

Pentecost



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 2:1–4, John 14:16, Acts 2:5–13, Joel 2:28–32, Acts 2:22–39, Ps. 110:1–3.*

Memory Text: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear” (*Acts 2:32, 33, NRSV*).

Pentecost” is from the word *pentēkostē*, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks (*Exod. 34:22*); it is also known as the Feast of the Firstfruits (*Num. 28:26*). The term means “fiftieth” and owes its usage to the fact that the feast was celebrated on the fiftieth day from the offering of the barley sheaf on the first day after the Passover. It was a day of joy and thanksgiving, when the people of Israel brought before the Lord “the firstfruits of the wheat harvest” (*Exod. 34:22, NIV*).

The feast then became a fitting symbol for the first spiritual harvest of the Christian church, when the Holy Spirit was poured out more abundantly than ever before, and three thousand people were baptized on a single day (*Acts 2:41*). Following the ascension of Jesus and His exaltation in heaven, this outpouring of the Spirit was a sudden, supernatural event that transformed the apostles from simple and obscure Galileans into men of conviction and courage who would change the world.

Pentecost often is called the birthday of the church, the time that Christ’s followers, Jews and (later) Gentiles, were legitimized as God’s new community on earth.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 14.

The Coming of the Spirit

In obedience to Jesus' command, the believers waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Spirit, and they waited amid fervent prayer, sincere repentance, and praise. When the day came, they "were all together in one place" (*Acts 2:1, ESV*), probably the same large upper room of Acts 1. Soon, however, they would move to a more public area (*Acts 2:6–13*).

Read Acts 2:1–3. What supernatural elements accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit?

The scene was intense. There was first a sudden noise from heaven like the roaring of a violent windstorm that filled the entire place, and then what looked like flames of fire appeared and rested upon those there.

In Scripture, wind and fire frequently are associated with a "theophany," or a divine manifestation (*for example, Exod. 3:2, 19:18, Deut. 4:15*). In addition, wind and fire also may be used to represent the Spirit of God (*John 3:8, Matt. 3:11*). In the case of Pentecost, whatever the precise meaning of such phenomena, they were signs introducing a unique moment in the history of salvation, the promised outpouring of the Spirit.

The Spirit always had been at work. Its influence on God's people in the Old Testament times was often revealed in a notable way, but never in its fullness. "During the patriarchal age the influence of the Holy Spirit had often been revealed in a marked manner, but never in its fullness. Now, in obedience to the word of the Saviour, the disciples offered their supplications for this gift, and in heaven Christ added His intercession. He claimed the gift of the Spirit, that He might pour it upon His people."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

John the Baptist foretold the baptism with the Spirit by the coming Messiah (*Luke 3:16; compare with Acts 11:16*), and Jesus Himself referred to it several times (*Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8*). This outpouring would be His first intercessory act before God (*John 14:16, 26; 15:26*). At Pentecost, the promise was fulfilled.

Although the baptism with the Spirit at Pentecost was a unique event related to Jesus' victory on the cross and exaltation in heaven, being filled with the Spirit is an experience to be continuously repeated in the believers' lives (*Acts 4:8, 31; 11:24; 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18*).

What evidence do you have of the Spirit's working in your life?

The Gift of Tongues

In Acts 2:4, the gift of the Spirit was manifested through speaking in tongues. Yet, this gift was only one of many different manifestations of the Spirit (*Acts 10:45, 46; 19:6*). Others include foretelling the future (*Acts 11:28*), visions (*Acts 7:55*), inspired speech (*Acts 2:8, 28:25*), healing (*Acts 3:6, 12; 5:12, 16*), and qualification for service (*Acts 6:3, 5*).

The gift of tongues at Pentecost did not occur because it is the typical or the most important evidence of the endowment of the Spirit. It was manifested in order to launch the church's world mission. That is, the calling given in Acts 1:8 required the gift of tongues. If the apostles were to cross cultural barriers and reach the ends of the earth with the gospel, they would need to be able to speak in the languages of those who needed to hear what they had to say.

Read Acts 2:5–13. What is the evidence that at Pentecost the apostles spoke in existing foreign languages?

It is estimated that in the first century there were eight to ten million Jews in the world and that up to 60 percent of them lived outside the land of Judea. Yet, many who were in Jerusalem for the feast were from foreign lands and could not speak Aramaic, the language of Judean Jews at that time.

