

## Pentecostal Signs

Acts 2:1-13

*The Third Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles*

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**Your** own personal Pentecost. That's how most of evangelical Christianity looks at Acts 2. "How can I be a Spirit-filled Christian and how can my church be a Spirit-filled church?" But before we talk about how to be filled with the Spirit we need to talk about the Spirit who filled the church.

We begin where we left off, with the kingdom of God ready to burst forth from the room in which one hundred and twenty disciples **were all together in one place** (v. 1). And now the promise of the Father that Jesus told them to wait for in that room is here as **the day of Pentecost arrived** (v. 1). Pentecost was one of the three required feasts for all Jewish males according to the law (Ex. 23:17). It was fifty days after the Passover and was also called the "Feast of Harvest" (Ex. 23:16) because it celebrated the end of the barley harvest.

But what does Luke mean when he says it **arrived**? It's more than just that it came that year like it had in years before. Luke uses a word with prophetic significance. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament Jeremiah spoke about the seventy years of Babylonian exile being "completed" (Jer. 25:12). Luke uses this word of Jesus in Luke 9:51 to say that the "time had come" for the Lord to ascend into heaven. To illustrate this words' meaning, think of the grains of sand that fall

down and fill the bottom of an hourglass. Here in Acts 2 we witness the ultimate fulfillment of this feast. It's not that the top of the hourglass is empty but now the bottom is full; the disciples celebrate not the end of Pentecost but the beginning of its reality when the harvest of the nations would come to the Lord (Isa. 2:2-4).

And as this time for the kingdom to go out and harvest the nations had come, Luke describes Pentecost's significance in three ways:

1. *The Sign of a New Creation (2:2)*
2. *The Sign of a New Temple (2:3-4)*
3. *The Sign of a New Humanity (2:4-14)*

## **The Sign of a New Creation (2:2)**

Again, capture the setting of this day. In an insignificant room, filled with one hundred and twenty insignificant men and women, something was about to happen that would change the course of human history. Luke describes something that sounded like **a mighty rushing wind** and which **filled the entire house** (v. 2). It was no mere Mediterranean early morning breeze that refreshed them; no, this was *the sign* that Pentecost was *a new creation*. Let me explain.

Wind in Scripture often signifies the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? As Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In other words, just like wind is sovereign, powerful, and controlled only by itself, so too it is with the Holy Spirit. He is the sovereign,

creative presence of God. Let me give you two Old Testament examples of this that help us see that Pentecost was a new creation.

In Genesis 2:7 we read that “the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Adam was “from the ground,” made up of the same stuff that you walk on every day. Adam was dust, he was dirt, he was a lump of clay, he was lifeless. But when the creative, life-giving power of the Spirit entered him—the “breath [that gives] life”—he became what he was not before: a living creature.

In Ezekiel 37 we have one of the most powerful images in the entire Scriptures. Ezekiel saw a valley filled with dead bones. And the way in which the Lord commanded Ezekiel to make them live was to preach to them. Through Ezekiel’s preaching of the Gospel breath entered the bones, flesh was put on them, and they came to life. Then Ezekiel 37:11 says, “these bones are the whole house of Israel.” The Spirit once again gave life to his people who were lifeless bones!

So there in that room King Jesus took a lifeless piece of clay, a bunch of dry bones and recreated them to be the beginning of a new creation who would go out and bring new creation to all the world. As we sing:

The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord,  
She is His new creation, by water and the word.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From the hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation.”

## **The Sign of a New Temple (2:3-4)**

There is a second sign here that shows us that on Pentecost *a new temple* was being built. In verse 3 we read about **divided tongues as of fire** (v. 3). In the Bible fire is a symbol both of cleansing and of judgment. All of those present that Pentecost day certainly knew the story of the burning bush in Exodus 3. The place where Moses stood was “holy ground” because the Lord was there, signified by the burning bush. The cleansing aspect is seen in that God is utterly holy and pure, which the image of fire brings out so clearly. And the judgment aspect of fire is seen in that Moses was forced to the ground in acknowledgment of his un-holiness in the light of God’s holiness. They knew the story of God’s presence with his people in the wilderness as signified by the pillar of fire each night. It comforted Israel with protection, but warned the Egyptians of judgment if they traversed its boundary.

But most importantly for our text in Acts is the account of the building of the tabernacle and its subsequent filling with the cloud of God’s glory, which is one of the Old Testament images of the Spirit. Exodus 40:34-38 narrates for us that when the tabernacle was finished, the Spirit descended to consume the offerings and to fill the Holy of Holies. All who brought offerings to the tabernacle were cleansed as surely as their offering was judged in the fire on behalf of their sins. Later, when the people failed and failed, the temple and its priesthood were defiled. The Lord had to speak of a coming day when he would “suddenly come to his temple” and purify the priests of Levi as a “refiner’s fire” (Mal. 3:2-5).

At Pentecost that tabernacle/temple came to its reality as the fire of God's cleansing and consecrating rested on the disciples and thus **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** (v. 4) just like the Holy of Holies. I hope you're seeing that Acts 2 describes what the church is, not what we are to strive after.

## **The Sign of a New Humanity (2:4-13)**

Pentecost had come and brought with it a new creation, a new temple, as well as a *new humanity* to worship in that new creation-temple. You see, on Pentecost God's curse at Babel in confusing the nations' languages and scattering them was reversed. How do we see this?

As we read that the disciples **began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance** (v. 4) we also read that **devout men from every nation under heaven** (v. 5), **both Jews and proselytes** (v. 11), heard the disciples **speak in his own language** (v. 6) **the mighty works of God** (v. 11).

What a message to us! What a message we have for the world! Our politicians and pundits can speak all they want about diversity and "coming together," but this ultimately can only happen this side of glory in the kingdom of our King, Jesus Christ. It is only in the church that those of various shades of color, of various origins of our birth, and of various political ideologies, can be united in the saving grace of God in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Acts 2 is not about your own “personal Pentecost.” It's about Jesus Christ's universal project of establishing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It started fifty days after our Lord's death. It continues among us here. May it continue through us in the world! May we live as a new creation, testifying of the power of God to save and sanctify! May we offer right sacrifices of praise as a new temple! May we be moved as a new humanity to a more fervent love for one another and for the world! Amen.