

## Commentary

- 1 Pentecost is a Jewish festival, the Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15-22) to be held fifty days (hence 'Pente-') after Passover. It was a Harvest Festival marking the completion of the barley harvest (and certainly this idea of 'completion' from the festival is picked up in 2:17f). But it also came to be treated as the anniversary of the giving of the law at Sinai. So some people have suggested that, just as in the Jewish calendar, after the redemption of the Passover came the giving of the old covenant sign (the law) ... so for Christians, after our redemption by Jesus' death at Passover comes the giving of the new covenant sign (the Spirit) (cf Ezek 36:26-27 for the same idea of law -> Spirit).
- 2-3 The physical phenomena which accompany the giving of the Spirit may seem strange. Here are three possible explanations. First, *wind* (cf 1 Kings 19:11; 2 Sam 22:16; Ps 18:7-15 and 33:6; Ezek 13:13 and 37:9-10; Jn 3:8) and *fire* (cf Ex 19:18; Isaiah 66:15) accompany God's appearance and powerful activity in the OT. Second, *wind* and *fire* are exactly how Luke quotes John the Baptist's description of what the Spirit's coming would be like (cf Luke 3:16). Third, Peter's explanation of the event is to refer the crowd back to Joel 2 (cf 'this is that' in Acts 2:16): all kinds of unusual phenomena were predicted there (19-20).
- 4 What are these *tongues* (4, 11)? It seems very unlikely that these are the same as the 'tongues' referred to in 1 Cor 12-14 which are, according to 14:2, (a) a means of speaking to God and not people, and (b) incomprehensible without interpretation (cf 14:6-19) (whereas in Acts 2 the whole point is that interpretation isn't needed!). The word translated *language* in 8 is the word *dialect*, further emphasising that these were the normal everyday languages of all the different groups in the crowd. Although there must have been an amazing hubbub of noise (with 120 people speaking out at once!), incredibly everyone could hear ... possibly as much of a miracle as the miracle of speaking! God clearly wanted everyone there to hear about the mighty works of God.
- But what were the disciples actually saying: was this missional preaching or praising? Presumably Peter's sermon from v22 gives us some indication of the content: it was full of statements about Jesus, and in particular that he is the one God has made Lord and Christ. It would also fit the important 1:8 that, once filled with the Spirit, they became witnesses to Jesus. On the other hand, look at the crowd's reaction in 11b. There is a strong theme in the OT that when God's people praise him before a watching/hearing world, that is part of promoting the gospel, implying a call to join in (cf Psalm 96:1-9 and Ps 66; 117; 1 Kings 8:41-43; 1 Peter 2:9). Perhaps there is not such a great distinction between these two ... to *tell the mighty works of God* as they are worked out in the person and work of Jesus is evangelistic.
- 9-11 In Genesis 11:1-9, language was confused (so that different groups of people couldn't easily understand one another) as God's punishment on

Babel's attempts to order the world around a God-excluding, man-exalting unity. Here in Acts 2, God undoes that judgement so that different nationalities can now all hear a God-exalting witness to Jesus. It's possible, then, that the list of people-groups (in 9-11) is equivalent to the so-called Table of Nations in Gen 10. Of course, different languages remain in Acts 2, so this is at best a prefiguring of God's 'plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Jesus' (Eph 1:9-10) so that before his throne and before the Lamb, there will be 'a great multitude drawn from every nation, tribe, people and language' (Rev 7:9-10). What we have in Acts 2 is God, through the proclamation of Jesus, indicating his ultimate purpose to undo his judgement in heaven.

However, we might ask why this link to Babel is not made explicit in the Bible. Any verbal link is probably through the word 'confused': the crowd at Babel was 'confused' by a multiplicity of languages, at Pentecost they were 'confused' by hearing their own language!

- 14-21 What Peter now gives is an explanation: 'this is that' which Joel described. In the OT, the Spirit only came on certain people at certain times for particular tasks. The blessing of the new covenant is that the Spirit is now freely distributed to all (so that every believer has the Spirit dwelling in him for ever cf Rom 8:9-11). Because every believer has the Spirit, every believer has knowledge of God (*see visions* cf 1 Cor 2:6-16), so every believer can speak out for God (*prophecy*). Every Christian can (and should!) declare *the mighty works of God* (11).

The Spirit poured out like this is a sure sign that God's end-time restoration has begun. So, we must be in *the last days* (17) before *the Day of the Lord* (20), when God will judge the nations (cf Joel 3:1-15). Joel is full of dreadful pictures of what that Day will be like, so 21 is wonderful news of escape: 'call on the name of the Lord to be saved'.

