

Study 2 The Book of Acts. The birth of the church through the Holy Spirit

Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2 the waiting Jesus requested is over for the disciples. The Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised arrives. The Spirit comes on a day many Jews from around the world gathered to celebrate Pentecost, the second of three great annual festivals for the Jews. The other two are Passover and The Feast of Tabernacles. Pentecost was the celebration of the Wheat harvest and many Jewish pilgrims were in the city of Jerusalem to bring their sacrifices.

The Holy Spirit comes with signs and sounds like that of a mighty wind and what seemed like tongues of fire that came to rest on each of them, likely to be the 120 mentioned in Chapter 1. The Holy Spirit's presence would have had an enormous impact on them.

The unique feature of the Spirits coming on Pentecost is in the ability of those who received the Spirit to speak in other languages, something that is significant since there were Jews from all around the world gathered in Jerusalem. They hear them praising God in their own home language rather than in native Hebrew or Aramaic language. This is an important insight into the Holy Spirit's work as God blesses the individual and those around them.

With the crowds confused and some thinking they are drunk, Peter addresses the crowd who became curious after hearing the sound of the Spirit's and the disciples praising God.

Peter explains the Spirit's coming from the book of Joel in the Old Testament where the promise of God is to pour out his Spirit on all people in the last days. A new day has dawned where it is not just the Kings and Prophets and Priests and teachers of the Law who know God and will be his spokesperson, but everyone, young and old men and women. What this means is everyone will be capable of speaking on God's behalf.

Just as Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God in his ministry, now the church will continue what Jesus had begun through their life and ministry.

In the next section from verses 22 to 41 Peter explains the coming of the Holy Spirit by reminding the crowd of Jesus, whose life was accredited by God with miracles and who died at the hands of the Jews and Romans according to the plan of God. And God raised him up, culminating in Jesus being declared Lord and Christ. Peter confirms that it is Jesus who has given the Holy Spirit; that they have just now witnessed.

After hearing this about Jesus, the crowd asks how they shall respond. Peter calls them to repent to turn back to God, to be baptised in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of sins and then they too will receive the gift of the Spirit which is for them and their children. Peter pleads with them to do this and three thousand do so and join the others.

The last passage speaks of the early churches activities as they:

- a. Listened and learnt from the apostles.
- b. Shared in fellowship of the Holy Spirit and what it means now to belong to this new community.
- c. Break bread together (most likely more of a common meal, but possibly communion).

- d. Devote themselves to prayer. A common Jewish practice now including the new revelation of the Holy Spirit and all that this means.

Other features are noted:

1. The apostles continuing the miracles of Jesus.
2. Their unity and devotion is described in being all together sharing everything in common. This included selling their possessions in order to help those in need.
3. They continued to meet regularly in both homes and in the Temple courts reminding us that they were Jews who still saw the Temple as their spiritual home.
4. There is a real sense of joy and excitement in the birth of the church and its early days in Jerusalem. The church continued to grow daily as the Holy Spirit continued to spread beyond those who had first gathered.

In summary everything that happens in Chapter 2 is seen as a continuing on of the ministry and life of Jesus, now through his disciples and followers. We can see how the apostles were the leaders of the new church called and set apart by Jesus.

The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the church in its life and mission. That the disciples spoke other languages will come up again in the book of Acts and in the letter of Paul to the church at Corinth. From the first giving of the Holy Spirit we can see how the Holy Spirit has benefits both personally to those who received the Spirit and in a missional way as others heard the disciples praising God in languages of their home country.

We can see how very early on, the formation of the church led to incredible sharing among its members and their commitment to meeting together for learning, fellowship, prayer and encouragement.

Gathering (church) is the way we grow both ourselves and in the mission God calls us to.

Questions and thoughts for reflection.

1. There are different schools of thought in the church between studying the Holy Spirit and experiencing the Holy Spirit. What is your view on this?
2. Some see here in Acts Chapter 2 with the giving of the Holy Spirit, a relationship with the Tower of Babel in Genesis Chapter 11 where God reverses the confusion among the nations with a new unity in the Spirit. What do you think?
3. There is considerable debate in the church about when the "Last days" begin. What do you think Pentecost means in this regard?
4. God's spirit is given to all people. How is this significant for us?
5. What role do you see speaking in other languages as the Spirit enabled has today?
6. How do you respond to someone who says you do not have to go to church to be a Christian?