There is no question that most converts at Pentecost were Jews from various lands who could now hear the gospel in their own native languages. That the apostles spoke in existing foreign languages, rather than in unknown ecstatic languages, is evidenced by the term *dialektos* (*Act 2:6, 8*), which means language of a nation or a region (*compare with Acts 21:40, 22:2, 26:14*). Clearly, then, they were speaking in these different languages. The miracle was that simple Galileans could now speak a language that, even hours before, they did not know. For those local Jews who witnessed the scene but were not acquainted with these languages, the only possible explanation was that the apostles were drunk, uttering strange sounds that made no sense to them. "Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine'" (*Acts 2:13, NIV*).

A powerful manifestation of God is happening before their eyes, and yet these people think it is just drunkenness? How can we be careful not to be so spiritually blind ourselves?

Peter's Sermon

The charge of drunkenness gave Peter the opportunity to explain what was happening. In his speech, the apostle first pointed to Scripture (*Acts 2:16–21*), describing the outpouring of the Spirit as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Compare Acts 2:17 with Joel 2:28. How did Peter understand the time of fulfillment of Joel's prophecy?

Joel's prophecy was about the future age of salvation (*Joel 2:32*), which would be characterized by several signs in the natural world and a lavish outpouring of the Spirit (*Joel 2:28–31*). By interpreting the Pentecost event in light of such prophecy, Peter intended to stress the historical relevance of that moment. But there is an important difference in the way he quotes Joel. Instead of Joel's introductory "afterward" (*Joel 2:28*), which pointed quite generally to the future, Peter said "in the last days" (*Acts 2:17*), indicating that the final act in the great drama of salvation had just begun. This is not, of course, a full description of last-day events but an evidence of the high sense of urgency that distinguished the early church. They did not know when the end would come but were convinced it would not take long.

Read Acts 2:22–32. What was the main point in Peter's presentation of the gospel?

After highlighting the prophetic significance of Pentecost, Peter turned to the recent events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It is the resurrection, however, that received greater emphasis, as it represented the decisive factor in the gospel story. For Peter, the resurrection was the ultimate vindication of Jesus (*Acts 2:22, 27*), and he quoted Scripture to help make his point about the meaning of the resurrection.

Because Jesus was the Messiah, He could not be detained by death. So for Peter and for all the writers of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus had become powerful evidence, not only of Jesus as the Messiah but for the whole Christian message of salvation.

With death all around us, always threatening us or our loved ones, why is the resurrection of Jesus such an important truth?

The Exaltation of Jesus

“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

In the third part of the speech, Peter went back to the issue of tongues, which had attracted the people in the first place. Instead of being drunk, which would have been strange at nine o’clock in the morning (*Acts 2:15*), the believers were speaking in tongues because the Holy Spirit had just been poured out from heaven.

Read Acts 2:33–36. What is the connection between Jesus’ exaltation at the right hand of God and the outpouring of the Spirit?

The right hand of God is a position of authority (*Ps. 110:1–3*). Peter’s argument, which he based on Scripture, is that it was because Jesus had been elevated to such a position in heaven that He poured out the Spirit upon His followers. The exaltation did not grant Jesus a status He did not have before (*John 1:1–3, 17:5*). Instead, it represented the Father’s supreme recognition of His prerogative as Lord and Savior (*Acts 2:36*).

This event actually brings us to one of the most important themes in Scripture: the cosmic conflict between good and evil. The point is that the Spirit could not fully come if Jesus were not exalted (*John 7:39*), and Jesus would not be exalted if He had not triumphed on the cross (*John 17:4, 5*). In other words, Jesus’ exaltation was the condition for the coming of the Spirit because it signified God’s approval of Jesus’ accomplishments on the cross, including the defeat of the one who had usurped the rule of this world (*John 12:31*).

The entrance of sin into the world cast a shadow upon God. Jesus’ death was necessary, not only to redeem human beings but also to vindicate God and expose Satan as a fraud. In Jesus’ ministry, the age of salvation was already at work (*Luke 4:18–21*). When He cast out demons or forgave sins, He was releasing Satan’s captives. Yet, it was the Cross that would give Him full authority to do that. So, when Christ’s self-sacrifice was authenticated in heaven, Satan had received a decisive blow, and the Spirit was being poured out to prepare a people for the coming of Christ.

