

Tongues as of Fire (Acts 2:1-4)

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Questions we'll be considering:

1. What led to the unusual events which transpired on the Day of Pentecost?
2. What is the significance of the "divided tongues as of fire" mentioned in Acts 2:3?
3. Should believers seek a similar experience today?

First question: *What led to the unusual events which transpired on the Day of Pentecost?*

1. Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit

- “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 [present tense] dwells *with* you and will be [future tense] *in* you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:16-18)
- “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (John 14:26)
- “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” (John 15:26)
- “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.” (John 16:7-8)
- Notice:
 - The Holy Spirit Who has been ministering on earth from at least Genesis 1:2 and is ministering on the earth when Jesus is speaking these things to His disciples, yet there is a sense in which the Holy Spirit had not yet come!
 - A precondition on the coming of the Spirit: Jesus must depart.

2. Holy Spirit and living water (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 *the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*” (John 7:37-39)¹
- Not yet given, those believing would (future tense) receive.
- A precondition on the giving of the Spirit: Jesus must be glorified.
- Key concept: *Holy Spirit as the source of living water within future believers.*

3. Israel's Kingdom deferred (Acts 1:4-8)

- This sets up an understanding for what follows in Acts 2.
- “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly *baptized with water*, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit* not many days from now.” 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 1:4-8)
- Promise of the Father: sending the Spirit.
- Contrast between baptisms (water vs. Spirit).
- Israel's kingdom deferred, expectations in abeyance, change in the program.
- Emphasis on global missions: witness in Jerusalem, Judea/Samaria, end of the earth.
 - As late as Acts 10, the apostles seemed to understand this to mean preaching to *Jews* everywhere, not Gentiles.
- Next verse Jesus departs (Acts 1:9)! Two preconditions for coming of the Spirit now met.
 1. Jesus must be glorified (John 7:39).
 2. Jesus must depart (John 16:7).
- About to inaugurate the mystery age of the church.
 - Body of Christ: physically standing in front of them, no spiritual body of Christ yet.
 - Spiritual Body of Christ is the church (1Cor 12:27-28; Eph 1:22-23; 3:6; Col. 1:18).

4. Answer to first question.

- Q: What led to the unusual events which transpired on the Day of Pentecost?
- A: A shift in God's program from Israel's kingdom to the Church Age requiring a new ministry of the Holy Spirit by which Holy Spirit baptism began the Church, the Body of Christ.

Second question: *What is the significance of the "divided tongues as of fire" mentioned in Acts 2:3?*

1. Do the tongues as of fire signify the baptism with fire which John the Baptist mentions?

“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." (Matthew 3:5-12)

- Does the baptism with fire refer to the cloven tongues of fire in Acts 2?
- What are the problems with this view?
 1. Context
 - How would John's listeners understand fire in this context?
 - Context is king: language has meaning for the original recipients.
 - Get into their shoes, listen from their perspective, forget what you know that they don't.
 2. Where fire is missing, so is judgment.
 - "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.'" (Mark 1:4-8)
 - No mention of baptism with fire.
 - Also no mention of judgment.
 - Not conclusive, but infers that where one is omitted, so is the other.
- Not referring to Acts 2.
- Most likely referring to the idea that everyone living after the cross will eventually undergo one of two baptisms.
 1. Baptism with the Holy Spirit: becoming believers, joining them to the Body of Christ, becoming "in Christ".
 2. Baptism with fire: destined for judgment and hell.
- Jesus initiates both baptisms.

2. Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- Baptism: a ritual involving complete immersion within water.
- How are water and the Holy Spirit compared and contrasted?
- Holy Spirit as the source of living water.

A. Living Water

I. Feast of Tabernacles - John 7

- "On the last day, that great day of the feast, 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 the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John [7:37-39](#))

- *living water*: source of life.
- *water*: flows, refreshes, gives life in the wilderness.
- Holy Spirit is said to be the source of living water flowing from within the believer.

II. Woman at the Well - John 4

- “Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you *living water*." The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But *the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*."” (John [4:10-14](#))
- Life-giving water.
- From a well-spring *within* believers.
- The same theme as John [7:37-39](#).
- Interesting "coincidence" in what follows:
 - “The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.” (John [4:19-21](#))
 - Samaritans: rival religion, worshiped at temple on Mt. Gerizim.
 - Jews: temple in Jerusalem.
 - Jesus: neither temple, a new temple will soon be inaugurated!
 - Key idea: living water-temple connection.

