



## **Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for October 5, 2008**

**Released on Wednesday, October 1, 2008**

### **“United by the Spirit”**

**DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 2:11–22.**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:1–47.**

**LESSON TEXT: Acts 2:1–17a.**

#### **Acts 2:1–17a**

**1** And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

**2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

**3** And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

**4** And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

**5** And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

**6** Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

**7** And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?

**8** And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

**9** Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

**10** Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

**11** Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

**12** And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

**13** Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

**14** But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

**15** For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

**16** But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

**17a** And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.

## **LESSON AIMS**

**After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:**

1. List the dramatic events that preceded the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost.
2. Explain the role of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.
3. Write a prayer of thankfulness for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Power Outage**

The American professor visiting a missions college was excited when he was told that his classroom in a remote location had been fitted with "air-con" (air conditioning). When he had taught there the previous year, the sweltering heat of the tropical nation had caused the sweat to roll off him in a constant flow.

Sure enough, upon arrival in the classroom the teacher spotted the shiny new air-con unit. He was surprised, however, to find that the room was still very hot. Explanation? There was no electricity to that part of the city on that day. Even the newest, most technologically sophisticated equipment in the world is of no value without a source of energy. A cutting-edge computer with no electricity is good for no more than a doorstop or a plant stand. An expensive car is no more than a lawn ornament if it has no fuel.

The church draws on the energy of its members (Acts 2:42-47). It is undergirded by faith, both of past and present Christians. But the church's greatest source of power is God himself. God empowers the church and the individual believer through the work and ministry of His Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

A congregation may construct a lavish palace for worship, but without the presence of the Spirit, it will always be underutilized. A church may recruit many community leaders to its board, but without the Spirit empowering their lives, it will be just another nonprofit organization. A creative church staff may develop an array of programs to appeal to the unchurched community, but without the active work of the Holy Spirit, the effort will resemble the marketing efforts of any business.

### **Lesson Background**

Acts is the second volume of work from the author Luke. As in the Gospel of Luke, there is a continuing emphasis on the Holy Spirit in Acts (compare Luke 1:15, 35; 2:25-27; 4:1, 18; 10:21; 12:12 for some examples). Some students have suggested that the theme of the work of the Holy Spirit is so prominent in Acts that the book could be called the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" instead of the traditional "Acts of the Apostles."

After Jesus' resurrection, He made various appearances to the believers for a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). He then left them to go back to Heaven to be with the Father. His final instructions before the ascension included the command for them to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8). This was to be the fulfillment of an earlier prophecy by John the Baptist that Jesus was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16).

The first chapter of Acts records what the group of believers did during this waiting period. The group numbered about 120 (Acts 1:15), and they met regularly for prayer (Acts 1:14).

## **THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT—Acts 2:1-4**

### **1. What was the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1)?**

Pentecost was a Jewish feast day that occurred fifty days after the Passover Sabbath (Lev. 23:15-16). This particular *Pentecost* is a Sunday about 10 days after Jesus' ascension (compare Acts 1:3). As they have gathered throughout this week and a half, the disciples are together again for fellowship and prayer.

Who is being referred to as *they* in this verse (and therefore the following verses)? It is not clear whether "all" in Acts 2:1 refers to the 120 disciples (1:15) or just to the Twelve (v. 26). The events of Pentecost, however, seem to revolve around the apostles (2:14, 37, 43). As mentioned later in the chapter, though, the promise of the Spirit was made to all who receive Christ (vs. 38-39).

### **2. Why is it important that the members of your church be of one accord? How can your church's members demonstrate this unity, and what will happen when they do?**

God is a God of unity in the essence of His own being, for He exists as three persons in one. We reflect the nature of God as we demonstrate unity in the church. Jesus expressed the desire that His followers demonstrate this unity in His prayer to the Father in John 17:20, 21: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Unity in the church opens the door for people to believe the gospel. Unity in Christ is seen when all we do points to Christ and not to ourselves, our personal preferences, or to human leaders.