The Firstfruits

Peter's hearers were cut to the heart by his words. Some of them might have been among those who asked for Jesus' crucifixion a few weeks before (*Luke 23:13–25*). But now, persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed God's appointed Messiah, they cried out in sorrow: "What shall we do?" (*Acts 2:37*).

Read Acts 2:38. What are the two basic requirements for forgiveness?

Repentance means a radical change of direction in life, a turning away from sin (*Acts 3:19, 26:20*), rather than simply a feeling of sadness or remorse. Together with faith, true repentance is a gift of God, but like all gifts, it can be rejected (*Acts 5:31–33, 26:19–21, Rom. 2:4*).

Since the time of John the Baptist, repentance was associated with baptism (*Mark 1:4*). That is, baptism became an expression of repentance, a rite symbolizing the washing away of sins and the moral regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:38, 22:16; compare with Titus 3:5–7*).

Read Acts 2:38, 39. What special promise is given to those who repent and are baptized?

The people at Pentecost were offered not only forgiveness of sins but also the fullness of the Spirit for personal growth, for service in the church, and especially for mission. This was perhaps the greatest of all blessings, for the main reason the church exists is to share the good news of the gospel (*1 Pet. 2:9*). So, from this point forward, they would have assurance of salvation and the power of the Holy Spirit, which would enable them for the mission to which the church had been called.

Why is the realization that we have “the remission of your sins” so important for anyone who wants to proclaim the gospel? After all, what hope can you offer to others in Jesus if you don’t have it yourself?

Further Thought: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost revealed a crucial truth about what happened in heaven and about how God the Father accepted Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world. The outpouring of the Spirit showed, too, that Christ's work in heaven in our behalf, based on His sacrifice on earth, was now inaugurated. These astonishing events are more manifestations of the wonderful truth that heaven and earth are connected in ways that we just can't fathom now.

"Christ's ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. . . . When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven's communication that the Redeemer's inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 39.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What of Pentecost can the church expect to experience in its life today? What is repeatable, and what is not?
- 2 Dwell more on the fact that Peter made the resurrection of Jesus such an important part of his Pentecost message. What made the resurrection even more astonishing is that whatever Jewish Messianic expectations had existed at the time, no one was expecting a Messiah to be resurrected from the dead. That was not on anyone's spiritual radar; it was not what those awaiting the coming of the Messiah had anticipated. What lessons can we learn from this about how we need to know what the Bible teaches, as opposed to whatever the latest popular teachings are?
- 3 Acts 2:38 talked about the need of baptism. Does this mean that anyone who believed in Jesus but died before being baptized must, of necessity, be lost? Justify your answer.

Best Friends

By BATDELGER BATTSETSEG

My first visit to church was in the ninth grade. The reason is rather embarrassing. I went because my best friend decided to sleep with her boyfriend.

But first my friend, Otko, asked for my advice outside our high school in Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar. I was just 16, but I was sure that she was making a bad decision. I told her not to do it. Then, just to make sure, I asked my older sister what she thought. My sister, who attended a Seventh-day Adventist church, went straight to Otko and told her to wait until she got married.

Otko was furious that I had revealed her secret. She said bad things about me to my classmates, and they started to ignore me. In a single week, I lost my best friend and all my friends at school.

I felt so lonely. I asked my sister if I could go with her to church. The people at church welcomed me. They were warm and friendly, and they taught me about God. After a few months, my classmates slowly began to talk to me again. They noticed that I was going to church, and they asked, "What are you doing? Why are you going to church?" I told them that I was becoming a Christian.

But I wasn't so open with my parents. My parents are Buddhists, as are most people in Mongolia, and they were angry about my interest in Christianity. I kept attending church every Sabbath, but I hid that from my parents. Eventually I told the truth and discovered that my parents had known all along. They accepted my decision to get baptized.

A year and a half after Otko stopped being my friend, she came to my house one evening to acknowledge that I had been right. She sadly told me that she had gotten pregnant and had had an abortion. "But," she said, "You are a heavenly person. I don't want to lose you as a friend. I'm willing to even die for you."

Otko didn't know it, but her words are also in the Bible. In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (NKJV).

Otko and I are good friends to this day, but my best Friend gave His life for me.



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