



Acts of the Apostles - Lesson 2A

Chapter 2 1:13

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- Chapter of Acts is probably one of the more famous chapters of the New Testament
 - And justifiably so, for in this chapter we see the birth of the Church
 - This chapter has four primary sections
 - There are two primary events
 - The arrival of the Holy Spirit
 - The sermon by Peter
 - And there are two consequences that follow from each of these events
 - The manifestation of the Spirit among the Body of believers
 - And the response of the Church to Peter's sermon
 - As we said last week, Acts is a book of transitions and it wasn't written as a book of theology or even necessarily of church practice
 - And the events of Chapter 2 in particular are extraordinary and unprecedented
 - The first of these events is the arrival of the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Acts 2:3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

- Luke opens with a very telling phrase
 - When the day of Pentecost has come
 - The phrase “had come” literally translates “to fulfill completely”
 - So Luke begins “when the day of Pentecost was fulfilled completely...”
 - Luke is saying more than you might have assumed
 - The day of Pentecost is actually a Jewish Feast called the Feast of Weeks or First Fruits
 - It was established in Exodus 34 and later in Numbers 28 and was to be observed for 50 days following Passover
 - Hellenistic Jews gave it the title Pentecost which means 50th day
 - The feast commemorated the day the nation of Israel received the Law at Mount Sinai
- Luke prefaces his description of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 2 by announcing that the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled completely by the events of this chapter
 - If we look at the parallels between the events of Exodus and the events of Acts 2, we see what Luke was saying

- In Exodus, the day of Pentecost followed 50 days after the Passover
 - The Passover itself was a forerunner of Christ's sacrifice on the cross
 - So in Exodus, God's people were set free from slavery and saved from death by the sacrifice of a spotless lamb
 - And the blood of that lamb was their covering
 - Then 50 days later, God's people were alone in the desert, fearful, waiting for God to direct them and guide them
 - At that point, God gave His people a Law written on stone
 - And this Law was their guide to righteous living
 - And the giving of that Law was accompanied by great signs and wonders and miraculous events
- Now moving to the book of Acts, the day of Pentecost follows 50 days after Easter
 - Easter is the day that the Passover celebration was completely fulfilled
 - The Passover of the Old Testament was merely a shadow or picture of the greater fulfillment found in Christ's sacrifice
 - This was the day when God set all His children free from the slavery of sin and death by the sacrifice of His sinless son, the Lamb of God
 - Our sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb
 - Then 50 days later, God's people are alone, fearful and awaiting direction from God
 - And at this point, God sends the Holy Spirit to men so that a Law may be written on their hearts
 - And the giving of the Spirit became the means for righteous living
 - And the giving of the Spirit is accompanied by great wonders and signs and miracles
- There is a "lesser to greater" relationship between the giving of these events in their original forms and the ultimate fulfillment in their later forms
 - This is a general pattern you will find in all the feasts of Israel
 - The earlier is a shadow of the later, greater fulfillment
 - The first points to the second, and the second event was the one in view from the beginning
 - So here, Luke says we are seeing the true fulfillment of the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost
- At this moment, all the disciples are still together, probably in the upper room because it says "house" in v.2
 - Then a miraculous, unique manifestation took place
 - First there was a sound of a rushing wind
 - Notice that the text doesn't say it was a wind, only the sound of a wind
 - The people in the room aren't thrown around or knocked over by a wind
 - It's only the sound of a wind

- Wind is a common picture of the movement or work of the Holy Spirit
 - Most clearly seen in John 3:8

John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- Secondly, there are tongues of fire that appeared to distribute themselves among the people in the room, one tongue of flame per person
 - In the Greek, the description here is particularly vivid
 - A cluster of licking flames appears and then seems to separate apart
 - And each flickering flame moves toward a different person in the room
 - Here again fire is associated with the Holy Spirit
 - Christ Himself makes that comparison in Luke 3:16