### **3. What were some of the physical manifestations that occurred on this Pentecost (vs. 2,3)?**

Without warning, the Holy Spirit manifested Himself both audibly and visibly. The gathered believers hear a loud *sound*, described as a powerful *wind* noise. Those who have been in a dangerously strong windstorm can testify that it is loud, so loud that spoken words are impossible to hear. There is no wind damage here, however, for there is no actual wind. This is a supernatural sound, a supernatural phenomenon. This sound fills the room, meaning everyone present experiences it.

Two symbolic items should be noted here. First, the source of this sound is *heaven*, implying that its origin is God himself. Second, the ancient concept of *wind* is closely related to *spirit*, thus setting the scene for what is about to happen.

The "cloven tongues" (Acts 2:3) were another visible manifestation of the Spirit's arrival. Although it may be difficult to visualize, the fire may have split asunder and rested on each of the disciples. Just as there is no wind damage to the house, there is no fire damage either. Nothing is burned or even singed. Luke says that those present see *cloven (divided) tongues like as of fire*. This is supernatural fire, like the bush Moses experienced—it burned but was not consumed (Exodus 3:2).

The sound of wind provides an audio miracle. The tongues of fire provide a visual miracle. We can only imagine what this actually looks like, but it must be both startling and exciting. As with the wind noise, all present can see that it is being experienced by *each* person present.

### **4. What were the "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) that were spoken?**

While the phrase "filled with the Holy Ghost" is used in a variety of contexts in the New Testament (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 4:31; Eph. 5:18), here it has direct

reference to the promise of Christ: "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). The disciples needed this empowering to begin witnessing to the world to which they were now being sent (v. 8).

As evidence of the Spirit's presence, they "began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). As we will see, these "other tongues" were the various languages of the people assembled in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (vs. 8-11). That this was a miraculous phenomenon is seen in the fact that the disciples could do this only because the Spirit caused them to speak out.

### **THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT—Acts 2:5-13**

#### **5. Who were the devout Jews in Jerusalem at this time? Why were the people confounded and amazed (vs. 5-7)?**

At this point in Jewish history, many Jews had been dispersed throughout the Roman world. Being "devout men," though, they journeyed back to Jerusalem to attend various Jewish feasts. Since it was in spring, Pentecost was particularly popular. Sea travel was less dangerous at this time of the year.

The expression "out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) simply means the known world of that day. The fifteen nations mentioned later (vs. 9-11) constituted much of the Roman Empire, which encompassed all of the territory surrounding the Mediterranean Sea in the first-century world. The list of nations is representative, not exhaustive.

The previously mentioned sound of a mighty, rushing wind and tongues of fire would have been difficult to keep quiet. Word spread quickly that something extraordinary was taking place. Consequently, large crowds began to gather. The people were bewildered at what they saw and heard. Particularly amazing was the fact that everyone heard the disciples speaking in his own language.

They recognize by the believers' appearance that they are from Galilee, considered to be a rural backwater for any sophisticated Jew of this period. For the visitors, it is highly unexpected that *Galileans* could be speaking in all the languages of the known world (vs. 8-11).

#### **6. What was a Jewish proselyte (v. 10)?**

Note also that Luke mentioned the presence of both "Jews and proselytes" (Acts 2:10). Proselytes were Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. While some Gentiles had informally adopted certain Jewish beliefs and practices (10:1-2), only those who had fully converted were referred to as proselytes. As such, they enjoyed all the rights and privileges of natural-born Jews.

Luke listed the various nations represented to emphasize the fact that these visitors to Jerusalem were hearing in their own tongues about the wonderful things that God was doing. In all likelihood, other nations and people groups were also represented (v. 11).

#### **7. What false accusation was made about apostles (vs. 12, 13)?**

The events of the day had caused "all" to be amazed. Some, however, were skeptical about these occurrences and expressed their doubts to one another, asking what it all meant. Some even concluded that the meaning was obvious: The disciples were drunk.