- 17-36 20% of *Acts* is given over to speeches/sermons/defences of the gospel. For a book that is called 'Acts' it's surprising how much is 'Words'! Reading these will make us clearer on what the gospel is. Luke rarely repeats himself, so as the book goes on, his summaries of what was 'typically' preached become more concise. For example, the first full-blown evangelistic sermon is 22 verses (2:14-36), then 14 (3:12-26), then 5 (4:8-11, 19-20), then 3 (5:29-32). The condensed version is: *you* killed him; *God* raised him; *we* saw him. For those not at the crucifixion (eg 10:36-41), it's adapted to: some information about who Jesus was; *they* (not *you*) killed him; *God* raised him; *we* saw him. Later when Paul preaches it to Jews and Gentiles (in 13:16-42), it's adapted still further: a longer OT background about the Messiah, then some information about who Jesus was; *they* (not *you*) killed him; *God* raised him; *they* (not *we*) saw him.

With that background, let's see the setting for that gospel summary here. The end of the quotation from Joel (21) encourages us to call on the name of the Lord to be saved ... which begs the question 'which Lord?' Peter's answer is in v22-36 leading to the conclusion: God has made this Jesus I've been describing the Lord you should call on (36).

## Group Study Outline

### Acts 2:1-21 Theme Sentence

God keeps his promise to send power on his disciples, and they become his witnesses.

#### Launching Question:

Give examples of things that are powerful (eg super-cars, power tools, etc)  
What would a church need to look like if the world were to call it 'powerful'?

#### READ Acts 2:1-13

Set the scene from chapter 1 (*collect ideas eg the apostolic team is completed, and they've received Christ's commission; now the 'witnesses' wait for 'power'.*)

What happens?

What does it sound like?

Where does the sound come from (2)? why is that significant? (1:11 cf Jn 16:7)

What does it look like?

Why do you think God sends these physical phenomena?

*God appears in the OT with wind and fire (cf notes for references)*

*Luke 3:16*

In what way is the promise of 1:4-5 fulfilled?

In what way is the promise of 1:8 fulfilled?

Who is in the crowd? (a) Jews; (b) many nationalities

What do they hear? (a) their own language or 'dialect' (6); (b) about 'the mighty works of God' (11)

#### TURN TO Genesis 11:1-9

What is the origin of different languages according to this story? Why do we speak differently from the French, Spanish or Chinese?!

So what is the significance of what happens in Acts 2? (*although it's still different languages here, this seems to prefigure Eph 1:9-10; Rev 7:9-10*)

(OR, more explicitly) When does God lift his judgement from the nations?

#### READ Acts 2:14-21

What is the answer to the question of 2:12? What does it mean?

How is Joel being fulfilled on the Acts Day of Pentecost?

In what ways do the events of Acts 2:1-13 fulfil Joel 2:28-32?

#### Thinking it through

(Cf *Launching Question*) What does a Holy-Spirit-powerful church look like?

What should our response be to this, as we compare ourselves with Acts 2?

In what ways are we 'witnesses' who can tell 'the mighty works of God'?

How is God's programme of 1:8 already being fulfilled?

What does that tell us about God's priorities? and about how he uses his power?

What is our part in God's plan to turn Babel (Gen 11:1-9) into heaven (Rev 7:9-10)?

# Acts 2:1-21



## Intro

If *Luke* was the story of what Jesus began to do and teach, *Acts* is what Jesus did next. He had previously promised his disciples that it would be better for them if he returned to heaven, because he could then send the Holy Spirit to them (John 16:7). Acts 1:4-5, 8 repeats that promise of the sending of the Spirit ... and explains why this will be better: they'll receive power to fulfil Jesus' commission to be his witnesses 'in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'.

So, **1:8 is the key verse**, giving us a four-fold structure to *Acts*:

- the giving of power (roughly, chapters 1-2);
- Jerusalem (3-7);
- Judea and Samaria (8-9);
- the ends of the earth (10 to the end, where the gospel reaches Rome).

In other words, the book will show the unstoppable progress of the gospel as it leaps over all kinds of hurdles to reach people right around the globe.

Acts 2 starts that unstoppable progress. The Spirit comes, so power comes to equip the disciples to be Jesus' witnesses ... and the incredible result is that a multinational, multilingual crowd all hear the gospel in their own language. It's difficult to think of a clearer visual aid of God's priorities unfolding. In other words, the work of the Spirit in *Acts* is **to push the church outward in new missionary activity**, and this activity is focussed on **telling people about Jesus** (and even Peter's Pentecost sermon is about Jesus, not the Holy Spirit!)

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### Acts 2:1-21 Theme Sentence

God keeps his promise to send power on his disciples, and they become his witnesses.

## Application

- When God commissions his people, he equips them for the task. We can see God's priority and plan in what he equips his people to go and do. We rely on him to enable us to do what he tells us to go and do. So everything we do as a church is really what Jesus is continuing to do.
- Is our church full of the Holy Spirit? ... here's the way to tell: heaven-sent power sounds like people speaking out as witnesses to Jesus. How are we as a church being pushed outward in new missionary activity?
- In what ways are we working out God's purpose to see the gospel spread 'to the ends of the earth'? Are there ways we could do more? How?