

Chapter 2

POWER FROM HEAVEN!

Acts 2

The early church had none of the things that we think are so essential for success today—buildings, money, political influence, social status—and yet the church won multitudes to Christ and saw many churches established throughout the Roman world. Why? Because the church had the power of the Holy Spirit energizing its ministry. They were a people who “were ignited by the Spirit of God.”

That same Holy Spirit power is available to us today to make us more effective witnesses for Christ. The better we understand His working at Pentecost, the better we will be able to relate to Him and experience His power. The ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Christ in the life and witness of the believer (John 16:14), and that is what is important. Acts 2 helps us understand the Holy Spirit by recording four experiences in the life of the church.

A. The Church Waiting for the Spirit (Acts 2:1)

1. Pentecost means “fiftieth” because this feast was held fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:15–22). The calendar of Jewish feasts in Leviticus 23 is an outline of the work of Jesus Christ.

- Passover pictures His death as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7)
- The Feast of Firstfruits pictures His resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20–23).
- Fifty days after Firstfruits is the Feast of Pentecost, which pictures the formation of the church.
- At Pentecost, the Jews celebrated the giving of the Law, but Christians celebrate it because of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church.

2. The Feast of Firstfruits took place on the day after the Sabbath following Passover, which means it was always on the first day of the week.

- Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week and “became the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20).
- Pentecost also took place on the first day of the week.

- Christians assemble and worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, because on that day our Lord arose from the dead, but it was also the day on which the Holy Spirit was given to the church.

The Feast of Firstfruits, the priest waved a sheaf of grain before the Lord; but on Pentecost, he presented two loaves of bread.

- At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit baptized the believers and united them into one body.
- The Jewish believers received this baptism at Pentecost, and the Gentile believers in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10).

This explains the presence of two loaves of bread (see 1 Cor. 10:17). The fact that there was leaven (yeast) in the loaves indicates the presence of sin in the church on earth. The church will not be perfect until it gets to heaven.

We must **not** conclude that this ten-day prayer meeting brought about the miracles of Pentecost, or that we today may pray as they did and experience “another Pentecost.” Like our Lord’s death at Calvary, Pentecost was a once-for-all event that will not be repeated. The church may experience new fillings of the Spirit, and certainly patient prayer is an essential element to spiritual power, but we would not ask for another Pentecost any more than we would ask for another Calvary.

B. The Church Worshiping the Lord (Acts 2:2–13)

As we study the events of Pentecost, it is important that we separate the accidentals from the essentials. The Spirit *came* and the people heard the sound of rushing wind and saw tongues of fire. The Spirit *baptized* and *filled* the believers, and then *spoke* as they praised God in various languages. The Spirit *empowered* Peter to preach, and then He *convicted* the listeners so that 3,000 of them trusted Christ and were saved. Let’s consider these ministries one by one.

1. **The Spirit came (vv. 2–3).** The Holy Spirit had been active prior to Pentecost and had worked in Creation (Gen. 1:1–2), in Old Testament history (Jud. 6:34; 1 Sam. 16:13), and in the life and ministry of Jesus (Luke 1:30–37; 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38).
 - However, now there would be two changes.
 - a. The Spirit would dwell in people and not just come on them, and His presence would be permanent, not temporary (John 14:16–17).

- b. The Spirit could not have come sooner, for it was essential that Jesus die, be raised from the dead, and return to heaven before the Spirit could be given (John 7:37–39; 16:7ff)

Remember the Jewish calendar in Leviticus 23. Passover, Firstfruits, and then Pentecost.

- c. There were three startling signs that accompanied the coming of the Spirit:
- 1) The sound of a rushing wind
 - 2) Tongues of fire
 - 3) Believers praising God in various languages.

The word *Spirit* is the same as “wind” in both the Hebrew and the Greek (John 3:8). The people did not *feel* the wind; they heard *the sound* of a mighty wind.

The tongues of fire symbolized the powerful witness of the church to the people.

Campbell Morgan reminds us that our tongues can be set on fire either by heaven or by hell! (James 3:5–6) Combine wind and fire and you have—a blaze!

2. The Spirit baptized

- a. The Greek word *baptizo* has two meanings one literal and the other figurative.
- 1) The word literally means “to submerge,”
 - 2) The figurative meaning is “to be identified with.”

The baptism of the Spirit is that act of God by which He identified believers with the exalted Head of the church, Jesus Christ, and formed the spiritual body of Christ on earth (1 Cor. 12:12–14).

