

Study Guide to
“Living in the Blessing of Pentecost”
(Acts 2)

Introduction: What is Pentecost and why is it important?

Pentecost was originally known to the Jews as the “Feast of Weeks.” Pentecost occurred seven full weeks after Passover (Lev. 23:15; Deut. 16:9) and celebrated the end of the grain harvest. The name “Pentecost” (which is Greek in origin) came from the interval between Passover and Pentecost which is fifty days. It is referenced in Exod. 23:14-19 with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Ingathering (also known as the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths) and, together with them, comprise three of the five major feasts of ancient Israel (Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). At some point during Israel’s later history, it also became associated with the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In Deut. 16:10, the feast is stipulated to involve the offering by individuals of a set proportion of the harvest from that year. Leviticus 23:17–20 and Numbers 28:27–30, however, provide detailed lists of what the priests were to offer on behalf of the nation. The day of Pentecost was to be treated as a Sabbath, a day of sacred assembly in which no work was allowed. The primary focus of this feast was gratitude to God for the harvest.

Pentecost is significant for Christians because it was on the Day of Pentecost that God chose to pour out his Spirit upon the church. On that day, Peter preaches (Acts 2:16-21) and references Joel 2:28-32. Joel’s prophecy speaks of a locust plague that destroyed Israel’s crops and left Israel destitute and under famine. Joel proclaims that there will be healing and agricultural restoration (Joel 2:21-27) if everyone will come together in a sacred assembly and repent (Joel 2:12-17). After proclaiming this healing, Joel promises that the Spirit will be poured out on all people regardless of race, gender, or social status (Joel 2:28-32). Joel links abundance to spiritual restoration. The word “pour out” draws a connection between the giving of the Spirit and the coming of healing rains that will reverse the famine.

On the first Christian Pentecost (which was probably on a Sunday, the Lord’s Day), Peter proclaims that Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled in the events of that day. On that day, the Spirit was given to the church, “tongues of fire” appeared on their heads, and they spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming the Gospel in languages they had not previously known.

The events of that first Pentecost and the Spirit given on that day signal the reversal of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) and the gathering of people formerly scattered so that now believers are united by the faith in Jesus Christ in one Spirit and so should live in unity in that Spirit in the Spirit (Eph. 4:1-16).

(This definition was adapted from Adapted from Elwell, Walter A., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, (1997, c1996).

Pentecost is the last of a series of once-for-all events whereby Christ establishes his present reign in his church.

Every believer must live, serve, and minister in the blessing of Pentecost because...

I. Pentecost was the realization of God's presence.

The violent wind is an OT symbol:

- Ezekiel 37:9-14 – The wind of the breath of God blew on the bones and brought them to life
- 2 Samuel 22:16 – The “breath of God” is God’s rebuke of the earth
- Job 38 – Job gets his answer from God in a whirlwind
- In the NT, Jesus tells Nicodemus the Spirit is like the wind, blowing wherever God wills it (John 3).

Fire is also a vivid sign of God’s activity (fire was associated both with cleansing and judgment, primarily judgment):

- John the Baptist had said that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16).
- These Christians would have remembered the Burning bush (Exodus 3) and the pillar of fire that led Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 13:21f; 14:24; Num. 14:14; Neh. 9:12, 19).
- These disciples would soon be called upon to confront the unbelieving world with God’s Word, which always comes with either blessing or curse (cf. Romans 1:16-18).

This passage in Acts 2 is full of the imagery of the temple from Exodus

40. Theologian Meredith Kline writes,

The last chapters of Exodus deal with the construction of the tabernacle under the leadership of Moses and the filling of the finished structure by God’s Spirit, visibly present in the form of the cloud of glory (Exodus 40). While the resurrection accounts in the gospels record the raising up of the temple of the new covenant in the sense that Jesus himself is that temple, it is beyond the gospels in the Book of Acts that the further [fulfillment] to the conclusion of the Book of Exodus is found. *In the Pentecost-event Christ erects the temple of his church and the Holy Spirit fills the house of God (Acts 2:1 ff.).* [emphasis mine]

The earthly temple that Moses describes is now superseded by this temple erected by Christ, a temple not made with hands, which is His body. This temple, which is being built in their very midst is now filled with God’s glory through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

II. Pentecost was the expression of God’s mighty power.

The whole concept of speaking in tongues is also full of the imagery of the OT.

