

Introduction: Christmas is the time of anticipation. In fact, that is what the Advent celebration is intended to recall. The anticipation of the arrival of the One who would break the curse of sin and death. We know anticipation well at Christmas. For some of us the anticipation is around the arrival of friends and family. For others it is the arrival of Christmas morning. For some of us it's the arrival of the Christmas ham. ☺ What we do while we wait reveals our hope and expectations of these arrivals. It was the same with this rag-tag group of 120 followers of the risen and ascended Jesus.

Waiting for the arrival of the power of God from the Holy Spirit, devoting themselves together in prayer, wrestling through what the Spirit had spoken through the Scriptures, and fulfilling the 12<sup>th</sup> man there was probably an anticipation. Maybe even a deep longing. Jesus was gone. He was alive, but He had been taken up to heaven and for over a week they may have felt utterly lost. "Apart from Me you can do nothing" he had told them (John 15:5), and "I will ask the Father and He will send to you another Helper, and He will be with you forever." But here, in Acts 1, they are in-between these promises. They can't do anything without Him, and the Helper hasn't arrived. They must have felt somewhat at a loss themselves. They couldn't decorate a tree or prepare a Christmas dinner, so to speak. Yet, in this powerlessness, they are being prepared exactly for how the Spirit of God works: through our powerlessness, our inability, and His power alone.

The power from the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. So? Well, Pentecost means 50<sup>th</sup>. It was 50 days after the Passover. It was referred to as the Feast of Weeks, 7 weeks of 7 days. And since Passover usually came in April, then Pentecost was the feast which arrived in June, making it one of the most attended festivals in Jerusalem. The travelling conditions were better in June, so more Jews and converts came to Pentecost in Jerusalem than other festivals. So there was a great cosmopolitan multitude at this point. There couldn't have been a better time for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.

But even more, there is a divinely ordained connection with the feast of Pentecost, for Pentecost was also known as the Feast of First-fruits. The Jews commemorated the first fruits of the harvest by baking two small loaves of bread (Lev 23;17) which were designated to the Lord as first-fruits. Thus, the mood of the Pentecost festival was the mood of gratitude to the LORD for provision, for life, for giving back to the LORD the beginning of a harvest which was certain and promised to be even fuller than these two first loaves. What a fitting picture of the first great pouring out of the Spirit of God! This founding of the Church, this beginning of the Spirit's work, is the giving of the first-fruits of God's great redemptive harvest throughout all the earth, jumping from a seed packet of 120 to a harvest of 3,000 as the first-fruits of a much larger and fuller harvest to come.

It was by divine Providence the perfect time for the pouring out of the life-giving Holy Spirit of promise. So, let's see how the Spirit speaks through Luke to show us what God is up to.

## 1. Section One (1-4): The Holy Spirit is Poured Out to Produce a New Nation of Proclaimers

- a. The Presence of God Arrives in Their Midst!
  - i. “And suddenly there was a noise from the heaven, just as a violent wind being carried along, and the whole house in which they were sitting was filled.”
    1. The presence of God indicated by wind; powerful, terrifying, roaring wind
      - a. 1 Kings 19:11-19
    2. Though terrifying in His power, the Spirit of God brings life to the powerless
      - a. Ezekiel 37:1-5
  - ii. And tongues were seen, being distributed to them, like fire, and it was seated upon each one of them,
    1. This phenomenon is not repeated any other time in the subsequent narrative of the Church.
    2. “Baptized in Fire”
      - a. 1 Kings 19:12 – the coming of the presence of God for the purpose of revelation
        - i. The passing of the torch from Elijah to Elisha as the type of transition and continuation of prophetic ministry
        - ii. The antitype of Elisha is the Church, carrying on the prophetic ministry of the One Who Was Taken Up
- b. Jesus promised two baptisms: HS and Fire – salvation (belonging) and judgment
  - i. Luke 3:16 – John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit and Fire
    1. “The one coming after Me” is coming to divide wheat from chaff, to baptize in HS and fire, to cut down the trees that bear no fruit, etc.
    2. John used this to move people to check their hearts and repent – the purpose of all biblical warning
  - ii. Fire purifies lasting things, like precious metals, but it consumes that which is not lasting
    1. Thus, fire separates (divides) the gold from the dross
    2. The world is full of decay, wickedness, oppression, evil, injustice, death and the means of the power of God to purify a heart comes through the preaching of His greatness in the triumph of Jesus Christ
  - iii. Thus, when Jesus brings fire of judgment, everything that is not lasting will be burned up – no evil, no suffering, no sin, only what is beautiful and lasting and glorious and godly, only a bright beautiful new heavens and new earth
    1. Fire is a severe cleansing agent, but a powerful and necessary cleansing agent – you can’t purify gold with a wire brush or a sponge, it takes fire. It takes a severe cleansing to purify for sin and to raise the holy.
    2. What type of fire will it take to burn the Universe?
    3. What type of fire did it take to purify these disciples and assay them as witnesses?
  - i. The fact that ‘tongues like fire’ appeared over the disciples indicates that they were purified in this moment, transformed into those new identities: witnesses who are set apart (holy) by the Holy Spirit of God
    1. Why do you think that Luke describes this event as “tongues like fire”
    2. Tongues are indicative of speaking, communication, proclamation
    3. Fire is indicative of purifying holiness
- c. The Holy Spirit’s Power is Given to Embolden Clear Communication
  - i. And they were filled of the Holy Spirit and they began to speak different languages just as the Spirit was giving to them clear declaration
    1. The Holy Spirit filled them *and they began to speak clearly and persuasively*
    2. Jesus promised them “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” and this power of God is the power to proclaim the grandeur of God
      - a. When I say “power of God”, to what context does your mind go?

