

b. The Age of the Spirit

Jesus' possession of the indwelling Spirit and the Spirit's empowerment for accomplishing His messianic task don't speak of His deity but His true humanity. It was as the Last Adam that Jesus was the Man of the Spirit, and this truth is foundationally and crucially important for understanding the outcome for the human race of His redemptive work. Jesus' identity as a new and final Adam indicates that His status as Man of the Spirit has implications beyond Himself: *He is the prototype and fountainhead of a new and consummate **spiritual** humanity that, like Him, is characterized by the indwelling presence, power, and leading of the Holy Spirit.* In that new reality – the age of the Spirit – the promise of sacred space was to finally be realized.

The connection between the human race and Jesus as Man of the Spirit comes to the forefront in the *Pentecost* event. There the fulfillment secured by Christ's atonement – and evidenced first in His own resurrected, glorified humanity as “firstfruits” of the new creation – was realized in the beginnings of a new Adamic race bearing the authentic human likeness of its progenitor.

In every way, Pentecost represented fulfillment of divine promise.

- Jesus had spoken of it as the immediate goal of His redemptive work (cf. John 14:16-20, 16:7-16, 20:19-22 with Acts 1:1-8), as had John before Him (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16).
- But being the Isaianic forerunner, John had functioned as the revelatory and salvation-historical bridge between the times of promise and fulfillment. He was the last of God's Old Covenant prophets, and he heralded the passing of the old order and the in-breaking of the eschatological kingdom. Thus, like Jesus after him, John's proclamation only reaffirmed what the prophets had insisted upon centuries earlier: *The coming Messianic kingdom involved the renewal of the created order and its restoration to God. That recovery had man as its focal point, and God would restore His image-son to Himself through the power and presence of His outpoured Spirit* (ref. Isaiah 32:1-20, 59:20-21; Ezekiel 36:22-37:28; Joel 2:23-32; Zechariah 4:1-10; cf. also Numbers 11:24-30).
- For their part, the prophets simply built upon the promise of restoration that originated with the protoevangelium in Eden and that God clarified and expanded in the succeeding generations (Genesis 3:15).

What all of this means is that Pentecost constitutes a point of convergence in the upward movement of salvation history – a singular episode of fulfillment that looks back to, draws upon, and brings together the great themes and imagery associated with Yahweh's enduring promise of deliverance and restoration from the curse and the kingdom that would emerge from it.

- 1) In Luke's account of the Pentecost event, the first matter of fulfillment pertains to the *restoration of man*. This is highlighted by the tongues phenomenon (Acts 2:1-11), specifically as it looks back to what transpired at Babel. In the progress of humanity from Adam and Eve, the concept of discrete nations with their own lands, cultures, and languages is first introduced in Genesis 10:1ff. Only then does the text provide the historical basis for that development: The Genesis writer introduced the *fact* of the existence of nations before addressing the historical circumstance that produced them. He did so as a point of literary emphasis, desiring to highlight the human and salvation-historical significance of what transpired at Babel by first describing its radical reordering effect.

Prior to Babel, mankind was unified in the sense that all of Adam's progeny spoke the same language and shared essentially the same culture. The human race was united as the "city of man" and, in the context of this togetherness, men reasoned that their unified will and power could enable them to build a tower into the presence of God Himself. In this way, man could make himself a name and establish his power and unified presence on the earth (Genesis 11:1-4).

The theological significance of this imagery is that the Babel event brought the reality of human "liberation" and enlightenment to its pinnacle expression. The issue wasn't the construction of a physical edifice as a testimony to human ingenuity and resource; what was transpiring on the plain of Shinar was the epitomizing expression of the human delusion of autonomy and self-sufficiency; Adam's race, standing collectively as a unified whole, was expressing its conviction that it is able to resolve the problem of divine-human estrangement and, as it were, bring the image-son back to God's garden-sanctuary.

- The Creator-Lord had driven him out; man – by his own power and resource – would bring himself back.
- Whereas God had promised to make a name for man ("Shem" – ref. 9:26-27); man was determined to make a name for himself.

Thus the tower represents man's attempt to end his banishment from Eden by constructing a new sanctuary where he is lord – a product of human labor and accomplishment through which he could reenter and subdue the place of the divine.

