

## The Beginning of the Great Commission (Acts 2:5-21)

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### Previous Sessions

1. Understanding the historical setting
2. Transition: the literal body of Christ departs, the spiritual body of Christ is formed
3. Spirit baptism begins
  - A. A new ministry of the Spirit which began with the events of Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost
  - B. The *means* by which a person is joined to the body of Christ
  - C. Occurs as a second work within the historical context of Acts since the body of Christ had never before existed
  - D. Not a second work in our day: the baptism of the Spirit, the Promise of the Father, was given as Jesus promised nearly 2,000 years ago
  - E. Spirit baptism, which forms the body of Christ, also establishes the temple of the Church
  - F. The church, having had its foundation laid, is not being formed over and over

### Today's session: tongues as evidence of a significant shift in God's program

1. FROM: the kingdom offer to Israel
2. TO: global evangelization, the fulfilment of the Great Commission
3. The significant question and answer from chapter 1: *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. "But 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 and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* (Acts 1:6-8)

### Today's passage (Acts 2:5-21)

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.'"<sup>1</sup>

### Why were foreign Jews and proselytes from many different countries in Jerusalem?

1. *And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.* (Acts 2:5)
2. Three mandatory feasts for male Jews to "appear before the Lord GOD"
  - A. *Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the **Feast of Harvest**, the **firstfruits** of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the **Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year**, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.* (Ex. 23:14-17)
  - B. Feast of Unleavened Bread — also called Passover
  - C. Feast of Harvest — also called Pentecost, the present context
  - D. Feast of Ingathering — also called Tabernacles

### The significance of the miracle of speaking in unlearned foreign languages

## 1. What languages were spoken?

### A. Those associated with visitors to Jerusalem from foreign regions

- Parthians - in the apostles' time the Parthian empire stretched from India to the Tigris
- Elamites - modern-day Persia (Iraq/Iran)
- Medes - north and west of Persia.
- Mesopotamia - the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
- Cappadocia - north of Jerusalem, near what is today central Turkey
- Pontus - north and west of Cappadocia, near what is today north central Turkey, along the Black Sea
- Asia - north and west of Jerusalem, what is today western Turkey (Ephesus was its capital)
- Phrygia - north and west of Jerusalem, near what is today west central Turkey
- Pamphylia - north and west of Jerusalem, near what is today south central Turkey, on the shores of the Mediterranean
- Egypt - south and west of Jerusalem
- Parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene - west of Jerusalem, on the northern shore of Africa on the Mediterranean
- Rome - Italy
- Cretans - Island of Crete, south and east of Greece, west of Cypress
- Arabs - south and east of Jerusalem, on the Sinai peninsula (modern day Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar)

### B. What is the significance?

#### I. Luke wrote both Luke and Acts

##### a. Acts is a continuation of the gospel of Luke, which ends predicting the Great Commission

- b. *And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:45-49)*

- ii. Signals a shift in God's program away from the presentation of the kingdom to Israel—which had now been rejected—toward the purpose of the Great Commission: global evangelization from among all nations.

## 2. What languages were *not* spoken?

### A. "Others" mocked, thinking those speaking were drunk

#### I. Why did they mock?

##### a. Denial?

- i. Possibly an attempt to deny the miracle.<sup>2</sup>

##### b. Unable to understand?

- i. The mockers did not understand the languages being spoken<sup>3</sup>
- ii. The mockers appear to have been natives of Judea and Jerusalem whose local languages were *not* among those spoken by miraculous means
- iii. To the unfamiliar, unknown language would sound like "babbling" — especially if many are spoken simultaneously and one's ear is unable to pick out a recognizable language to follow

### B. The tongues spoken appear to have omitted languages commonly known in Judea and Jerusalem

#### I. The languages spoken were miraculous for Galileans

- a. Even though some who understood the foreign languages were from Judea (Acts 2:9) I think we can safely conclude that the languages which were spoken were all *foreign languages with respect to Judea (and Jerusalem)*. It would not have been considered remarkable for a Galilean to be understood in Judea or Jerusalem (Acts 2:7-8).

### C. What is the significance of the omission of local languages — languages which would be known by Galileans?

#### I. Tongues as a sign to unbelievers

- a. *In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers . . ." (1Cor. 14:21-22a)*

#### ii. Babel as background - confused tongues, a sign of judgment (Gen. 11:7-9)

#### iii. Commissioning of Ezekiel

- a. ***Then He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. (Eze. 3:4-7)***

#### IV. Blessings and Curses

- a. ***The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. (Deu. 28:49-50)***
- b. **Isaiah in reference to Assyrians (N. Kingdom)**
- i. *For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people (Isa. 28:11)*
  - ii. "Following up on the leaders' mimicking, Isaiah said that if they did not want to listen to his "lecturing" then they would be "lectured" by another people who had a difficult and different speech. Foreign lips would deliver the message of judgment on them. Isaiah was referring to the Assyrians who were advancing on Israel and would soon conquer it. Though God had offered Israel rest and repose they refused to listen to Him and His messenger. Therefore the LORD would turn their mocking back on them and they would be injured . . . snared, and captured by a people whose language they did not understand."<sup>4</sup>
- c. **Jeremiah in reference to Babylonians (S. Kingdom)**
- i. *"Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," says the LORD. "It is a mighty nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say." (Jer. 5:15)*
- d. **Actions speak louder than words.**
- i. Because Israel would not listen to the prophets who spoke their native language, therefore, God would "speak" to them through Gentile nations of foreign tongues. Israel would "listen" to their captors because, "actions speak louder than words."

