

## **Bi134 Acts**

### ***Lesson Bi134-3 Pentecost: The Spirit Is Poured Out***

Have you ever stood under a waterfall and let the water pour down upon you from above? This may have been how the disciples felt on the Day of Pentecost when Jesus poured the Holy Spirit on them.

In obedience to Jesus' command, 120 of his faithful followers, including the apostles, gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. For over a week these men and women continued in prayer and praise to God in an upper room and in the temple courts. Great expectation filled their hearts. When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they once again gathered. They sat down, and as the festive crowds milled around them, they began their prayers.

That's when it all happened! Suddenly from heaven came a thunderous roar—like the sound of a powerful wind storm. In wonder, the people's eyes turned skyward. Some put their hands over their ears to mute the deafening sound. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the noise stopped. The people stood in quiet astonishment, wondering what had just happened.

Then, without warning a huge mass of flames appeared above the heads of the 120 followers of Jesus who had gathered for prayer. Soon, the mass of flames began to divide itself into many smaller "tongues" of fire. Astonishingly, one fiery tongue settled on the head of each disciple. The onlookers watched in amazement. In the meantime, those in the vicinity who had heard the heavenly sound began rushing into the temple court where the disciples were praying. Very quickly, the crowd grew into the thousands.

As everyone stood marveling at the wind and the fire, God worked yet another wonder. The Bible says that all of the 120 disciples "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). They began speaking in languages they had never learned.

To some in the crowd it seemed as if these poor Galileans were drunk. "They are full of sweet wine!" someone shouted. However, as the people listened more closely, one by one, they began to hear these uneducated Galileans speaking in their own native languages. Visitors from Arabia heard them speaking Arabic; those from Egypt heard them speaking Coptic; others from Rome heard them speaking Latin, and so it went. What were they saying? They were boldly proclaiming the mighty deeds of God! Confused, the bystanders asked one another, "What does this mean?"

For the Jews of Jesus' day, the festival of Pentecost was one of three important annual feasts in which every Jewish male in the area was required to attend. The word 'Pentecost' means fiftieth. So, Pentecost took place 50 days after Passover. In the Old Testament, the festival is called by three different names: the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of First Fruits. Thousands of Jewish pilgrims gathered from all over the Roman Empire to attend this annual festival.

For Christians, Pentecost has a different meaning. It is one of the most significant events in all of sacred history. It was on that day that God first empowered his church to carry the message of Christ to the ends of the earth. Without this powerful infilling, the early disciples would never have been able to accomplish their God-given mission. The same is true today. Without the empowering of the Holy Spirit it will be impossible for us to take the gospel to all nations before Jesus comes again.

The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is also the defining event in the book of Acts. It sets the stage for everything that follows. A clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of Pentecost is essential for a correct understanding of the rest of the book of Acts.

The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was accompanied by two great supernatural wonders. The first wonder was a sound from heaven “like the blowing of a violent wind.” It was a sign that God had come powerfully on the scene. This sound of wind also speaks to the missionary purpose of the Spirit’s outpouring. Wind is a powerful force of nature. Jesus said that the global missionary work of the church is to be carried out in the power of the Spirit. John described the Spirit’s work as being like the wind (John 3:8). The Spirit works tirelessly throughout the world inspiring and empowering the church, revealing Christ to the lost, and drawing people to him.

A second wonder occurred at Pentecost. What looked like tongues of fire appeared and came to rest on each of the 120 disciples. It was a sign that the Holy Spirit was coming upon the disciples to empower them as witnesses. By empowering them with the Spirit, he would anoint their tongues to proclaim the gospel to the lost.

The purpose of their being filled with the Spirit was not for their conversion but to empower them to witness as Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8. Notice further that they were *all* filled with the Spirit. It is significant that in Acts every time the Spirit of God is poured out on a group of people, they are *all* filled. This shows us that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience for all believers. Every believer must be filled with the Spirit because every believer is called to be a witness for Christ.

The immediate effect of the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was that they “began to speak in tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (2:4). This is the first of three times in the book of Acts that people speak in tongues. And each time, their speaking in tongues happened immediately after they were filled with the Spirit.

It is important to notice that the first two signs of Pentecost (the sound from heaven and the tongues of fire) preceded the disciples being filled with the Spirit, and they are never repeated in the book of Acts. The third sign (speaking in tongues) immediately followed their being filled with the Spirit, and it is repeated two more times in the book of Acts. In Acts, the writer Luke presents speaking in tongues as the “initial physical evidence” that one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. In other words, when someone speaks in tongues, it is a sign from God that they have been empowered to be Christ’s witness to the lost.

The fact that the disciples at Pentecost spoke in 15 Gentile languages also testifies to the missionary purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is empowerment for witness “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

This lesson is **important** because understanding Pentecost helps us to understand Acts. It also helps us understand how we are to carry out our ministries today.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we, just like those first disciples on the Day of Pentecost, must be empowered by the Spirit to fulfill our role as Christ’s witnesses to the lost. This empowering comes when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Let’s **review** some significant things we have learned in this lesson.

1. How did the Jews of Jesus’ day view the Day of Pentecost?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the Jews saw Pentecost as one of their three great festivals, and that it was a harvest festival, you are correct.
2. What two supernatural signs preceded the disciples being filled with the Spirit and are never repeated in the book of Acts?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “a sound from heaven and what seemed to be tongues of fire coming to rest on each of the 120 disciples,” you are correct.
3. What one sign followed their being filled with the Spirit?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “they spoke in tongues as the Spirit enabled them,” you are correct.
4. What is the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “empowerment to witness for Christ,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to replay it 2-3 times until you can teach it accurately to someone else. Then find someone, or a group of people, and teach this lesson to them. Say to the person, “Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit enables? If you haven’t, then ask God to fill you with his Spirit today. If you have, then go out and witness to others, expecting the Holy Spirit to empower your witness.”