- i. Creation? Miracles? Healings?
    - ii. Does it go to preaching?
  - ii. They began to speak “different languages”
    - 1. “tongue” usually refers to a language, as it does here with the verb “to speak”
    - 2. The “confusing” and “bewildering” work of the Spirit here is in the context of the speaking, not the hearing
      - a. Thus, it is the speaking event which is amazing, not the fact that the hearers understood. They understood “according to the language of their birth”
      - b. I think that we will speak a lot of languages in heaven to reveal God’s great and glorious work of redeeming our curses.
  - iii. The languages which they spoke was “a clear declaration” of Jesus
    - 1. Their speech was a clear communication, even if in a different language than their Galilean Aramaic
      - a. This was not “babbling” or “unknown speech”, it was reasoned, particular, and powerful
      - b. The verb, translated “utterance” (infinitive), is a word used only twice more in the NT, both in Acts, and indicates reasoned, clear, persuasive speech
        - i. This is the same verb used of Peter when he gets up to speak to the crowd in v14 “addressed” as he spoke to them in Greek
        - ii. This word, “utterance,” is the word used by Paul in Acts 26:25, “I am *declaring* to you true and rational words”
    - 2. The content of their speaking was the message of the glorious work of God in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom
      - a. We know this because of Peter’s sermon (next week)

2. **Section Two (5-11):** The Spirit Builds This New Nation by Uniting All Ethnicities Under One King

- a. This is the beginning of a New Nation made up of peoples from every ethnicity!
  - i. The divisions of languages more divisive than the division of ethnicity
    - 1. Without the ability to communicate it is very hard to bond socially
    - 2. My son, Ricky, is an example: ethnically Korean, we thought that we would have to wrestle over how to build those ethnic/appearance differences, but it is the language issues that we have with our severely autistic son which provide a much more difficult bonding issue
    - 3. Linguists refer to an original childhood language as “heart language”
  - ii. So when the Spirit of God bridges the gap of understanding which language divides, He is bonding those of different ethnicities, cultural histories and contexts
    - 1. and there were Jews inhabiting Jerusalem, pious men from every nation under heaven, and this multitude came together at the existence of the sound,
      - a. Why these phrases?
      - b. Revelation 7:9-10 – “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
  - iii. This is why racism is to be abolished in the Church of Jesus Christ
    - 1. There is no room for cultural superiority or elitism, the nagging and wicked impression of such needs to be annihilated from our own hearts and presuppositions by the Word of God
      - a. All disdain, stereotypical comments, feelings of superiority and inferiority are to be expelled and judged as sin

- b. Do not let each other hold onto racist feelings or feelings of superiority over others peoples or cultures.
      - c. The fact that God has done all the work in the gospel, from election to our security in the heavens for all of eternity, is incredibly humbling and destroys any basis for our pride toward another person, race, culture, faith, or creed
    - 2. What is happening here is reversal of Babel’s curse, and a return to the original Good in the Garden, as Paul instructs the Athenian philosophers, “He made from one man every nation of humanity to live on the face of the earth...” (17:26)
  - iv. In Christ, God makes the separated peoples into *one new humanity* (Ephesians 2:15)
    - 1. Not one individual, but one new entity of recipients of God’s grace, one new humanity
      - a. A 2nd century letter to Diogenes called Christians the “third race”
    - 2. He made Jews and Gentiles brothers and sisters.
      - a. It is not that Gentiles are made Jews, nor are Jews made Gentiles, but we are all made into one NEW humanity in Christ: the third race, Christian
      - b. A new race that is raceless! – Harold Hoehner
    - 3. All come to God the same way: by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and this is communicated to all peoples!

