** - **ἑτέραις γλώσσαις** [*heterais glōssais*], similar but different. Still languages, but not ones they normally spoke.

II. **GIVEN UTTERANCE** - Unexpected, not contrived, not coached or experimental sounds, they had no idea this was going to happen! Just like the household of Cornelius (Acts 10) and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19).

a. **COACHED?** - Compare this with the common Pentecostal practice of coaching people to 'begin to babble' and to 'let go' and begin speaking with nonsensical syllables.

B. **KNOWN HUMAN LANGUAGES** - Always understood by others who heard

I. **JEWS OF DISPERSION** - Visiting for Pentecost (Acts 2), various known languages of numerous regions (next time)

II. **SAMARITANS** - Inferred

a. **ACTS 8:18** - *Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money*

III. **GENTILES** - House of the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10):

a. **ACTS 10:44-46** - *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.*



- b. **COACHED?** - “Nor was there any process of seeking, surrendering, examining themselves, giving up, praying for it, but by hearing of faith, in believing the message of the Gospel the Holy Spirit fell on them.”<sup>6</sup>

IV. **LANGUAGES** - Speaking in dialects (**διαλέκτω** [*dialektō*]), translated “languages” in Acts **2:6,8**.

C. **PURPOSE** - GLOBAL EVANGELIZATION

- I. **SHIFT IN FOCUS** - Gospel going out to the nations, **TONGUES**, and tribes (Gentiles!) — the Great Commission
- a. **ACTS 1:8** - ... *you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea [Acts 2], and Samaria [Acts 8, inferred], and to the end of the earth [begins with Gentiles in Caesarea, Acts 10]*
- II. **PREACHING THE GOSPEL?** - No evidence in the NT that the gospel message was ever given miraculously in an unlearned foreign language
- a. **CORNELIUS** - Peter presented the gospel in their language and was unexpectedly interrupted when the listeners spontaneously erupted in an unlearned language
- III. **EVIDENCE** - Undeniable evidence to those who heard of a miraculous work of God
- IV. **PURPOSEFUL** - Certified by whose authority the Spiritual work was initiated

Chapter	Region	Who	Tongues	Sign
Acts 2	Jerusalem	Jews	human languages	Sign to waiting disciples: the <i>Promise of the Father</i> had arrived. Sign to visiting and local Jews: judgment of Israel, God turning to foreigners. Endorsement of Peter and those who were Spirit-baptized.
Acts 8	Samaria	Samaritans	?	Sign to Samaritans: dependence upon laying on of Jewish hands: <i>salvation is of the Jews</i> (John 4:22).
Acts 10	Caesarea (beginning of the <i>ends of</i> )	Gentiles (Italians in Caesarea)	human language	Sign to Jews: Gentiles given salvation (Acts 11:15-18).



	<i>the Earth, Acts 1:8)</i>			
Acts 19	Ephesus (more ends of the Earth, Acts 1:8)	Disciples of John the Baptist	human language	Sign to John's disciples: authority of Paul, Spirit baptism by Christ now supersedes water baptism by John.

## V. JUDGMENT - More on this further on in the chapter.

### A BEGINNING - The birth of the Church

#### 1. AFTER THE CROSS

- A. **MATTHEW 16:18** - *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build [future tense] My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*
- B. **EPHESIANS 2:14-16** - *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*
- C. **EPHESIANS 3:4-6** - . . . *you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel*

#### 2. FOUNDATION - APOSTLES

- A. **1 CORINTHIANS 12:28a** - *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles . . .*
- B. **EPHESIANS 2:19-20** - *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*

#### 3. A BEGINNING

- A. **ACTS 11:15-16** - Peter, referring to his experience at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10: *"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the*

***Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*** "

4. **SPIRIT BAPTISM = FORMATION OF BODY OF CHRIST** - Spirit baptism is the means by which individuals are joined to the body of Christ
- A. **1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13** - *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*
- B. **SPIRIT BAPTISM** - Never occurred prior to Pentecost
- I. **FIRST, JESUS MUST DEPART, JOHN 16:7-8** - *Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*
- II. **FIRST, JESUS MUST BE GLORIFIED, JOHN 7:37-39** - *On the last day, that great day of the feast [of Tabernacles], Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for [1] the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because [2] Jesus was not yet glorified.*
- III. **PROMISED AT HIS ASCENSION, ACTS 1:5** - *for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be [future tense] baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

1. **ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE** - Both are needed
- A. **CHURCH LIKE ISRAEL? - ROMANS 10:2** - *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*
- B. **SPIRIT or FLESH?** - What God is not presently doing, the Church is working up using a cheap fleshly substitute (ecstatic speech) which is neither miraculous, convincing, nor turning the world upside down.
2. **DEMEANING** - The truly miraculous of the early church (speaking in unlearned foreign languages) is recast into non-miraculous, and even bizarre practices

which the modern church, and even the occult, can manufacture at will.

3. **DENIAL OF REALITY** - The modern church can not produce any sound as of a rushing wind, no visible tongues as of fire, no speaking in *bona fide* unlearned foreign languages. Does this square with the idea that “everything in Acts is for the Church today”?
4. **DISAPPOINTMENT & FRUSTRATION** - The historical context of Pentecost is ignored leaving many believers disillusioned and feeling as if they are second-class Christians.
5. **MISDIRECTED FOCUS, STUNTED GROWTH** - Seeking experiences and placing undue focus on ego-building gifts rather than achieving true spiritual growth through what God has revealed in the closed canon of His Word.

Fri Feb 6 14:11:23 2015



SpiritAndTruth.org<sup>b</sup> Scan Code

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#### Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 2:1-4
2. Ref-1289, 210
3. “[Adam] was a good man, and was the founder of the church, of which Christ himself became a son, he was the first in line of the church, and as such he was from God [Luke 3:38].”<sup>2</sup>
4. Concerning leaven as representative of sin: Ex. 12:15,19; Ex. 13:7; 23:18; 34:25; Hos. 7:4; Amos 4:5; Mat. 13:33; 16:6-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 13:20; 1Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9
5. In extra-biblical sources.
6. Ref-0904, Acts 10:46

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#### Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0904** John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (Broken Arrow, OK: StudyLamp Software, 1690-1771).
- Ref-1289** Jonathan Edwards, *On Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993, 1839). ISBN: 0-85151-583-5<sup>c</sup>.

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#### Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-85151-583-5>.