

Acts The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts is the connecting glue between the ministry of Jesus and the establishment of the Christian Church.

In it Luke wants to show us the growth of the early church following the death and resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven to be with the Father again, having promised that He would return in due course for his bride, that is the church. (Acts 1:11) That growth to be achieved not in their own strength but under the anointing and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Acts continues from where the gospel of Luke finishes and indeed Luke refers back to his earlier gospel and gives a short synopsis in Acts 1: 1 - 11. The emphasis in these early verses of Acts is very much centred on the fact that these early disciples, who had seen Jesus taken from them and crucified but then risen again and taken into heaven, were left with the command to be His witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. A clear message to them that He had come not just to save the Jews but all mankind and they were to be His messengers in proclaiming the Good News. That same message still applies for us today I believe. But note what Jesus said to them first before dispersing them to proclaim His message of salvation.

(v8a) **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you....."**

Just prior to this in v4 He told them, no commanded them: **"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit"**

That they obeyed tells us several things. We need to remember that when Jesus was arrested and crucified all of the disciples scattered and ran away for fear of being associated with Jesus and indeed Peter denied Him three times lest he be arrested as well. Following Jesus resurrection it is safe to assume from the persecution that followed that the disciples were still very much a target for the Israelite leaders and therefore their natural instinct was probably to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible to avoid possible arrest and worse. We see here that they overcame these natural instincts and obeyed Christ's command because they now, following all that they had seen, believe in Him as the Son of God and know enough to trust Him when He commands them.

They still have misapprehensions about the purpose of Christ coming to earth as we see in v6. where their expectation is that He is going to **"restore the kingdom to Israel?"**

Jesus answers: **"It is not for you to know the time or dates the Father has set by His own authority."**

They and we do not need to know everything that the Lord intends, indeed He would be a pretty small God if we knew everything! He does, however, give us sufficient knowledge and power to accomplish the tasks which He sets for us to do and as we shall see shortly this power comes through the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The Lord knows what we need and we should be trusting him to provide rather than trying to second guess Him and indeed try to force our desires on him which some are prone to do.

This is what the disciples then do as having seen Christ taken up into heaven and received the promise of His return in due time they return to Jerusalem and joined together "**constantly in prayer**".

Prayer is the bedrock of our communion with God and indeed Jesus often came to prayer on behalf of the disciples before sending them out and for Himself as He did the Father's work. The disciples following His example "**All joined together**". There was a unity of purpose, they were also still in danger of persecution and prayer was their unifying factor. Jesus had also told them that he had a new task for them to do and I'm sure they would have been praying into that as well. We are told that they prayed with the women as well, something not done at the synagogue, but here they were unified in Spirit and purpose together and we are told in Psalm 133 that where brothers dwell together in unity there the Lord commands a blessing.

Let's look now at that first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples.

Acts 2: 1-13 (NIV)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Amazed and perplexed they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Pentecost was already a Jewish festival which marked the day the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and because of this we are told in 2:v5 that "**there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven**". It was this day that God chose to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the assembled disciples.

They were alerted to its coming by "**a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting**". The sound came suddenly and would have awakened the disciples senses to the fact that something was about to happen. It was also a sign of God's might and power.

In order that the disciples would be certain of what was happening God sent a visible sign in the form of tongues of fire which separated and came to rest on each of them so that they would know that they had individually received the promised gift. The fire fulfilled John the Baptist's prophecy that **"He(that is Jesus) shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."** Fire is used as a metaphor for cleansing in the Old and New Testaments and the Holy Spirit is sent to melt the heart, burn up the dross and develop pure and devout affection in the soul.

The Holy Spirit's presence increased their love of Christ and the hope of heaven, for one another and unity, they were also endued with miraculous powers for the furtherance of the gospel which they exercised as God gave them occasion to. One of these was the speaking in tongues which, in a very practical way, God gave to them all on this occasion so that the peoples of many nations who were assembled for Pentecost could hear the good news of Christ, which the newly emboldened disciples were now keen to share with them, in their native tongue and understand it.

Not only did this allow them to hear the good news of Jesus Christ, which undoubtedly the disciples spoke to them about, but also to be amazed at the miracle they were witnessing in that men whom they knew to be Galileans were speaking in so many different native tongues, some of which they had almost certainly, never heard before.

Most were **"amazed and perplexed"** and asked, **"What does this mean?"**

Some, however, as they still do today, made fun of them, and said, **"They have had too much wine!"**

In the following verses Acts 2 14: 41, we see the disciples starting to use the power of the Holy Spirit which has just been given to them and the fearlessness and boldness of their faith as a result of this new authority they have been given to carry out Jesus great commission to make disciples of all nations and what better place to start than here in Jerusalem where people are gathered together from all nations for the feast of Pentecost.

Typically Peter is the first to exercise this new gifting which God has given them.

The first thing that Peter wants to do when he has received the Holy Spirit is to preach about the saving grace of Jesus and what that can bring to initially the Jews and those who live in Jerusalem, thus fulfilling Jesus command in Acts 1: 8 that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem first.

Whilst we only have recorded here Peter's sermon it is almost certain that the others who had been baptised would be proclaiming a similar message to other groups in the city and that the three thousand added to their numbers that we read about in verse 41 was a collective figure for all of them.

We are told of two differing reactions to the sight of the disciples speaking in different tongues in verses 7-13

The first was of amazement and perplexion. Amazement that these men, whom some knew to be ordinary Galileans, were suddenly speaking in many and varied languages such that all understood them and perplexion as to what it all meant.

The second was of scorn and scoffing accusing them of being drunk on wine.

These reactions have not changed over the centuries and even today when we speak of the good news of Jesus, some are curious and stirred in their spirits and want to know more whilst others are dismissive writing it off as myth and legend before having a chance to assess its validity.