3. **Section Three (11-13):** The Spirit Builds This New Nation by Proclaiming the Magnificence of God

- a. This reconciling work is established here in a grand image of a New Nation unified in Christ

- i. REVERSAL OF BABEL: Genesis 11:1-9

- 1. and they were **confused**, because each one was hearing them speaking in his own dialect

- a. Babel was the place where Humanity “sought to make a great name for itself”
        - i. It wasn’t about building a really big tower, but about building a monument to Humanity’s glory, greatness, magnificence
      - b. So God divided Humanity by “confusing” their languages, so that they could not communicate with one another
      - c. Here at Pentecost God creates the confusion of *clarity*, not the lack of clarity
        - i. They were **bewildered** and **wondered**, saying "Look! Aren't all of these who are speaking Galileans?"
        - ii. They shouldn’t have been able to speak all of these different languages, dozens, with such clarity and eloquence

- ii. and, "How is that we, we hear each by our own dialect in which we were born?"

- 1. These languages were known languages, the languages of the dialects that these converts and Jews had grown up – their heart-languages
      - a. Thus, though they all knew the *lingua franca* of the day, Hellenistic Greek, they all had a 1<sup>st</sup> language “of their birth”
      - b. So, these languages spoken were the miracle of spontaneous knowledge and fluency in a foreign and previously unknown language
    - 2. List of dialects and peoples:
      - a. Parthians and Medes and Elamites (east of Israel, Iran to Jordan) and the inhabitants of Mesopotamia (Iraq),
        - i. Parthians were Persians from modern day Eastern Iran, who had trade with the Han dynasty of China because they were on the Silk Road
          - 1. They had fought Rome for control of the Levant in the Roman-Parthian Wars

2. It was the Parthians who defeated Herod the Great and sent him running to his fort at Masada
3. They controlled Babylonia at this time
- ii. Medes were from modern day NW Iran
  1. One of the tribes listed by Herodotus is the Magi, from modern day Tehran
  2. Cyrus the Great was a Mede from a previous (500 years earlier) empire in Media
  3. Possible ancestors of the Kurds
- iii. Elamites were those from modern day SW Iran and Southern Iraq
  1. Assyrian Empire, ruled from Susa, Nineveh being a major city of the Elamite empire
  2. Elamite language is known as a language isolate: a language that is unrelated to other languages or dialects immediately preceding or succeeding it
    - a. Some scholars believe that Elamite closely resembles some Northern Indian dialects, and even Mon-Khmer from Cambodia!
  3. The Assyrian Church is the oldest continually existing Church in the world
- iv. Luke includes these three major former Empires which had troubled the Israelites throughout their history: Persian/Babylonian, Mede, and Assyrian
- b. Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia (North and West into Turkey),
  - i. Judea was the region surrounding Israel and parts east of the Jordan River
  - ii. Cappadocia is the mountainous area of modern-day Turkey
    1. They had been bustling around by foreign powers and were reduced to a Roman province during this time
  - iii. Pontus
    1. North of Cappadocia on the southern border of the Black Sea
    2. Known as Amazon to the ancient Greeks
    3. Part of the region of Galatia
  - iv. Asia
    1. Roman province west of Galatia and north of Lycia, containing the Aegean Islands, except Crete
    2. The cities of Ephesus, Pergamum, and Smyrna were the dominating city-state in Asia
  - v. Phrygia
    1. Modern central Turkey
    2. Three famous kings of Phrygia: Gordias (his famous Gordian knot was cut by Alexander the Great), Midas (for whom everything touched turned to gold), and Mygdon (who warred with the Amazons)
    3. The Colossians lived in Phrygia
  - vi. Pamphylia
    1. Usually combined with Pisidia where Antioch was located
    2. Ancient land inhabited largely by Greeks
- c. Egypt, and the parts of Libya which is according to Cyrene (North Africa),
  - i. Egypt – former enslavers of Israel (Exodus)
  - ii. Libya/Cyrene

