

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 6 – Acts 2:1-4 – Pentecost / Speaking in Tongues

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts captures the events of the apostles as Peter and Paul spread the Word of Jesus Christ. Acts is a book of transition: the administration of the church begins, but it is not fully understood until Paul discloses that the body of Christ is the pillar of truth and Israel has been temporarily set aside.

We must not build doctrine from the Book of Acts unless we can substantiate it in the Epistles. We learn and understand what happened and how God and the people of God spread the Word of Christ.

Last lesson I stated:

Matthias or Paul making 12 apostles does not matter. This activity has no impact on us. This is recorded as information about what happened. There is no prescriptive element. We can be curious, but since the Scriptures do not make this a big deal, neither should we.

This does not mean that the Scripture does not matter, but the controversy over Matthias does not matter. All Scripture is vital, and none of it is to be ignored. The determination of whether Matthias is a properly chosen apostle is not a question that needs to be entertained, even if I find the topic interesting.

ACTS 2:1-4 – TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Before we address some of the questions from these first four verses, we need to evaluate them to ensure we properly understand the text.

Verse 1 – *When the day of Pentecost had come* – The proper translation of this is “when Pentecost was completed.” Pentecost is not only a single-day holiday, it also signifies the end of a season. We will get back to this shortly.

They were all together in one place

They were – All the third person plural references in this section either refer to the 120 that were in the room (1:15) or to only the apostles (2:14). It is unclear as to who they were.

The place where they were is assumed to be the upper room, where the previous chapter had them. That is a safe assumption, but where they were precisely is not the point of the chapter.

Verse 2 – *a noise from heaven* – This is literally “out of the heaven.” In Scripture, this refers to both the sky and the spiritual heaven (Luke 4:25, 8:5, 10:18, 12:33; Acts 1:11). What is the intent here? The wind came from the spiritual realm, but the direction was most likely the sky above.

What filled the house? Most will say it was a wind. In the text, the noun is “sound,” then the sound is described as a violent rushing wind. It was the sound that filled the house, not a wind or a breeze.

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 6 – Acts 2:1-4 – Pentecost / Speaking in Tongues

Verse 3 – *There appeared to them tongues as of fire* – These were not fire; they appeared as fire. And each manifestation of a tongue rested upon each of them. Again, is this 120 or 12 (11)? I am inclined to think that this was only the apostles at this time, but it may be all of the 120.

Verse 4 – *And they were filled with the Holy Spirit* – Filled is “πίμπλημι pimplemi.” This word, when used in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, is always a term for an empowerment for a function or a prophetic moment.

Luke 1:15, 41-45, 67-69ff; Acts 4:8-12, 9:17, 13:9-12. This is not the same word as in Ephesians 5:18. There is no text where being “filled with the Holy Spirit” is upon every believer.

Speak with other tongues – “γλῶσσα glossa” means a body of words and systems that make up a distinctive language (language, tongue). The fact that this is other languages is clear from Acts 2:7-8, 11.

PENTECOST

Pentecost is one of Israel's feasts and festivals. These are regularly occurring events that recognize God's work among His people.

The most significant texts regarding Israel's feasts are Leviticus 23, which describes the festivals, Numbers 28–29, which emphasizes the offerings; and Deuteronomy 16, which emphasizes Passover.

Sabbath

Sabbaths were the most frequently observed festivals in Israel. They occurred weekly, monthly, every seven years, and every fifty years. Sabbath celebrations were included in the list of Israel's appointed feasts (Lev 23:1–44). The Sabbath Year was more festive than the weekly Sabbath celebration (Lev 25:1–7). The Year of Jubilee was celebrated every 50 years and was an occasion to free slaves and cancel debts (Lev 25:8–55). Each new moon constituted a minor festival—it included feasting, rest from work, and extra sacrifices.

The Levitical Feasts

The most well-known feasts of Israel are those described in Leviticus 23. The three pilgrimage feasts—the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—demanded that every male Israelite travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

Paschal Feasts

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were closely related and ran consecutively (Leviticus 23:4–8). The Feast of Weeks followed seven weeks later and connected the remembrance of the exodus (at Passover) with the bounty of the conquest.

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 6 – Acts 2:1-4 – Pentecost / Speaking in Tongues

The Passover was established in Exodus 12 prior to the Sinai covenant. The Passover celebrates God's deliverance of the faithful during the time of the exodus, the story of which is recounted during the feast. By "passing over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, God allowed the firstborn of Israel to live (Exodus 12:21–31).

Passover is celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long remembrance that consecrated the coming season. It may be considered an extension of the Passover feast rather than an independent holiday.

The biblical texts intertwine the two feasts, with the Passover celebrated on the first day of the feast—the 14th of Nisan—and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated on the following day (Exodus 13:3–10; Leviticus 23:4–8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days and required daily offerings. The feast demanded a rejection of leavened bread from the Israelites' meals, households, and storage places (Deuteronomy 16:4). It concluded with a convocation and rest from laborious activity (Leviticus 23:8).

While the Feast of Unleavened Bread was not a pilgrimage feast, it was often celebrated in Jerusalem because the Passover's pilgrimage would have them present. In Jerusalem, it would be considered a violation if one traveled during this festival week.

The Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Harvest, celebrated the grain harvest and the renewal of the covenant. It is named for the seven weeks separating it from the Passover celebration. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the entrance into the Promised Land and its bounty (Leviticus 23:10).

The Feast of Weeks was marked by the offering of the first fruits of the grain harvest. In contrast to the Passover feast, this grain offering explicitly included leaven (Leviticus 23:17). Meat offerings of bulls, a ram, and seven lambs were also required (Numbers 28:26-27). Deuteronomy indicates that the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated at the temple once it had been established (Deuteronomy 16:9-12). This makes the Feast of Weeks one of the pilgrimage feasts and is considered to be one of the Paschal feasts.

The Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Harvest, is 49 days. The 50th day of the feast is called Pentecost.

Pentecost is not a church holiday or festival. The events of Acts 2 may have significance in the festival, but that is not clear. It is clear that this day marked the time when all travelers would begin to go home for the year and the opportunity to quickly spread the news about the Messiah to all the Diaspora.