III. From where else does living water flow elsewhere in Scripture?²

a. Ezekiel's Temple

- “Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, *flowing from under the threshold of the temple* toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.” (Ezekiel [47:1](#))
- “And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and *everything will live wherever the river goes*.” (Ezekiel [47:9](#))
- “And He said to me, "Son of man, this is the *place of My throne* and the

place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places.)” (Ezekiel 43:7)

- The river of life flows out from the temple: specifically from the presence of the Living God within the temple.

b. **Eternal State**

- “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)
- “But I saw no temple in it, for *the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*” (Revelation 21:22)
- The river of life flows out from the temple: specifically from the presence of the Living God Who is the temple.

B. **The temple of the believer**

I. **The body of Christ as a temple.**

- “Do you [plural] not know that you [plural] are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you [plural]? If anyone [singular] defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [plural] are.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
- “Now, therefore, you [plural] 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, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you [plural] also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)
- Caveat: although speaking to a *group*, the Spirit is within each *individual*.

II. **The body of the believer as a temple.**

- “Do you not know that your [plural] bodies [plural] are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you [plural] not know that your [plural] body [singular] is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:15-19)
- “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with

darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever [*singular*]? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you [plural] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them [plural] And walk among them [them]. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.'" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

III. Sealed with the Spirit.

a. Not true prior to Pentecost.

- "But the Spirit of the LORD *departed* from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him." (1 Samuel 16:14)
- "Do not cast me away from Your presence, And *do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*" (Psalms 51:11)

b. The Transition predicted: the upper room.

- "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 [present tense] dwells *with* you and will be [future tense] *in* you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:16-18)

c. After Pentecost: sealed.

- "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)
- "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4:30)

IV. God's dwelling presence is *permanently* housed within sinful flesh.

a. Temple of the believer is sinful.

- "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)
- "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body." (James 3:2)
- "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1

John 1:8-10)

b. Contrast with dwelling presence in Solomon's temple.

- “Furthermore He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.”” (Ezekiel 8:6)
- “Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. . . .” (Ezekiel 9:3a)
- “Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD'S glory.” (Ezekiel 10:4)
- “Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.” (Ezekiel 10:18-19)
- ““But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD. So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city.” (Ezekiel 11:21-23)

c. How is this possible?

- “But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, *because Jesus was not yet glorified.*” (John 7:39)
- “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.” (John 16:7)

C. Dedication of Solomon's temple.

- Installing the tabernacle into the newly constructed temple.

I. The importance of sacrifices

- “When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and *consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices*; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy

endures forever." Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God." (2 Chronicles 7:1-6)

- What do you suppose flowed out from the temple? A life-giving river of blood!

II. Enormous number of sacrifices. Why?

- "Also King Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel who were assembled with him before the ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude." (2 Chronicles 5:6)
- "Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered to the LORD, twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated **הֲנִיךְ** [*hānak*] the house of the LORD. On the same day the king consecrated (**קִדַּשׁ** [*qādaš*]) the middle of the court that was in front of the house of the LORD; for there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar that was before the LORD was too small to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings. At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven more days-fourteen days." (1 Kings 8:62-65)
 - *Dedicated*, **הֲנִיךְ** [*hānak*], "to devote a structure to deity or special purpose (Dt 20:5; 1Ki 8:63; 2Ch 7:5+)." ³
 - *Consecrated*, **קִדַּשׁ** [*qādaš*], to set apart for holy service, be regarded as holy.
- God's sign of acceptance (2Chr. 7:1).
 - *Fire* consumed the sacrifice.
 - Glory of the Lord, the *shekinah*, filled the temple.
- Similar occasions.
 - Acceptance of Aaron's offering at dedication of the Aaronic priesthood at the tabernacle (Lev. 9:24).
 - Acceptance of Elijah's offering on Mt. Carmel (1K. 18:32-38).
 - Acceptance of Gideon's offering by the Angel of the Lord (Jdg. 6:18-21).

III. Acts 2: dedication of the temple of the believer.

- Rushing wind = coming of the Spirit in a new ministry (baptism).
- Cloven tongues, as of fire = dedication/cleansing (Jesus' sacrifice acceptable for permanent residence by the Spirit).
- Cloven tongues, in a sense, can be said to be similar to the burning bush of

Exodus 3.

- What was remarkable?
- Not the fire, but that the thorn bush (bramble - representing sin) was not consumed (Ex. 3:3).
- Sin is judged/purged, but the sinner is not consumed.
- The temple is cleansed and dedicated for the *shekinah*, the dwelling presence of God.
- “Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.'" Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will *we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For *by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*". (Hebrews 10:7-14)

3. Answer to second question

- Q: *What is the significance of the "divided tongues, as of fire" mentioned in Acts 2?*
- A: They are analogous to the fire which consumed the sacrifice during the dedication of the tabernacle and Solomon's temple indicating the dedication and cleansing of a new Spiritual Temple where the glory of God has taken up residence, the temple of the believer.