#### V. Cause for Jewish concern!

- a. **God is giving miraculous signs using languages unknown in Galilee**
- b. **God's emphasis is broadening toward the Gentiles**
- c. **What might this imply to thoughtful Jews?**
- i. How would it feel if God had been speaking in your native tongue for generations but now begins speaking in a language you cannot understand?
  - ii. What are the implications in the near term for the centrality of Israel as God's special treasure (Ex. 19:5; Deu. 7:6; 26:18; Ps. 135:4)?

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#### Peter's Explanation

1. ***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 2:16-21 cf. Joel 2:28-32)**
2. Peter refers to Joel 2:28-32 which predicts numerous characteristics of the "last days," especially cataclysmic events associated with the day of the Lord.
3. Does Peter's citation of Joel constitute the "fulfillment" of Joel's passage in entirety?
  - A. Some make this error, using this passage as license for interpreting many OT prophetic passages as hyperbole (literary exaggeration for effect), denying any future literal fulfillment.
  - B. They attempt to shoe-horn events associated with the yet future Second Coming into the First Coming.
4. Peter is referring to Joel, not as constituting complete fulfillment, but **to indicate that the events of Pentecost are in line with expectations established by Joel's predictions:**
  - A. *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17 cf. Joel 2:28)*
  - B. *And also on my menservants and my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Acts 2:18 cf. Joel 2:29)*
  - C. These specific predictions of Joel are in keeping with the new ministry of Spirit-baptism which has just begun on the events of the Day of Pentecost.
5. Peter is also connecting the giving of the Spirit with the Great Commission

A. ***And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. (Acts 2:21 cf. Joel 2:32)***

6. **Notice elements from Joel's passage which did *not* take place on the Day of Pentecost:**

- Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
- Your old men shall dream dreams,
- Your young men shall see visions.
- And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
  - Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
  - The sun shall be turned into darkness,
  - And the moon into blood,

7. **These aspects await future fulfillment in association with *the great and awesome day of the LORD* (Joel 2:31)**

## Points of Application

1. **FIRST - The events of Acts 1 and 2 represent a historical shift in the program of God**

- A. ***From presentation of kingdom to Israel to global evangelization***
- B. ***From a literal temple located in Jerusalem to a spiritual temple located in all parts of the world***
- C. ***From largely Jewish focus as the nation of Israel to largely Gentile focus as the body of Christ***
  - I. **Still "to the Jew first",<sup>5</sup> but Israel's disobedience will now result in a shift toward Gentile concerns**
    - a. **Order of the Great Commission: witnesses in Jerusalem/Judea, then Samaria, then rest of world**
    - b. ***you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [the Jew's] disobedience (Rom. 11:30b)***
- D. ***From the literal presence of Jesus in the incarnation to the spiritual presence of Jesus as the body of Christ, the Church***
- E. **We ignore the historical context at our own peril: making today and every day like Pentecost in Jerusalem at the initial giving of the Spirit almost 2,000 years ago is a serious distortion of what Acts is teaching.**

2. **SECOND - A key lesson for us today: continued rejection of God's revelation necessitates God turning elsewhere**

- A. **Losing center stage (for a time) in God's program through continued disobedience!**
- B. **God will get the job done with us or without us.**
- C. **Nations that once had a closer relationship with God and walk away will no longer be exalted.**
- D. **Access to the knowledge of God which we take for granted (based on our Christian heritage) is rapidly waning.**
- E. **Our enhanced understanding of the Bible, access to abundant study materials and cultural familiarity with the principles of God for which we've been favored will not last if we continue in our rejection of God.**
- F. **The day may come when the availability of Biblical materials in English are eclipsed by those of another "foreign tongue."**
- G. **If so, America will have joined the list of nations who, having once been exalted through service to God, dwindled to insignificance on the global stage by turning from God.**

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Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 2:5-21
2. "Unable to explain this miracle away, the Jewish unbelievers were puzzled, and some resorted to scoffing and asserted, They have had too much wine." Ref-0038, Acts 2:5-13
3. "On the other hand, those mentioned in v. 13 were Judeans and did not understand the foreign languages the apostles were speaking. They concluded the apostles were drunk and speaking gibberish." Ref-0107, Acts 2:12,13
4. Ref-0038, Isa. 28:11

5. Concerning preaching the gospel to the Jew first: Acts 1:8; 2:39; 3:26; 10:36; 13:5,14,46; 17:2,17; 18:4-6,19; 28:28; Rom. 1:16; Rom. 2:9-10.

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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-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).

**Ref-0107** Earl D. Radmacher, ed., *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

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Links Mentioned Above

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

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.