3. The Spirit filled (v. 4). The filling of the Spirit has to do with power for witness and service (Acts 1:8)

– The baptism of the Spirit means that I belong to His body; the fullness of the Spirit means that my body belongs to Him. The baptism is final; the fullness is repeated as we trust God for new power to witness.

4. The Spirit spoke (vv. 5–13). Note that the believers were praising God, not preaching the Gospel.

- Why did God do this? For one thing, Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other; but at Pentecost, men heard God's praises and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost was a ministry of humble submission to God.

- Another reason for this gift of tongues was to let the people know that the Gospel was for the whole world. God wants to speak to every person in his or her own language and give the saving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The emphasis in the Book of Acts is on worldwide evangelization, "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). "The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions," said Henry Martyn, "and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become."

Apparently the sound of the wind drew the people to where the believers were gathered, but it was the praise by the believers that really captured their attention.

The careless listeners mocked and accused the believers of being drunk, but others were sincerely concerned to find out what was going on.

The people were perplexed (Acts 2:6)

Amazed (Acts 2:7, 12)

They marveled (Acts 2:7)

It is interesting that the mockers should accuse the believers of being drunk, for wine is associated with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Paul relates the two *in contrast*, for when a man is filled with strong drink, he loses control of himself and ends up being ashamed; but when a person is filled with the Spirit, he has self-control and glorifies God. Strong drink can bring a temporary exhilaration, but the Spirit gives a deep satisfaction and a lasting joy.

5. The Church Witnessing to the Lost (Acts 2:14-41)

Peter did not preach in tongues; he addressed his audience in the everyday Aramaic that they understood.

The message was given by a Jew, to Jews (Acts 2:14, 22, 29, 36), on a Jewish holy day, about the resurrection of the Jewish Messiah whom their nation had crucified.

The Gentiles who were there were proselytes to the Jewish religion (Acts 2:10). Peter would not open the door of faith to the Gentiles until he visited Cornelius (Acts 10).

C. There are three explanations in Peter's sermon.

1. He explained what happened: the Spirit had come (vv. 14–21).

The joyful worship of the believers was not the result of too much wine; it was the evidence of the arrival of God's Holy Spirit to dwell in His people. Orthodox Jews did not eat or drink before 9 A.M. on the Sabbath or on a holy day, nor did they usually drink wine except with meals.

It was indeed the dawning of a new age, the "last days" in which God would bring to completion His plan of salvation for mankind. Jesus had finished the great work of redemption and nothing more had to be done except to share the Good News with the world, beginning with the nation of Israel. The invitation is,

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

2. He explained how it happened: Jesus was alive (vv. 22–35).

News travels fast in the East; and probably most of the adults in Jerusalem, residents and visitors, knew about the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. They also had heard rumors of an "official announcement" that His followers had stolen the body of Jesus just to make people think that He had kept His word and been raised from the dead.

- But Peter told them the truth: Jesus of Nazareth had indeed been raised from the dead, and the Resurrection proves that He is the Messiah!

a. Peter gave them four proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and then he called on them to believe on Christ and be saved.

1) His first proof was the person of Jesus Christ (vv. 22–24). Peter's audience knew that Jesus was a real Person from the town of Nazareth and that He had performed many signs and miracles. It was clear that God's hand was on Him. They had heard Him speak and had watched His life. They had even seen Him raise the dead, yet they could find no fault in Him—and these things were not "done in a corner"! (Acts 26:26)

It was incredible that such a Man should be defeated by death. From one point of view, the crucifixion of Jesus was a terrible crime (Acts 2:23), but from another point of view it was a wonderful victory (Acts 2:24). The word translated “pains” means “birth pangs,” suggesting that the tomb was a “womb” out of which Jesus was “born” in Resurrection glory (see Acts 13:33).

