

## Lesson 3: Acts 2.1-21 Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

### Introduction

The birth of the Church? The cross or Pentecost? Pentecost is not the moment that divides the ages. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those three days are the critical moment that distinguish the Old Covenant from the New Covenant. More than that, the cross stands as a towering banner, dividing all of human history between the period before God died for us and the period after God had died for us.

We cannot elevate Pentecost above or even to the same level as the cross. Pentecost could not happen without the cross. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ answers the most critical of Old Testament questions, “How does God overcome the curse of death justice demands for the rebellion of Adam and Eve?” Or in other words, “How does holy fire burn on a dry bush without consuming it? How does a holy God enable the possibility of relationship with sinful people?”

This is the first question of Covenant. How can I be seen as acceptable or righteous in the sight of God? I have addressed the two questions of Covenant extensively in earlier podcasts, especially in the Romans and Pentateuch series.

The first question asks, “How are we deemed acceptable before a holy and just God?” The biblical answer is consistent throughout. We are made acceptable 100% through his grace. Old Testament believers looked ahead to the event that would secure salvation. We look back. The cross is that event. Jesus died in our place. When we place our faith in him as Lord and Savior, his death pays the wages for our sin. We are declared just: justified by a gift of grace which we receive through faith.

A second question follows that first question. “Now that I am in relationship with God based 100% on grace received through faith, how then shall I live?” This question does not remain the same throughout the Bible. God’s moral nature does not change. So, there is a consistent moral vision through the Bible. That does not change. But other facets of covenant are different. Abraham lived according to the Covenant of promise he received. Israelites lived according to the covenant of Law communicated through Moses. Now, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has instituted a New Covenant. We live according to the New Covenant, with a different set of expectations that govern the second question, “How then shall we live?” We not only ask, “How then shall we live now that we are in relationship with God by grace through faith?” But we ask, “How then shall we live now that we are in a relationship with God by grace through faith under the New Covenant?”

How do the people of God live differently after the cross than the people of God who lived before the cross?

Considering this second question, I am now ready to make a strong claim about Pentecost. While not the central, critical moment of salvation history, the coming of the Holy Spirit is a necessary moment in salvation history to enable the new wines skin we call, the New Covenant. The New Covenant of grace as a guide for how we ought to live out our relationship with God would not be possible apart from this new reality of the Holy Spirit indwelling believers. Something incredibly new takes place at Pentecost that gives birth to a new kind of community.

We do not want to diminish the importance of Pentecost for the New Covenant people of God nor do we want Pentecost to overshadow the central importance of the cross.

Is Pentecost the birth of the Church? While we should probably consider the whole fifty-day period from the crucifixion to Pentecost as our watershed moment, I think we can say, “Yes, what we are witnessing at Pentecost really is the birth of the New Covenant community that we call, the Church.”

We have a community of Jesus' followers already formed and waiting. They are waiting because Jesus told them to wait. An essential piece is not yet in place. They are not to begin their mission of witness until the Spirit comes. At Pentecost they will be empowered with a new experience distinctive to this New Covenant. Something new is truly coming into being.

Acts chapter 2 can be divided up into three parts. In verses 1-13 we have the miraculous wonder of the Holy Spirit filling this community of believers. Then in the middle section, 14-41 we have teaching from Peter explaining what is going on. And in 42-47 the chapter ends with a summary description of this New Covenant community.

In this lesson, we will address the miraculous event, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the first part of Peter's speech. In our next lesson we will address the rest of Peter's teaching and the summary description of the new community at the end of the chapter.

### **The Miracle of Pentecost**

So we start with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-13.

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. <sup>5</sup> Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> "And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born?" <sup>9</sup> "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our *own* tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." <sup>12</sup> And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

When the Holy Spirit came, the Holy Spirit came! There is sound like a mighty, rushing wind. In Zagreb we live on a hill. And when the wind blows down at night down that hill, the building shakes and the roof rattles and there's a whistling noise. And you can't sleep all night, it gets so bad. These men were familiar with that kind of powerful winds swooshing down the mountainside across the Sea of Galilee. It is a mighty sound, like a hurricane. The Spirit comes with sound and with sight. Tongues of fire fan out and rest on each person. The word, "tongue", is a play on words. It doesn't look like the tongue in your mouth. The tongue of fire is a flame. But it connects with tongues of speech that come. So, a tongue of fire, tongue of speech, it's a play on words. And so, this means that there is a flame resting on each person. So, the Spirit comes with sound and sight and speech. This is a personal manifestation of the Spirit moving each individual member of the community to say something, to speak out in a way that cannot be explained apart from the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit. They don't just speak. They speak in languages that they can't know.

