

# The Holy Spirit Fills the Believers

Acts 2:1-21

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Today we are continuing our sermons series through the Book of Acts.

We heard earlier a scripture reading from Genesis 11, where God broke up the rebellion of proud human beings.

He caused them to speak different languages, and scattered them all over the planet.

But God also had a plan to reunite humanity in Jesus, and that's what today's scripture passage is about.

We will see in today's text that representatives from many nations gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

Jesus chose that holiday to send the Holy Spirit, to fill the members of His church with His presence.

Then His people began to tell diverse people groups the good news about Jesus and the path of salvation.

Pentecost was truly the launch of the global spread of the gospel.

Let's look together now to Acts 2:1-21.

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

7 Utterly amazed, they asked:

“Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites;

residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--

we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you;

listen carefully to what I say.

15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose.

It's only nine in the morning!

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 “ ‘In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

*Together we read Isaiah 40:8:*

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth.

Jesus, we worship you because you are full of mercy and love.

Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God, amen.

Pentecost was a Jewish festival celebrated every summer, 50 days after Passover began.

Pentecost was a busy time in Jerusalem, when Jewish people from all over the world came to celebrate together.

In Acts 2:5 we read that:

“there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.”

On this map you can see where the people came from.

Some Jews lived in these places because they moved there voluntarily.

Many others were scattered when Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

But when possible, many Jews traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

When the visitors arrived for this Pentecost, they didn't know that 120 disciples of Jesus were also there.

They were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Jesus made them wait for 10 days, until thousands of Jews from many nations arrived.

And that was when God the Father, and God the Son, sent God the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit arrived, there was wind and fire.

Look again at verses 1-2:

1 "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting."

Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were major languages spoken in the region 2,000 years ago.

In all three of those languages, the word for "wind" is also used for "spirit."

In Hebrew the word is RUACH.

In Greek it is PNEUMA.

The Latin word is SPIRITUS.

If you look through the Old Testament, you frequently find this connection between the Holy Spirit and wind.

The Holy Spirit was present at the beginning of creation.

Listen to Genesis 1:1-2.

1 "In the beginning God created the sky and the earth.

2 The earth was empty and had no form.

Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit was moving over the water."

The Holy Spirit was the breath of God, moving like a wind over the water.

Then in the next chapter we read this in Genesis 2:7.

7 "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

The Holy Spirit was the breath of God that blew life to Adam.

Therefore, in Acts chapter 2 Luke was not describing a meteorological event when he wrote about the wind.

Luke was saying that the wind was actually the Holy Spirit who rushed into the room where the disciples were praying.

Look at what Luke wrote next, in verse 3:

3 "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

Like the wind, fire was an Old Testament sign of God's presence among his people.

God appeared in a burning bush when he spoke to Moses.

God appeared in fire on Mount Sinai when he gave his people the 10 Commandments.

Later, God told the people to prepare a place where he could meet with them.

Listen to how God appeared at the tabernacle, in Exodus 40:38.

38 "For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night;

in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys."

That tent of meeting in the desert was later replaced by the temple in Jerusalem.

Here is what I want you to see:

When God appeared to his people in fire in the past, it was always in one location.

But notice what happened in today's scripture passage, in verse 3:

3 "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

The fire separated because when the Holy Spirit arrived on Pentecost, Jesus sent His Spirit to each individual believer.

My friends, if you want to speak to God, you don't have to travel to a temple or a church.

Instead, we together are the temple of God.

The apostle Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:16.

16 "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"

Each of you is important my friends, with your beautiful skin colors, and accents, and cultures.

Because the Holy Spirit lives in us and builds us into one temple.

God no longer meets with his people at one temple in one city.

Instead, the Holy Spirit now goes with his people anywhere we go.

At Pentecost, God was preparing the early church to expand all over the planet.

To do that, he created one mobile human temple--

made of diverse people, each filled with the Holy Spirit.

Look with me again at verses 4-12.

4 "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

7 Utterly amazed, they asked:

“Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?

8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

... 11b --we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?””

Can you picture in your mind what was happening here?

Thousands of visitors were filling the streets of Jerusalem.

Suddenly they heard the rushing wind, and the sound of the disciples speaking in many different languages.