God's response was to destroy the human unity that had brought critical mass to human hubris and its destructive power. Adam's offspring believed that human unity is the answer to man's dilemma (so it is to this day – witness the United Nations); *God understood that human unity means only the synergistic increase of human evil and destruction.*

The Lord vanquished this unity by scattering the earth's inhabitants and confusing their languages (11:8-9). This served first to end the synergy of human sin and its destructive power, but it also constituted God's witness to man of the irreparability of the divine-human estrangement that led to Adam's banishment from Eden.

Try as he might, man could not take hold of God's dwelling and recover himself from his cursed state. If Adam's race was going to return to Eden, it would not be by its own efforts – *even the collective, unified efforts of all humanity*. The Creator-Lord had already revealed that that restoration would come through *one* man, so that the Babel incident profoundly reflects upon the human unbelief and rejection that would reach its zenith in the rejection and murder of the promised Son of Man.

Recognizing the significance of Babel in the movement of salvation history, it's easy to see how Pentecost represented, among other things, the "undoing" of Babel. At Babel, God had scattered the human race, alienating men from each other even as they were alienated from Him. That alienation was expressed in *geographical* and *linguistic* isolation, and Pentecost served to reverse that.

- On that day, men from the nations formed out of the Babel dispersion (cf. the table of nations listed in Genesis 10 with Acts 2:9-11), were once again together in Jerusalem.
- More than that, their linguistic isolation was remedied, not in the sense that they again spoke the same language, but in that they were united in linguistically conveyed understanding: Each one heard and understood *in his native language the same message* proclaiming God's mighty, saving deeds in His Son (Acts 2:5-11).

And out of that linguistic unity would come true *human* unity – not the geographical unity of being in the same place at the same time, but the true unity of *spiritual oneness* wrought by the mutual indwelling and transforming power of the one Spirit. The mutuality of shared hubris could not reunite the human race; that work belonged to the renewing power of God. Adam's race was to be reunified through their transforming union with the Last Adam (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-20; Ephesians 4:1-6).

- 2) This mutual reconciliation of the human race that began at Pentecost presupposed human reconciliation to God. The punitive and preservative scattering that occurred at Babel was the outcome of man's alienation from God; so it was in Babel's "undoing": Men were being reconciled to one another as a consequence of their reconciliation to God. That two-fold reconciliation – which had its instrumental cause in their mutual faith in the gospel – was secured by the *outpouring of the Spirit*.

This bestowal, too, constituted fulfillment on several fronts.

- First of all, in previous times God's Spirit had dwelled in the midst of His covenant people, but always with a kind of remoteness and incompleteness. The Spirit was the divine power and presence in Israel, and that involved, on occasion, His "coming upon" various men for the accomplishment of Yahweh's work. But the presence and operation of the Spirit ("ruach") were like the wind ("ruach") in its blowing: intangible, unpredictable, remote and unresting.

Moses recognized this at the very beginning of Israel's covenant existence, and he longed for a time when the Spirit's presence among Yahweh's people would be comprehensively personal and permanent (Numbers 11:24-30). That longing had proven to be prophetic, and was now at last being satisfied.

- Moreover, the Lord's presence among His people was epitomized in His Shekinah in the Holy of Holies. This glory-cloud hovering over the ark between the wings of the cherubim symbolized Yahweh's enthroned presence in Israel, even as the ark symbolized the footstool of His throne (1 Chronicles 28:2; cf. also Numbers 7:89; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; Psalm 80:1, 99:1, 132:7; etc.).

Though the biblical text doesn't directly associate the Shekinah with the Spirit, their mutual representation of Yahweh's personal presence links them together. Importantly, *the closest biblical association between the Shekinah and the Spirit is Christological*, and is exemplified in a particular aspect of Ezekiel's prophecy. After Yahweh's glory-presence departed from the temple (10:1-4, 18, 11:22-23), Ezekiel saw it being restored in connection with the idealized, visionary temple detailed at the close of the book. *But the vision of Yahweh's return to His sanctuary was attended by the presence of a man who explained to Ezekiel that the returning Shekinah represented his enthronement to dwell among His people forever* (43:1-8).

- This imagery corresponds to Daniel's vision of the exaltation and enthronement of "one like a son of man," the outcome of which is the triumph and everlasting establishment of Yahweh's kingdom – the kingdom of the saints of the Most High (Daniel 7:9-27).

The prophetic implication is clear: **Yahweh's Shekinah – representing His enthroned presence in the midst of His people – was to find its consummate fulfillment in the enthronement of a man; a man who is the covenant son of David and the promised Immanuel** (Isaiah 9:1ff; Luke 1:30-33).