And this miraculous wonder is full of symbolism, just starting with the fact that this is the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Pentecost is not a Christian word. Pentecost was a word for the Feast of Weeks.

#### *The Feast of Pentecost*

In the Old Testament festival calendar, three feasts invited all Jews to travel to Jerusalem. The presence of Jewish men was required at these three feasts. The feast of Unleavened Bread came in

the first month of the year. This holy week began with the Passover meal though, by the first century, the whole week could be referred to as Passover. So, either Unleavened Bread or Passover. The Feast of Weeks occurred seven sabbaths and a day after the end of Passover week. Seven weeks, that's seven times seven plus one is fifty, so the Feast of Weeks also began to be called in Greek, "Pentecost," which literally means "fiftieth". The third feast, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, took place half-way through the year in the seventh month.

The Biblical directions for all three feasts indicated that they were celebrations of God's provision. Passover celebrated the barley harvest. Pentecost celebrated the wheat harvest. The Feast of Booths celebrated the grape harvest and later grains. And then, in addition to giving thanks for the harvest, both Passover and Booths, the first and the last, provided an opportunity to remember some aspects of God's historic deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begun with the Passover meal, reminded the Jews how the initial escape from Egypt occurred after the tenth plague, when the angel of death passed over. At the Feast of Booths, families built booths and spent the night in them to remember God watching over Israel as they wandering forty years in the wilderness, before finally entering the Promised Land.

Unlike Passover and Booths, the Feast of Pentecost was not originally designed to remember some Old Testament event. Originally, it was purely just a harvest celebration, a thanks to God for his provision. But well before the time of Christ, the Jewish festival calendar had begun to use Pentecost to remember, to celebrate the birth of the nation when God gave the law of Moses at Mount Sinai. And this development of the cycle makes a lot of sense. So, you start your year in the first month, with the Passover and celebrating the great deliverance from Egypt. Then, fifty days later, at Pentecost you celebrate the cutting of covenant at Mount Sinai, the actual getting of the Law. And then in the seventh month, with Booths celebrates God's provision through the years of wandering. So, each year you remember these events chronologically, beginning with Passover, and leaving Egypt, and getting to Sinai, and receiving the Law, and then God's provision through the forty years of wandering.

In this period from Passover to Pentecost, that was historically a shorter period of traveling from Egypt to Mount Sinai - the long forty years comes later - so there's this sense of historic expectation that people came out of Israel, and they're waiting for God to communicate to them his expectations, while the Jewish cycle encourages that same sense of anticipation, you have Passover and then the Week of Unleavened Bread, so that's a major festival, and then you're counting off seven weeks and a day to celebrate Pentecost. So, there's this repeated sense of anticipation towards that moment of celebration when Israel truly became a nation. At Sinai, with receiving the Covenant, they become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." They have a covenant. They have a Law. And they heard the fearful sound of God's voice. And they saw his holy presence as fire and smoke on the mountain.

And so now we look at the time of Christ and we see, what a great sense of timing God has in using these symbolic feast days of the Old Covenant to establish the New Covenant. At that remembrance of Passover, the delivery from Egypt, now we are remembering even a greater deliverance, with the death of Christ freeing us not from oppression of some nation but freeing us from the oppression of slavery to our own sin. They had symbolically put blood on the doorposts of their homes so that the angel of wrath would pass over. And now we see that Jesus Christ, he's not a symbol: he is the Lamb of God; he is the sacrifice, the god-man dying in our place so that his blood would cover us, would protect us from the wrath of God, because God looks at us and he sees the penalty has been paid. Justice is satisfied. So, we had a great deliverance at Passover, and then we have this period of anticipation, this waiting for fifty days. And at Pentecost, again, with a sound, the mighty sound that

was at Sinai, and with fire and smoke, just as it was on the mountain, God gives birth to the New Covenant people. He speaks his word not just through the one man, Moses, but he speaks his word through all the individual members of the community gathered together, and the result is not going to be one geopolitical nation, but it's going to be first fruits from all the nations.