Luke 3:16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

- The arrival of the tongues of fire demonstrate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each believer in that room
 - And the indwelling was made visibly evident by the fire
 - Making clear that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the baptism of fire
 - These are synonymous terms in the Bible
 - Next Luke says these men were filled by the Holy Spirit
 - This is a different experience than the indwelling of the Spirit which occurred in v.2
 - The word filled implies controlled (as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:18)
 - So after the indwelling, these men became controlled by the Holy Spirit
- Then the men under the control of the Spirit spontaneously begin speaking in languages they didn’t know a moment earlier
 - When the Bible uses the word “tongues” to describe language, it’s referring to normal, understandable human language
 - English, Spanish, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, etc...
 - It doesn’t mean babbling nonsense words
 - It doesn’t necessarily mean a dead or unknown language
 - It simply means speaking a real, knowable language that the speaker didn’t know beforehand
 - The miracle is found in the simple fact that a person is suddenly able to speak a language they’ve never spoken before

- What's the significance of speaking in a foreign language?
 - Why did God chose to use this strange manifestation to mark the indwelling of the Spirit at Pentecost?
 - Consider the origin of multiple languages
 - When men were rebelling at the tower of Babel, they were seeking a way to unite themselves in the power of the flesh
 - They were trying "to reach God" according to Genesis
 - But they were doing it in the sin of their flesh
 - So God frustrated their efforts by confusing the language and scattering them
- Now God is producing the opposite effect
 - He is uniting a group of men who had previously spoken different tongues
 - Now they're speaking in tongues they didn't know previously, and suddenly language wasn't a barrier anymore, at least for this moment
- More over, the arrival of the Spirit meant that a spiritual uniting of these believers was taking place
 - Where before men were striving to unite in the flesh and reach God
 - Now they were being joined together by the Spirit as God reached out to them
 - Before their efforts were frustrated by a separating of the languages
 - Here God is bringing them together by uniting their languages
- God chooses to bring about speaking in tongues to send an unmistakable message that this moment is a time of reconciliation among men
- So before we move to the next section, let's stop to ask the obvious question:
 - Why did these events accompany the indwelling of Holy Spirit, and why don't they happen to all believers?
 - First, all believers do share in the key event of this moment
 - Jesus and the Apostles all taught that all believers receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a result of coming to faith in the Gospel
 - And that baptism ushers us into the family of God
 - But we also know that by and large Christians don't experience miraculous manifestations like those described here when we believe
 - We don't hear the sound of a violent rushing wind
 - We don't see tongues of fire arriving and diving into our bodies
 - We don't find ourselves falling under control of the Spirit and our mouths beginning to speak a foreign language
 - So the question is why did God find it necessary to bring these manifestations at Pentecost?
- Place yourself as an observer in the upper room as the Spirit arrived
 - Remember, you have no understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this

new age

- Try to remember that you would have had no idea what to expect or even that the event was coming
- Then you see these miraculous, powerful displays
 - You hear a powerful wind, but you don't feel even a breeze
 - You then see a fire ball in the room, and then the fire breaks apart and divides itself into each person in the room
 - But the fire doesn't burn you
 - It just appears to go into each person
 - Finally, the body begins to do things on its own, including speaking in foreign languages
- As you watch this happening, what do you conclude?
 - Something has happened
 - God has entered each person and has begun to control their behavior
- Now pretend the first indwelling of the Holy Spirit had arrived in the same way that He comes to us today
 - That is to say, what if the Holy Spirit had arrived silently?
 - What if the only effect of the Spirit's arrival had been the fruit He produced in believers' lives over time?
 - Simply put, you would have never known it happened, at least not for some time
 - And there would likely still be Christians today arguing whether the indwelling of the Spirit was even possible much less universal
- God desired to make His presence in the lives of these believers clearly evident in that day
 - But it's equally obvious that God didn't intend to continue these manifestations for all believers after He had made His point
 - Signs like this served their purpose in their day
 - Once the point has been made, it doesn't require God to make that same point over and over again
 - Finally, when we understand the significance of this moment in the history of God's dealing with men, we can put the entire scene in perspective
 - Pentecost was a pivotal moment when God sent His Spirit to permanently indwell all His children
 - Prior to this moment the Spirit only chose to indwell some men, sometimes for only a short time
 - It wasn't used as a universal mark of faith
 - Now in Acts 2 God ushers in a new dispensation in God's administration of mankind
 - All of God's children would receive something previously reserved for only a few, usually priests, prophets or kings