They heard Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and other languages from Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Today we have amazing technology that provides you with translation of our sermons.

And your phones have apps like Google Translate that are very helpful.

But the visitors to Jerusalem on Pentecost didn't have Google Translate.

They were amazed and confused when they heard the apostles speaking different languages.

But the focus here is not the different languages that the disciples spoke.

The focus is the message that they spoke.

The visitors said in verse 11b—

"we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

If you forget everything else you hear tonight, remember this.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost for two reasons.

Jesus wanted each individual disciple to be filled with the Spirit, so we can have hope, power, and understanding.

The second reason Jesus sent the Spirit was to make the Great Commission possible.

Remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8--

8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The early church had a mission, and they needed the Holy Spirit to do it.

Soon after Pentecost, a great persecution broke out against Christians.

The believers in Jerusalem were afraid and hid in their homes.

But they couldn't stay there in Jerusalem.

Jesus used the persecution to send his people out to the nations.

Listen to what Luke reports in Acts 8:4,5,8.

4 "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there...

8 So there was great joy in that city."

The believers in Jerusalem were scattered because God wanted them to go forth and spread the Gospel.

That was the purpose of the gift of languages at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to speak foreign languages, so visiting Jews from all over the world could hear the Gospel.

Next week we will look at what Peter said next.

Peter delivered perhaps the most important sermon in the history of the church, and 3000 foreign visitors believed in Christ!

And then they went back to their home countries.

But they went home transformed.

They had traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, but they returned home with new life and new purpose.

Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 13:10-11.

10 "And the gospel must be preached to all nations.

11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say.

Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

Are you sometimes nervous about sharing the gospel?

I am nervous sometimes, and sharing the gospel is my job!

Sometimes I worry that I will say the wrong thing, or people will reject me because they don't want to hear about Jesus.

But remember that if someone rejects the gospel message, it is Jesus they are rejecting, not you.

And when you are nervous about what to say, remember this promise from Jesus.

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, then you are filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will help you find the right words, the way He helped the believers 2,000 years ago.

I want to tell you one more reason why the Holy Spirit appeared as fire on Pentecost.

Before electricity existed, fire was used for heat, and cooking, and for light.

For most of human history, fire was the only source of light available after sunset.

When there is light you can see.

That's why light is a metaphor for knowledge and understanding.

Listen to this prophecy about Jesus the Messiah from Isaiah 60:19.

"No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light;

but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory."

Before healing a blind man Jesus said in John 9:5--

"While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

Later Jesus said:

"I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness" (John 12:46).

The Holy Spirit appeared as fire on Pentecost to bring light to the minds of the disciples.

The Holy Spirit filled them with understanding to see the Bible in new ways.


And if you ask the Spirit to open your mind, He will help you understand the Bible when you read it.

Remember that the apostles were praying and studying scripture when the Holy Spirit arrived.

That's why Peter could understand that the prophet Joel was speaking about current events.

Listen again to how Peter responded to the confused crowd who heard the disciples speaking in many languages.

Acts 2:14-21 says:

 One Voice Fellowship

14 "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you;  
listen carefully to what I say.  
15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose.  
It's only nine in the morning!  
16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:  
17 " 'In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.  
19 I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
20 The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
21 And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

We saw last week how God helped Peter understand the poetry of David and apply it to the traitor Judas.

God also used the psalms of David to show Peter and the other apostles that they should replace Judas with Mathias.

Now in these verses, we see how the Holy Spirit helped Peter understand Pentecost through the words of the prophet Joel.

Next week, we will look at the rest of Peter's sermon in Acts 2.

We will see that 3,000 people called on the name of the Lord and were saved.

Visitors from many nations became believers in Jesus that same day, so they could carry the good news of salvation with them when they left Jerusalem.

I'm excited to continue studying this book together with you in the months ahead, my friends.

For now, let's pray together about what we have seen today.

Jesus, thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to that small group of 120 believers 2,000 years ago.

Thank you for opening the minds of those 3,000 visitors to Jerusalem, so they could carry the gospel message back to their homelands.

And thank you for my friends here, who have come from many nations.

Please fill us with the Holy Spirit, so we can be transformed by the gospel.

And so we can go share the good news with everyone around us.

We ask this in your holy name, Jesus, amen.