*The Nature and Effect of the Miracle*

Now, focus is going to turn toward the Twelve in verse 14, when Peter takes his stand with them. But we have good reason to believe that the miraculous speaking in tongues came forth from all the members of the community. Not just the Twelve disciples. The chapter began by telling us they were all together in one place. This likely includes the women followers mentioned in chapter 1, and the family of Jesus mentioned, and quite probably most of the 120 that were most recently mentioned. So, after saying they were all in one place, the text goes on to tell us that the tongues of flame rested on "each one of them" and that they were "all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues." So, we catch this emphasis is on "all together", "each one", "all filled." That emphasis is going to be confirmed by Peter's quote of the prophet Joel, that the Spirit of God is promised for all members of the community, male and female, everybody, not for some elite class in the community.

The Holy Spirit is manifested by wind, that mighty sound, and by fire, but most importantly, by speech. A consistent theme found in the Old Testament is that our God is the God who speaks. While the idols are dumb, our God speaks. You remember the prophets of Baal called out in a great frenzy, but they could not get one word out of Baal. God took Elijah to Mount Sinai. A great wind roared by, but God was not in the wind. Fire came, but God was not in the fire. Then God spoke. Unlike the pagan gods, God is not the phenomenon. He is not fire. He is not storm. Those things might represent his presence, but our God is the God who speaks, and the world falls silent.

The Holy Spirit is not an energy source. The Spirit is not a phenomenon. He is not fire or wind. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He manifests himself most importantly through the inspired speech that's coming forth from the gathered believers.

The Holy Spirit gives them prophetic words. And in this case, the Spirit miraculously communicates those words in the dialects represented in that multicultural crowd. This is why they ask, "Aren't these all Galileans?" They expect to hear Aramaic with a country Galilean drawl. How can Galileans speak with clear accent, each person's mother tongue? I'm hearing the language that speaks directly to my heart. And this is a powerful moment at the beginning of the birth of the Church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for every nation. There's going to be something about the Gospel that frees it from one culture. You don't have to become Jewish to accept the Gospel. The Gospel is going to come to you in your own heart language. It is for you, and you, and you, and you: for every culture.

The people gathered are both Jews and proselytes. Jews lived spread out to the West all over the Roman Empire and to the East all over the Persian Empire. They are the diaspora, the Greek word for "dispersed" or "scattered all over." Proselytes are non-Jews who have begun the process to be become as though they are Jewish. They are more serious than God-fearers. We'll hear that term, "God-fearers." The God-fearers want to worship Yahweh. The proselytes are even more involved in the process of being initiated into Judaism so that they might keep the Law of Moses in full. Pentecost, as one of the three main feasts of presence, causing the swelling of Jerusalem with visitors from across the empire, both Jews and proselytes. And we also have to recognize that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, so we don't know how many of these people actually live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is, in that sense, multicultural. I mean, it's primarily Jewish, but Jews from all over, so a lot of these could be residents of Jerusalem, but then also, we assume, a lot of them came for the Feast. And we don't really know how many are visitors and how many live here.

What we do know is that we have a microcosm of the surrounding world. You know, if Jerusalem is the center, these people are on the map all around Israel. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia. That's pointing up to the Persian Gulf and then up the two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. And then we have mentioned Judea. That's kind of our central and that's kind of circling to the West. And then we move on to Asia Minor with Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia. These are all Roman provinces of modern-day Turkey. Then we jump the Mediterranean and we come down to North Africa and we're continuing West from Egypt and over to Libya and the surroundings of Cyrene. And then we jump the sea again and we go up to Rome before coming back to Crete, just to the West of Israel, and Arabia just to the East.

All of these Jews and proselytes had come with anticipation to Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. These are holy days. They've come to worship. They've come to hear about God, to praise God, to come to see things. The city is swelled, it's packed with visitors. It is no surprise that the sound and light and speech fallen on this community spills into the streets quickly and gathering this crowd. And it's the third hour in the morning is around 9 am. It's not that early. And so, the people are ready to gather and they're asking, "What's going on at the Feast?"

So, what do these gathered Jews and proselytes from all over find when they hear the noise and they start joining the crowd? They are astonished. They become perplexed. "What's going on. We hear all these different people speaking in our own tongues! And they're speaking about the mighty deeds of God."

This gathering creates two biblical images in my mind. First, I can't help but think of Isaiah 2:2.

<sup>2</sup> Now it will come about that in the last days  
The mountain of the house of the LORD  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

That's talking about Zion, the mountain in Jerusalem.

And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.

The second image I have as I think of our key verse Acts 1:8 that when the power of the Holy Spirit comes on the apostles they will be witnesses - they will speak of the mighty deed of God concerning Jesus, "in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the remotest part of the earth."