1. Known as the “Athens of Africa” by the Greeks, a school of philosophy was started by a pupil of Socrates
  2. Simon who carried Jesus’ cross was from Cyrene, and traditionally Mark was said to have travelled to Alexandria from which the Coptic Church grew, was said to be Cyrenean.
    - d. Romans (Italy, the center of the known world and the seat of world power) who are visiting,
  3. Jews and proselytes,
    - a. There is a distinctively Jewish element to the early church, even though there is a variety of ethnic origins
    - b. These people are ethnically diverse, but are all steeped in the Jewish Scriptures and traditions
  4. Cretans and Arabs
    - a. From the oceanic islands to the deserts of Arabia
  - b. It’s a statement of geographical bookends, we hear their speaking out in our own languages the magnificence of God
    - i. The content of their “declarations” or “utterances” in these various foreign languages was “the magnificence of God”
      1. As opposed to Babel, the words are not making much of Man, but rather making much of God
      2. The Spirit is speaking of the grandeur and glory of God
        - a. The following interpretation of these words and these events by Peter will point to Jesus Christ
        - b. So, even the Spirit is constantly pointing to Jesus Christ, not to Himself
        - c. He is the evidence of God’s work *in raising and anointing Jesus Christ as Lord and Christ over all!*
      3. "...for the Lord has so knit together the certainty of his word and his Spirit, that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us there to behold the face of God." - John Calvin
4. The Proclamation of the Gospel Produces Two Responses
  - a. The context which Peter quotes, from the prophet Joel, is about the division of those who call upon the name of the Lord and those who are judged by the Lord
    - i. context of the “Valley of Jehoshaphat”, or “Valley of the Judgement of YHWH” and is strongly “distinguishing” between those who call upon the name of the Lord and those who take up arms against Him.
      1. Like when Jesus quotes from Joel in Matthew 24:29ff, it is also in the context of three parables (Virgins, Talents, Sheep/Goats), which all have to do with a division between the people, the redeemed and the condemned, and in each case the condemned are surprised at their condemnation, thinking that they had done nothing wrong
    - ii. In this way, we see the same distinction here: The Spirit of God proclaiming the Word of God through the Servants of God brings salvation and condemnation
      1. The division, however, is revealed to be that which is not between Israel and its Gentile neighbors, however, or even between those who speak Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or the like, but between those who believe in God’s magnificence revealed in the triumphant and reigning King Jesus and those who excuse the evidence of His reign as something else entirely
  - b. There are two responses to hearing of God’s greatness in such a way
    - i. People will be moved to seek to understand the Lord and the implications of the gospel

1. and they were all **bewildered** and **utterly at a loss**, saying one to another, "What does He will this to be?"
  2. They are looking for a theological answer – literally “What is [God] doing here?!”
  3. When the Spirit of God speaks, people are intrigued by what the Lord is doing and want to understand it rightly
- ii. People will be cynical and interpret the gospel according to their own perceived wisdom
    1. The second response is snide cynicism – “What a bunch of drunks!?”
    2. These people weren’t “at a loss”, but thought that they had it all figured out.
      - a. This lack of *powerlessness* and *circumspect humility* is what opposition to God looks like and what keeps one prepared for judgment.
- c. This shows us that miracles, no matter how amazing and obvious, are not enough to instill faith in the viewer.
    - i. The message, the gospel proclaimed (by Peter in this chapter), is what brings about faith
    - ii. Miracles, great works, mighty deeds, are not the means by which the Spirit brings life to people: it is the message of the gospel announced and explained that produces conversion in the hearts of the hearers
  - d. It also means that the Spirit of God can be speaking and people reject it outright
    - i. Just because people don’t respond to your witness with repentance and faith does not mean that the Spirit of God is not speaking in your testifying
    - ii. It simply means that they are rejecting the very voice of the Spirit of God

Conclusion: As He promised, God institutes His New Covenant by pouring out the power from His Holy Spirit upon the people. Yet, it is not the power which we would assume and its scope was far exceeding the expectations of this small band of Jewish disciples. God was up to something Curse-breaking, having undone the Great Curse of Eden’s judgement, Death, by raising His Son from the dead, He was now revealing that was also reversing the great division of humanity at Babel, undoing the linguistic divide which He used to shear the arrogance of the people who sought to make a great name for themselves. In Christ Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, God is making a great name for Himself and creating a people who declare with reasoned, persuasive, clear proclamation that His name is great and glorious and worthy to be praised.

He is creating a New Humanity, a New Nation, consisting of those from every tribe and language and ethnicity, all united under one Head, Jesus Christ, for the purpose of declaring joyfully the magnificence of God. All the anticipation of God’s power being poured out paled in comparison to this great Christmas morning when the gift of God’s Spirit began His march throughout history, throughout the globe, and throughout the hearts of men.