Third question: *Should believers seek a similar experience today?*

1. **Jesus' prayer in the upper room and John's parenthetical explanation in John 7:37-39 indicate a historical transition is afoot.**
2. **The historical formation of a new spiritual entity, the body of Christ, the temple of the believer.**
3. **Book of Acts spans approximately 30 years.**
 - Full of missions activity, new conversions.
 - Only four mentions of reception of the Holy Spirit *after* having believed.
 - Related to: “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 1:8)

Chapter	Region	Who	Tongues	Sign
Acts 2	Jerusalem	Jews	human languages	Sign to waiting disciples that the promise of the Father had come. Sign to visiting and

				local Jews: judgment of Israel, turning to foreigners. Endorsement of Peter and those who were Spirit-baptized.
Acts 8	Samaria	Samaritans	?	Sign to Samaritans: "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).
Acts 10	Caesarea (beginning of "ends of the Earth")	Gentiles (Italians in Caesarea)	human language	Sign to Jews: Gentiles given salvation (Acts 11:15-18).
Acts 19	Ephesus (more "ends of the Earth")	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.

4. Acts is *descriptive*, not *proscriptive*.

5. Epistles never teach:

1. to tarry for more power.
2. to seek a second experience.
3. to coach believers or try to speak using meaningless syllables.

6. Second work misunderstands the definition of the body of Christ.

“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.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

7. Historical cleansing/dedication of temples.

- Was the dedication of the tabernacle a repeated experience?
- Was the dedication of Solomon's temple a repeated experience?
- Why should the temple of the Body of Christ be different?

8. Answer to third question.

- Q: *Should believers seek a similar experience to Acts 2 today?*
- A: No. The church was established on the Day of Pentecost, its foundation was laid long ago. Since the time of the book of Acts, all believers have been simultaneously baptized and sealed with the Holy Spirit the moment they believe.

As a former Pentecostal, my question to Pentecostal listeners is this: do you desire the truth enough to allow God's Word to sit in judgment over your experience?

- Have you been baptized with the Spirit as a second work “with evidence of speaking in tongues”? How similar was it to Acts 2?
 - Was the room you were in filled with the sound of a mighty rushing wind?
 - Did others who were present see cloven tongues, as of fire, residing upon you?

- Did you spontaneously speak in an unlearned *bona fide* foreign language?
- Try as one might, Christians today *cannot* repeat the Acts 2 (or 10 or 19) experience because zealous flesh cannot produce what the Spirit of God is not empowering.
 - Where the Spirit is absent and the flesh charges ahead, ecstatic speech, a cheap imitation of Biblical tongues, results.

The story is told of a man who came to Dr. Harry Ironside one night and said, 'I have just come from a great tarrying meeting. Hundreds have been tarrying for many days in San Jose, California, waiting for the Holy Ghost.' Ironside asked by what authority they were doing this. 'Why Jesus said, tarry ye in the City of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.' To this Ironside replied with quick wit and straight theology, 'Well, my friend, are you not confounding the location and time? You are over 10,000 miles too far away, and over 1,900 years too late.'⁴

Endnotes:

1. "Sukkah continues by describing the unique use of water in this festival [the Feast of Tabernacles]. On the first day of the feast a procession led by priests brought water to the temple from the Pool of Siloam; trumpets were blown at the city gate as the procession entered. Each day priests circled the altar while the worshipers waved their *lulabs*. The Hallel (Ps. 113-18) was recited or sung on each of the eight days. The officiating priest ascended the altar ramp and, using two silver bowls, one for water, the other for wine, poured out the libation. . . . In John 7 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem during the latter part of the Festival of Booths . . . Given the time (the Feast of Tabernacles), the place (the temple), and the theme (water), such a declaration was bold and dramatic. Little wonder that in the following verses people debate whether Jesus might be the Messiah." Ref-1200, p. 161
2. Time doesn't permit exposition of Gen. 2:10; Ex. 17:6; Pr. 10:11; 16:22 or fully exploring the analogy with the river of blood flowing from numerous sacrifices at the temple.
3. Ref-0618, #2852
4. Ref-0004, pp. 23-24

Sources:

- Ref-0004** Ronald E. Baxter, *Charismatic Gift of Tongues*.
- Ref-0618** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-1200** J. Julius Scott Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995, 2007). ISBN:978-0-8010-2240-1^b.

Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-8010-2240-1>.