God's commitment to all the peoples of the earth begins immediately, right here, with the birth of the Church. The proclamation of the mighty deeds of God could have happened in Aramaic and practically everybody would have understood. Add in a little Greek and you've got everyone. God began much more inclusively than that. He spoke to the heart, to the culture of each person gathered. The first message inspired by the Holy Spirit on this Pentecost morning is a message for the nations.

Now this is not the streaming into Zion that Isaiah foresaw. And it is not the going to the remotest part of the earth that Jesus proclaimed. This is not the fulfillment yet of either vision. This is a first fruits right at the beginning, signaling that one of the new realities of the New Covenant people of God is a multicultural inclusion of disciples from all nations. This is where we are headed. That is integral to the commission of Jesus Christ. All nations. This is not the old wineskin, where one nation is central and dominates. This is all nations. That's the scope. Not black separated from white separated from Latino separated from Asian. One Gospel for all peoples. That's the plan. It's not going to come naturally to the disciples. They are going to struggle with the plan. Just like it is still not natural to the majority of Christians in our day. It is much more natural to reach people like us in our place than it is to reach people different than us or to value the spread of the Gospel in different

places. And yet, this is the Good News. This is the Great Commission. This is the plan. “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Acts 1:8 does not say that when the Holy Spirit comes, you may gather in committee and, you know, decide whether you want to be witnesses or not to the barbarians. What do you want to do? That’s not what it says. It says, “When the Holy Spirit comes you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and in the remotest parts of the earth.” It is not “you may.” It’s not “if you want to.” It is “you will.” There is a sovereign hand of God that is going to be resisted by the will of his people, but the spread of the Gospel is going to happen. The Spirit will ensure that the Gospel goes forth to the nations.

### **Peter’s Speech at Pentecost, part 1**

Whenever something miraculous or supernatural happens, there are always going to be those who see and wonder, “What does that mean?” They are going to be asking, “How should we interpret these things?” There are also going to be those who mock and quickly discount, like the ones in this crowd who jeer. You know, “They are just full of sweet wine and they’re all drunk.”

Peter engages the mockers. The text says that he takes his stand with the Eleven. And he raises his voice to be heard by the crowd and he speaks. The first part of his speech has to do with the miraculous sign now taking place. Peter is going to explain what is going on. That’s the part of Peter’s speech I am going to address in our second half of this lesson. We’ll look at the rest of the speech in our next lesson. So right now we’re going to look at Acts 2:14-21.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. <sup>15</sup> “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; <sup>16</sup> but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; <sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. <sup>20</sup> ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. <sup>21</sup> ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

Now, Peter knows how to preach. I really don’t know if Peter meant his audience to smile when he began. “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day...” That’s 9 am. The implication is that if it were 9 pm then maybe, you know, this big crowd at Pentecost here for the feast. Then you might expect we’ve got a rowdy group of drunken men.

Whether Peter said that with a smile or whether he was just straight serious, I don’t know, but he sets up the speech by countering the misconception of some of the members in the crowd. And that’s going to be a form of address throughout the book of Acts. You know, there’s going to be people misunderstanding Christianity, and then someone, an Apostle, usually Peter, Paul, or maybe another believer, stands up to give a little speech to provide a correct perspective.

It is a good way to draw in the crowd. “I hear what you guys are saying. You’re saying they are drunk. Well, they are not drunk. That makes no sense at this time of day. Let me tell you what is going on.” You can imagine the crowd kind of focusing in on Peter. “Yeah, tell us, this is - we’re perplexed. We have no idea what is happening here. Tell us what’s going on.”

And then, having grabbed their attention Peter seamlessly begins his quote of Joel. “And it shall be in the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.’”

This full quote is from Joel 2:28-32a. The translation included here by Luke is from the Septuagint, the standard Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

There are two things to always check when a New Testament author quotes the Old Testament. First, what is the context of the quote? And second, what did the New Testament author add or change?

#### *Peter's Use of Joel – the Context*

You check the context because New Testament authors can expect listeners to recognize the wider story that surrounds the quote. For example, what if I were just to say to you, “My precious. My precious.” And that’s the only quote I give you. What do you think of? Half of you just thought of a consumed little soul who’s obsessed with possessing a golden ring that, in fact, possesses him. The quote brings in this whole story. Or if I say, “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.” What do you see? It brings in the whole story of the crucifixion. Just getting that little quote, and then you’re quite likely thinking of Jesus hanging on the cross, and maybe you’re thinking of the soldiers casting lots below him. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It’s a quote that brings in context. And we should check for that whenever a New Testament author quotes, that they could assume that these Jews and these proselytes, that they recognize quotes from the Old Testament, and they start thinking about the surrounding context.