Throughout the OT, when the Spirit possessed men and women, they prophesied. A good example is Eldad and Meded in the camp in Numbers 11 (note also Moses' response).

Isaiah 19:18 speaks of the Messianic age by saying, "*the cities of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD Almighty.*"

Luke is very clear here that what they were speaking here were *known languages*, which *may or may not* be known to the speaker. Many of the Jews present in Jerusalem had gathered for the Pentecost celebration were from every nation under heaven and (2:8, 11) and they each heard the gospel in their own native language (tongue) (Acts 2:7-11).

III. Pentecost was the demonstration of God's inclusive grace.

Pentecost also saw the undoing of the confusion of Babel by uniting many diverse peoples into one body: the Church. The diversity of language, the scattering of the peoples of the earth is in Genesis 11:1-9 was God's judgment on the world, because of unbelief. Men sought to force their way into God's heaven on the basis of their works and God judged them and frustrated their efforts.

Pentecost is a once-for-all event unique in redemptive history having a past, a present and a future perspective. We cannot make it a standard for today without ignoring the fact that Pentecost is directly linked to a series of non-repeatable events, such as the Resurrection, Ascension and Return of Christ.

As for the past, it is the culmination of what was promised in Joel 2:28-32 and Isaiah 32:15, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh.

As for the present, those who were filled (or baptized with the Holy Spirit) on this occasion were chosen by God to experience his awesome power in the violent wind, the tongues of fire, and the inspired prophetic utterances.

As for the future, what happens here is nothing less than a reversal of God's judgment upon the world at the tower of Babel. Pentecost begins the process of the undoing of God's judgment on Babel as Jesus Christ extends his kingdom.

The kingdoms that were scattered will now be re-united in Jesus Christ and one day all nations of the world will worship and adore Him with one voice and one language.

IV. Pentecost was the beginning of God's continuing influence.

Pentecost cannot be repeated and does not need to be repeated because the Holy Spirit is ours now as a deposit, a guarantee until the ultimate redemption at Christ's return (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

The community of believers received its baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and after that event, individuals are said to experience new

fillings, or the state of “being full of the Holy Spirit.” In this age, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, occurs at the moment of conversion, and water baptism is, among other things, a sign of that Spirit baptism. In the NT, it is never repeated, nor is there a second level or stage of Christian experience that involves the receiving of the Spirit.

But what do we mean by the term “filled with the Spirit”? Luke uses this term in many different ways. While baptism occurs only once, we are told that this filling with the Holy Spirit was an event which was repeated.

- It is presented as an initial endowment for service (Acts 9:17), when giving inspired speech (Acts 4:8).
- We are told variously that filling is both a process of “being filled” (13:52) or the state of being full (Acts 6:3).
- A person already filled can receive a fresh or a continuous filling. It can be called a pouring out or a receiving (Acts 10:47).

This filling of the Spirit is always linked in Scripture to a new understanding of the Word of God, or the means of grace. In evangelism, it is linked to the Holy Spirit enabling Christians to bear witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the end of the Earth.

Conclusion: In Acts 2, we see that what was promised is fulfilled; what the prophets foretold had come to pass. God himself, in the person of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, has begun his reign through the power of the Holy Spirit. The suffering servant, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world, is not only risen but enthroned; and not only enthroned but exalted.

And now Jesus Christ baptizes his disciples in the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses. Christ will begin to extend his reign through the word in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Moses saw the glory of the Lord in the earthly temple, God’s glory is even more evident in the temple made without hands of “living stones” (1 Pet 2:5). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit indwelt the new temple, the church of the living God, and his glory is evident.

We stand this morning in the light of Pentecost. The risen and exalted Lord is in our midst through the Word and through the ordinances of the church, and we are his temple.

For Further Study:

Study the following passages and, in your Bible Study Notebook, record some of the roles the Spirit plays in the life of the believer.

- John 16:4-15
- Romans 8:1-17, 26-27
- Galatians 5:16-26
- 1 Cor. 12:1-11