- 2) *Peter’s second proof was the prophecy of David (vv. 25–31).* He quoted Psalm 16:8–11, verses that obviously could not apply to David who was already dead and buried. Being a prophet of God, David wrote about the Messiah, that His soul would not remain in hades (the realm of the dead) or His body in the grave where it would decay.
- 3) *The third proof was the witness of the believers (v. 33).* After His resurrection, Jesus did not appear to the world at large, but to His own followers whom He had commissioned to give witness to others that He was alive (Acts 1:3, 22). They had nothing to gain by preaching a lie, because their message aroused official opposition and even led to the imprisonment and death of some of the believers. A few fanatics might be willing to believe and promote a lie for a time, but when thousands believe a message, and when that message is backed up by miracles, you cannot easily dismiss it. These witnesses were trustworthy.
- 4) *Peter’s fourth proof of the resurrection of Christ was the presence of the Holy Spirit (vv. 33–35).* Follow his logic. If the Holy Spirit is in the world, then God must have sent Him. Joel promised that one day the Spirit would come, and Jesus Himself had promised to send the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 1:4). But if Jesus is dead, He cannot send the Spirit; therefore, He must be alive. Furthermore, He could not send the Spirit unless He had returned to heaven to the Father (John 16:7); so, Jesus has ascended to heaven! To back up this statement, Peter quoted Psalm 110:1, a verse that certainly could not be applied to David (note Matt. 22:41–46).

Peter’s conclusion was both a declaration and an accusation.

Jesus is your Messiah, but you crucified Him! (see Acts 2:23)

Peter did not present the cross as the place where the Sinless Substitute died for the world, but where Israel killed her own Messiah! They committed the greatest crime in history! Was there any hope? Yes, for Peter gave a third explanation that was good news to their hearts.

3. He explained why it happened: to save sinners (vv. 36–41).

The Holy Spirit took Peter's message and used it to convict the hearts of the listeners. (In Acts 5:33 and 7:54, a different Greek word is used that suggests anger rather than conviction for sin.) After all, if they were guilty of crucifying their Messiah, what might God do to them!

NOTE: That they addressed their question to the other Apostles as well as to Peter, for all twelve were involved in the witness that day, and Peter was only first among equals.

Peter told them how to be saved: they had to repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ. They would give proof of the sincerity of their repentance and faith by being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, thus identifying themselves publicly with their Messiah and Saviour. Only by repenting and believing on Christ could they receive the gift of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 14), and this promise was for both the Jews and the "far off" Gentiles (Eph. 2:13–19).

Acts 2:40 indicates that the Apostles continued to share the Word and to urge the people to trust Jesus Christ. They looked on the nation of Israel as a "crooked generation" that was under condemnation (Matt. 16:4; 17:17; Phil. 2:15).

Interesting Note: The nation would have about forty years before Rome would come and destroy the city and the temple and scatter the people. History was repeating itself. During the forty years in the wilderness, the new generation "saved itself" from the older generation that rebelled against God. Now, God would give His people another forty years of grace; and on that day, 3,000 people repented, believed, and were saved.

6. The Church Walking in the Spirit (Acts 2:42–47)

The believers continued to use the temple for their place of assembly and ministry, but they also met in various homes. The 3,000 new converts needed instruction in the Word and fellowship with God's people if they were to grow and become effective witnesses. The early church did

more than make converts; they also made *disciples* (Matt. 28:19–20).

Two phrases in Acts 2:42 may need explanation.

1. “Breaking of bread” probably refers to their regular meals, but at the close of each meal, they probably paused to remember the Lord by observing what we call “the Lord’s Supper.” Bread and wine were the common fare at a Jewish table.
2. The word *fellowship* means much more than “being together.” It means “having in common” and probably refers to the sharing of material goods that was practiced in the early church. This was certainly not a form of modern communism, for the program was totally voluntary, temporary (Acts 11:27–30), and motivated by love.

The church was unified (Acts 2:44), magnified (Acts 2:47a), and multiplied (Acts 2:47b). It had a powerful testimony among the unsaved Jews, not only because of the miracles done by the Apostles (Acts 2:43), but also because of the way the members of the fellowship loved each other and served the Lord. The risen Lord continued to work with them (Mark 16:20) and people continued to be saved.

The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for “services as usual.” They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine. Because the risen Christ was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit.

Home Work

1. Why is it appropriate that the events of Acts 2 occurred on Pentecost, the day when the Jews celebrated the giving of the covenant under the Law of Moses? (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:6)

2. How did the resurrection prove that Jesus is...

Christ (2:25-33)

Lord (2:34-35)

3. The sermons in Acts suggest outlines we can follow in explaining the good news to others. Summarize what Peter asks the Jews to believe and do, and why they should do these things.

truth to believe (2:21-24, 31-33, 36, 39)

actions to do (2:21, 38)

reason why (2:20-21, 38, 40)

4. What one insight from Acts 2 would you like to take to heart?

How does this insight apply to you?

5. What action can you take (including prayer) to begin putting this insight into practice this week?

6. Can you add anything to Page 24-25 of your notes?