In Peter’s quote of Joel, this short prophecy describes the devastation of the land of Israel by a locust plague. And the locusts become a metaphor for an invading army from the North that will devastate Israel in the day of the Lord. And it will be a just punishment on Israel for turning away from God. The main idea of Joel is a call to repentance. “‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘Return to me with all your heart...(Joel 2:12).’” The context fits exactly where Peter is going to go with his speech. The crowd of men and women of this generation of Jews, right here, right now in Jerusalem, rejected and crucified the Messiah. They have turned from God and deserve his wrath. Peter is going to call. He is going to say, “It’s not too late. Yet even now repent of your sin and turn back to God.” He is going to tell them the same thing that Joel told the people in his day.

That’s really going to get to the second half of Peter’s talk. Even more importantly for this first part, Joel is pointing ahead, past the day of God’s judgment to the day of God’s restoration. He is saying there will be this judgement of an invading army, but there will be time of refreshment after that. And Joel is looking ahead towards the New Covenant and the outpouring out of the Holy Spirit that was foreseen by Moses and Jeremiah before him, that God is going to do something new. The context of Joel is both a call to repentance and also this vision of a new age that is going to come after.

#### *Peter's Use of Joel – the Changes*

So, we first pay attention to the Old Testament context. When we get an Old Testament quote like Joel, we go in and we read around it to see what’s the context, because the author is importing more than just the quoted words. We then pay attention to how the author changes the quote, because this so often happens. Again, New Testament preachers, and you have to think of them more as preachers maybe than writers, can expect their audience to know Scripture. And since their audience knows the text, additions or changes to the texts - they’re not trying to trick people by giving them the wrong quote; they assume you know the right quote and they add things to embellish the quote, and it causes the listeners to perk up. The intent is not to change the meaning of the text, but to clarify, to develop it, or to apply it to the contemporary context.

And there are three changes here. The first two are primarily stylistic, and the third is a development. Peter switches the order of young men and old men. That seems to just be a style choice that allows “sons and daughters” to flow right into “young men,” and then we move to “old men.” He also adds, at the end of verse 18, a repetition of the phrase, “they shall prophesy.” This is also a style choice drawing attention to the idea of prophesy by everyone. We’ll talk about that when we get there. The most significant change is at the beginning of the quote. This is where Peter adds something that is not there. In his prophecy, Joel does not start with the phrase, “In the last days...” Joel simply says, “And it will come about...” Peter adds “In the last days...” It’s in accordance with Joel’s vision, it’s just not the words Joel uses but it adds clarity to what is happening right now in Jerusalem. We are in the

middle of a transition from one era to the other. What you are witnessing, men and women of Israel, is the beginning of the “last days.” We have crossed the bridge from the Old to something New. These are the last days.

*Peter’s Use of Joel – The Pouring out of the Holy Spirit*

Now, looking at the text itself, two features stand out in Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all the people of God. “I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND.” The word is not literally “mankind.” The Greek word is literally “flesh.” It creates a contrast with Spirit. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh. The translation is good, “mankind”, better to say “humankind” or, “all people” because that is where Joel is going to go with it. This is not just for men. This is men and women. The Spirit is poured out on all people. Look how he develops that.

AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,  
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;  
EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,

“Sons and daughters,” that is men and women. “Young men and old men,” that is regardless of age, young and old. “Even on my bondslaves”, which referred probably just to Israel. They considered themselves as God’s slaves or servants as a whole nation. But in this New Covenant context it probably also is intended to cause to think about slave versus free. So, we have sons and daughters, they’re the “free”, and we have slaves, the bond servants. And then we get the reassertion of male and female, bond slaves but men and women.

These verses in Joel end with the repetition, “I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT,” and then Peter adds, “And they shall prophesy,” which creates a nice balance to the way this text begins and this text ends.

And this is the second feature that stands out. The first was that the Spirit is poured out on male, female, young, old, slave and free. The second is the emphasis on prophesy. The pouring out of the Spirit leads to a recognition of and communication of truth from God. The Spirit speaks through the community of believers. That is what has just happened as God poured out the Holy Spirit on the gathered community of 120. They are filled with the Spirit in order to speak truth about the mighty deeds of God. And that is emphasized with the repetition of the idea that they shall prophesy.