- And the indwelling would be a permanent gift intended to bring sanctification
 - Third, this indwelling would unite men and women through a common Spirit and purpose as the Bride of Christ
 - Fourth, it brought access to supernatural power through spiritual gifts previously available only to a few chosen
 - Fifth, for the first time we see God's Spirit reach out to Gentiles and unite them with Jews
 - Finally, the arrival of the Spirit opened the door for the preaching of the Gospel to the world
- With all these purposes being accomplished in this moment, should we be surprised that God would treat the moment in a special way, showing Himself in a unique way?
 - And likewise, once the precedent had been established, should we expect Him to repeat this experience every time another person is ushered into the family of God?
 - For example, the nation of Israel saw miraculous displays when God delivered the Word of God to them for the first time at the Mountain
 - But did God repeat those miraculous displays every time another child was born into Israel and received instruction in the Law?
 - Or did the mountain shake and pillars of fire appear every time a foreigner received circumcision and enter the assembly of Israel?
 - Of course not
 - Similarly, should we expect God to repeat the first experience every time a new believer receives the Spirit and enters the Body of Christ?
 - No
 - And so we should not seek after such displays nor teach that they are the expected norm simply because it happened in the early church
- Now we said the chapter had four divisions, so let's move to the second division: the peoples' response to what they've witnessed

Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.

Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

Acts 2:7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

Acts 2:8 "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"

Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around

Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs — we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”

- The second section describes the effects of this display of the Spirit upon others in the city of Jerusalem
 - Based on vs.5-6, here’s what we can assume has happened
 - The group in the upper room experienced the arrival of the Spirit and then began speaking in foreign languages
 - Though we can’t know exactly what they were saying, the text in v.11 says they were speaking of the mighty works of God
 - Most likely they were declaring the saving work of God in history and of the Gospel all the while praising the Lord
 - As their excitement spills over, they pour out of the upper room and into the crowded streets of Jerusalem on Pentecost
 - Out in public, the sound of their voices draws attention
 - The Greek word for sound in v.6 is different than the word in v.2 indicating that it wasn’t the sound of the wind that drew the crowd
 - It was the sound of the men speak in a multitude of foreign languages
 - In the crowd were a large number of Jews and a few Gentile converts visiting from countries outside the land of Israel
 - This was common in that day because Passover and Pentecost were both feasts that Jewish men were required to observe in Jerusalem
 - Jews living in the land simply left after Passover and returned again 50 days later for Pentecost
 - But Jews living outside the land would stay over for the 50 days waiting for Pentecost
 - That meant there would be a large number of foreign speaking Jews hanging around the city during this time
- In v. 6 we see a description of these men as they watch the disciples speaking in foreign tongues
 - They can hear the disciples speaking in their own foreign languages
 - And they were bewildered because they couldn’t understand how these residents of the Galilee were able to speak their native tongues
 - They probably knew these men were Galilean either by their appearance or by their accent
 - Galileans were said to have a distinct accent, which would have been apparent even as they spoke a foreign language
 - In vs.9-10, we see the list of countries representing the nationalities present

- Based on these countries, we can know the languages being spoken in the moment
 - There would have been Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Nabeteian
- This reminds us that speaking in tongues means speaking in a real, recognizable language
 - Any attempt to fake this gift only results in silly gibberish that no one could understand since it's not a real language
- Now look at the effect this scene had on the crowd
 - Among the visiting Jews, it caused them to puzzle and ask questions of the meaning of this miracle
 - They recognized it was important and supernatural but they didn't understand the meaning
 - The second group seem by comparison to be local Jews, who just mock the event as drunkards
 - They don't ask questions because they doubt the significance of the event
 - Both these groups are unbelievers who are seeing this manifestation of God, with some responding with an open heart and others responding by mocking
 - Paul explained how God used this unique display

1Cor. 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

1Cor. 14:21 In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord.

1Cor. 14:22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

- Quoting from Isaiah 28:11, Paul says this gift was given to fulfill prophecy given to Israel
 - God told Israel they would know when God was judging them when they saw Him opening the mouths of Gentiles to speak in foreign tongues
 - Here we see the beginning of that prophecy, when unbelievers respond to signs by questioning it and looking for answers
 - Even as some turn their backs
- To this receptive and inquisitive crowd, Peter will begin to preach, and his preaching forms the final two sections of the chapter