*New wine* is wine that is not fully cured and is still very sweet. Such beverage is cheap and crude. Of course, they were not drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)!

### **THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT—Acts 2:14-17a**

#### **8. Who was the primary speaker on the Day of Pentecost (vs. 14, 15)?**

It is obvious that Simon Peter was the keynote speaker on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37), although the other apostles stood with him and perhaps did some preaching too.

Before Peter actually began to preach the gospel, though, he answered the charge concerning their supposed drunkenness. Since it was only the third hour of the day, or about nine in the morning, such a scenario was quite unlikely (cf. 1 Thess. 5:7).

### **9. What are some ways that Christians can respond to attacks or questions from those who oppose the gospel?**

Standing in a united front on the Day of Pentecost, Peter and the eleven showed how to respond to being misunderstood or attacked: Peter was ready to give an answer, being set for the defense of the gospel (see Philippians 1:17; 1 Peter 3:15). He was also able to use logic very well.

One of the important things followers of Christ need to do is to live in such a way that there is no evidence to support the attack when someone wants to attack or confront them (see 1 Peter 3:16). When we are persecuted and suffer for the sake of Christ, we remember that, like Paul, we may be "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9).

### **10. From what prophet did the speaker quote on Pentecost? How was the Spirit's ministry going to be different from His work in the Old Testament era (vs. 16, 17)?**

What was happening, however, was the beginning of the fulfillment of a prophecy that was spoken by Joel some eight-hundred years before the time of Christ (Joel 2:28-32). God had promised that "in the last days" He would pour out His Spirit on "all flesh" (Acts 2:17). We often use the phrase "last days" to envision the end times. While this expression can be used in this way (2 Tim. 3:1), it can also mean the period between the first and second comings of Christ. God has spoken through His Son "in these last days" (Neb. 1:2).

In the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit did not come upon all of God's people; He came only upon those chosen for special tasks. Under the new covenant, however, the promise of the Spirit is for all believers. Consequently, those who obey the gospel as preached on Pentecost are still promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39; 5:32; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 1:13).

## **CONCLUSION**

### **The Holy Spirit In Us**

A soccer association once purchased a large, commercial lawn mower to cut the grass on its playing field. Despite the mower's cost and the claims of its manufacturer, those using it felt it was severely underpowered. They complained unrelentingly.

It wasn't until many months after the purchase that a mechanic changing the cutting blades discovered that one of the spark plug wires was not connected. The mower's two-cylinder engine should have provided plenty of muscle, but it had been operating only at half power. After the wire was connected, the operators were amazed at how it roared through the densest grass almost effortlessly.

Many churches have ignored the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the point where they are operating on half power (or less). We may hope that a careful study of the Holy Spirit's dynamic role on the Day of Pentecost may remedy this power deficit. One of the great promises shared by all Christians is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The New Testament teaches that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life

of a believer is both a seal of God's salvation and a taste of our future glory with Him (see Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Acts has much to teach us concerning the Holy Spirit's role in the church. Today we can be bolder and more effective as people who share the gospel, if we will lean on His power! This will not take the place of personal initiative and knowledge of God's Word. But as in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is the avenue God employs to have unremarkable persons do mighty things in His name and for His glory.

### **PRAYER**

Father in Heaven, You are the source of spiritual power, renewal, and comfort in our lives through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. We err greatly when we try to "go it alone," without His help. Remind us again not to neglect Him. May we draw upon Your Spirit to be bold in sharing the good news about Jesus Your Son. It is in His name we pray, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

The Holy Spirit still empowers.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:**

Next week's lesson is "Discerning Gifts for Leadership." People have varying views regarding the value of organization in all aspects of life. Some think that the fewer rules the better, while others see strength in tight regimentation. Perhaps somewhere in the middle is best. The early church grew so fast that deacons were chosen by the congregation and appointed by the apostles, while the apostles gave themselves to prayer and God's Word. Study Acts 6:1-5, 8-15.

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