*Peter’s Use of Joel – The Sign of Messiah*

Now, Peter could have just ended there to explain what was going on, but he keeps going with a few more verses from Joel.

<sup>19</sup> ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE  
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,  
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.  
<sup>20</sup> ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS  
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,  
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.  
<sup>21</sup> ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

I think Peter kept going because he wanted really to get to the end, “‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED’”, because that is going to transition him into what he really wants to talk about, which is Jesus. That’s going to be the rest of his talk. But to get there, he has got to refer to the wonders above and the signs below. We could understand this prophesy of wonders above and signs below as having happened between the time of the crucifixion and this day of Pentecost. The signs below of blood and fire and smoke could refer to the blood of Christ and the fire and smoke of the Spirit. You know, as the tongues of fire rest on each one of them, like at Mount Sinai. And the wonders in the sky above could refer to the Sun going dark at the crucifixion. The Sun went dark. And maybe to a blood-red harvest Moon during this period of harvest.



But we don't have to read the prophecy of Joel as all happening at the same time. We don't have to understand these wonders and signs as coming true right now. It is all part of the same age, but the pouring out of the Spirit could occur at the beginning of the age and the Sun going dark and Moon appearing as blood could happen at the end of the age. And this is just one of the challenges of Biblical prophecies. For the prophets, looking into the far future is very much like looking at a mountain from a great distance. And you see what looks like one peak, but the closer you get, the more details stand out and you start to see that what looked like one large peak is really many peaks with valleys between.

And the prophets are often given the visions that bring everything together. But now that we have the perspective of time coming very close to these events, we see that, okay, Israel returned from exile, but then there was some time before the rebuilding of the Temple, and then there was quite a bit of time before the coming of the Messiah, and then there's a lot more time for the establishment of a New Heaven and New Earth. And so, what might come together in one prophetic vision, from our perspective of events we now see great valleys in-between the peaks. We see a first and second coming of the Messiah. That was not so clear to them. The Kingdom of the Christ has been inaugurated but the New Heaven and New Earth are not going to come until the end of the age. And personally, that's how I understand Joel's prophecy, that it's a conflation of this great age, and the pouring out of the Spirit initiates the age but the darkening of the Sun and the Moon to blood, those are going to happen at the second coming of Christ, and so it's separated by a valley of thousands of years.

And either way you look at it, the quote definitely fits Peter's aim. The fire and smoke at Pentecost and the darkened Sun at crucifixion, you know, that easily comes to mind with what he's quoting right here, whether that's the fulfillment, whether that's just suggestive of a future fulfillment, it does not really matter.

The story Luke is telling begins a new age. From this point on, the Holy Spirit will play a prominent and active role in the spread of the Church.

As Paul put it in Romans 7:6,

We have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

So, it's something new. As Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses..." The mission depends on the Holy Spirit.

While it is very tempting to take time now and discuss the things of the Spirit, the role of tongues, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit; how about the baptism of the Spirit that was mentioned earlier in chapter 1; how does the Holy Spirit work in the lives of believers to give us this power that's promised? But this is all part of Luke's story that is just being introduced. So, we're not going to take time to address those questions now, but we are going to address them. We are just going to wait and see how Luke develops these things for us.

What is clear from Luke's report here is, that through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church is born in fire and Spirit. This is no longer the wineskin of the Old Covenant established at Mount Sinai. This is the wineskin of a New Covenant made possible by the cross of Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection, and by the filling of the Holy Spirit. We cannot answer the second question of Covenant - how then shall we live? - we can't understand how to live for the Father in the grace of Jesus Christ without understanding the New Covenant work of the Holy Spirit. So, I'm really looking forward to what Luke has to show us about the Holy Spirit as the Book of Acts unfolds.

### Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 2:1-13. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. According to the text, what was the nature of the miracle that happened at Pentecost? Who performed the miracle? What did they do? Who did they affect?
3. What significance comes from the fact that God chose to pour out the Spirit at this particular feast?
4. What significance and effect comes from the fact that the crowd represents Jews from all over the Roman and Persian lands?
5. Read the beginning of Peter's speech in Acts 2:14-21. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
6. What is Peter's objective with this part of his speech? How does the first part of the quote from Joel (Acts 2:17-18) accomplish this objective?
7. How does the second part of the quote from Joel (Acts 2:19-21) work to transition Peter into what he wants to talk about in the rest of his speech?
8. How do you explain the importance of Pentecost as a moment in salvation history? What promises are fulfilled? What reality is change? What is the relationship to the cross?