It is the second group that Peter addresses first dismissing their accusation by stating that as it is only 9 am they cannot be drunk as they suppose, as on the Sabbath and solemn feast days as this was, Jews were prohibited from eating and drinking until the ninth hour.

He then proceeds to explain to them all what has happened and uses Scripture to justify what he is saying. Note here that even though Peter has now been filled with the Holy Spirit he does not set aside Scripture nor think himself above them, a mistake unfortunately that many have made in church history and continue to do so today. A true preacher will not only respect and adhere to Scripture but also test what they speak and hear against the Canon of Scripture.

Here Peter does that and starts his explanation of what has occurred by quoting from the prophet Joel. Note that Peter quotes the whole paragraph rather than taking a small part, so that its full context may be seen. Again something we can learn from today where some are prone to take one or perhaps two verses and read into them something which is clearly not so when taken in the full context of what is around them.

This prophesy from Joel sets out several important points which would have not been acceptable to a lot of the Jews:

Firstly it states that God will pour out his Spirit on ALL people.

The Jewish doctors of the day taught that God's Spirit only came upon wise and rich MEN, and such as were of the seed of Israel, certainly not to women or servants or gentiles.

God here says no, it will be on all people.

Secondly that the Spirit will bring a Spirit of prophecy, not limited to some and not limited by age or gender or position. It speaks of sons and daughters, young and old, servants both male and female. For servants and females to be included is a massive departure from the culture of the day where both were regarded as chattels rather than equals of the men.

Verses 19-20 are regarded as portents of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in about forty years time and Josephus in his preface to the History of the wars of the Jews, speaks of the signs and prodigies that preceded them, terrible thunders, lightening and earthquakes and a fiery comet that hung over the city for a year before its destruction.

Verse 21 speaks of God's promise to preserve those who have given their lives to him. It is recorded that not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Note that the Christians are a praying people calling on the Name of the Lord.

To reinforce the message of Scripture, Peter now reminds them of what many of them had been; first hand witnesses of the miracles and wonders that Jesus performed, miracles that they could not deny for many had witnessed them personally. He emphasises that God was the author of the miracles through Christ and as such Jesus was a man accredited by God or he could not have performed the signs and wonders he did.

Peter then goes on to emphasise that Jesus death and resurrection were done as part of God's set purpose and with His foreknowledge and again quotes Scripture to reinforce his statements. He quotes from Psalm 16:8-11 explaining that these words are spoken by David about Jesus Christ. They cannot be about David himself as he most definitely died and was buried and his tomb is in Jerusalem even now. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that He would place one of David's descendants on his throne as the promised Messiah (Luke 1:32). Seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of Christ in these verses:

"I saw the Lord always before me"

Jesus', and our end goal, was and should be the glory of the Father and that His and our suffering are eventually to the honour of God.

"Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken"

God is always there beside Him then and us now and because of this we can be assured that He will guide and protect us in all circumstances

"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices"

Jesus recognises that God has His hand on what is to come and rejoices in the certainty of it:

"my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your Holy One decay."

The certainty of death but also the certainty of resurrection into immortality

"You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence"

That Jesus has known the path He is to follow and that by following it He will make it known to the world and made it possible for them to follow if they chose to.

"You will fill me with joy in your presence"

The reward set before Him was joy, a fullness of joy into which all who choose to follow Him shall enter, and in which they shall be forever happy.

Peter then returns to personal indisputable testimony of the fact that many there had seen the resurrected Jesus whom God had raised up and His ascension into heaven. What they were now witnessing was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which had been promised beforehand.

Peter concludes by drawing the threads of his discourse together with the logical conclusion that :

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

As Peter was speaking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit many were reached by his words and wanted to know what they needed to do.

Note here the familiarity with which they ask. They address the disciples as "brothers" showing a familiarity and warmth, an empathy that had not been there when Peter started.

There is a recognition that they need to do something; they have seen and recognised that there is sin in their lives and that in order to be saved they need to do something about it. When men are convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sinful nature there is a desire to move away from it, to change in some way.

Peter here tells them that they need to:

1. Repent. That is change your mind and be sorry for what has gone before, change your ways from the old ways of doing things to a new and different way.
2. Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. That is, firmly believe in the doctrine of Christ in your heart and soul not just with words, and make an open solemn confession of this and renounce your sins.

They must believe sincerely in the name of Jesus, that he is the promised Messiah; everyone from the greatest of sinners to the most gracious (for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God Rom3:23) must be baptised in His name for the remission of sins. God's grace is sufficient for all.

Upon doing this Peter tells them that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter then emphasises that this promise is not only for them but also their children and all who are far off as the Lord our God will call; i.e. not only the Jewish nation who believed the Messiah was coming just for them but all those whom God chose to call including the Gentiles.

Peter then continues to speak to them and warn them about the current generation with many words and at the end all had heard his words but only those who had willingly accepted them as truth were baptised and added to their number. Note by being baptised their lives were changed and they became one with the body of disciples living their lives in the same way as those in the early church. But it is important to see that when we accept Christ fully as Lord and Saviour and give our lives to him then we cannot help but become changed people as we live out our lives with and for Him.

Let's pray:

Father we thank You that You loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us on the cross and to be raised again to intercede for us at Your right hand. But you also knew that the first disciples and we needed sustaining until Jesus returned and in Your wisdom and grace sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and sustain all who call upon Jesus name as Saviour and Lord. As we do the work which you set for us to do help us to walk in your footsteps through the Holy Spirit. And as those first disciples were emboldened to speak out your truths as the Holy Spirit came upon them then so may we have boldness to speak out as you provide opportunity under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus precious name we ask it.

AMEN.