Day One - The Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-13

**Read Acts 2:1-13.**

The Arrival of the Spirit - vv. 1-4

Having reestablished the necessary 12 disciples with the choice of Mathias, the gathering now waits for the promise which Jesus has made. Jesus had been with them 40 days, and so they wait in a state of expectation for 10 days until the promise is fulfilled. They are all gathered together in a single place—likely a large upper room of a house.

In **v. 1**, Luke begins with a time-marker, mentioning that the day of Pentecost had come. Pentecost was 50 days after the passover, and is referred to in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks ( Exod 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:15–16; Deut 16:9–10, 16; 2 Chr 8:13.) All Jews were to return to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast (see Acts 20:16), and it would have been a tumultuous time in the city, filled with returning Jews.

Jewish tradition had tied the giving of the Law (Ex 19:1) with this day, which “…Philo mentions the noise created by God’s breath or wind at the giving of the law and also says the voice of God was visible as flames. Luke’s account suggests that he “was aware of the association of Pentecost with the renewal of that covenant.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

In **v. 2**, Luke records that a sound like a violent wind filled the house. There is no literal wind—instead, the sound of a wind is what filled the place. The disciples were likely in a larger upper room, since there were 120 of them.

Luke continues in **v. 3** by explaining that tongues of fire rested on each one of them. The ‘tongues’ here is the same word as is used later about the gift of tongues. The connection seems clear in Luke’s mind. However, this is a visible manifestation of the Spirit (accompanied with the audible noise). Fire was often connected with the presence of God (Ex 3:2-5; 19:8), and so it makes sense that both the sound and sight were linked to God’s presence for the Jewish people. The Spirit’s presence is therefore both seen and heard.

What these tongues were is impossible to determine. Some have illustrated it as small flames above each head, and others in different forms. However, clarity is impossible without more information—a limitation that Luke probably makes intentionally.

The important point in Luke’s mind is not what exactly the tongues were, but that the tongues are not individual and distinct, but a single unifying manifestation that appears on each person. The one Spirit is on each individual in the community.

In **v. 4**, the Spirit accomplishes an inward work that connects with the outer manifestation—everyone present is ‘filled with the Spirit’. (This language is complex, and has been discussed at length in week 3 of the study.) However, the stated purpose of the filling of the Spirit in this case is that they be able to speak in other ‘tongues’—languages that the did not know.

“They were filled with the Spirit so that they could *speak in other tongues.* In OT times, the regular consequence of a person’s possession by the Spirit of God was prophecy (e.g., Nu. 11:26–29; 1 Sa. 10:9–10; 2 Sa. 23:2; Is. 61:1–3), and this was the specific outcome of the Spirit’s advent on this occasion too. Inspired and equipped for what would be essentially a verbal ministry, they were empowered to bear testimony to the exalted Christ (cf. 1:8).”[[2]](#footnote-3)

The specific abilities to speak, and the languages they spoke, were determined by the Spirit, as Luke makes clear, saying that the Spirit was giving them utterance.

The Response of the Crowd - vv. 5-13

In **v. 5**, Luke explains that there were crowds of devout men in Jerusalem at this time. This makes good sense, since the Feast of Weeks involved pilgrimage. This group is said to be Jewish, devout, and from every nation under heaven—a reference to the widespread diaspora of the Jews. The estimate of pilgrims is as high as 1 million.[[3]](#footnote-4) Further, since Jerusalem was the center of Judaism at this time, the city would have been populated by many Jews born in other nations who had come to study, do business, etc.

Starting in **v. 6**, Luke uses a series of strong verbs to indicate the shock of the crowds (v. 6 - bewildered, v. 7 - amazed and astonished, v. 12 - amazement and great perplexity). The point is obvious—the miracle of tongues has caught the attention of the residents of Jerusalem. Ironically, some of the people observing respond by mocking them (v. 13).

Luke records two rhetorical questions in **vv. 7-8**. The first is a reference to the disciples and their origin—Galilee. This is likely simply because the followers of Jesus would have been relatively well-known at this point. They had been in and out of the city, and had been with Jesus at the triumphal entry. The leading disciples would have been well-known. Some have suggested that the knowledge of their origin was due to a different dialect of Aramaic, or because of a different form of dress, but this is simply conjecture. It is impossible to know precisely how, but Luke records that the crowd is aware that they are from Galilee.

The second rhetorical question is obvious—how is it possible that the crowd is hearing the disciples preach in their native tongues? The question implies that many of the crowd were pilgrims from outside of Jerusalem who had been born speaking local dialects for business, but were now communicating in either Hebrew or more likely Koine Greek—the ‘lingua franca’ of the day. As referenced before, this provides a helpful explanation of what the gift of tongues is in 1 Cor 14.

The disciples were all Galilean and should not have been able to speak the local languages from the wide range of provinces that are mentioned!

The miraculous work of the Spirit is to cause these men and women to speak in other languages. The miracle is NOT that the people present can *hear* in other languages, but that the speakers are able to speak in those languages.

The list of nations/regions in **vv. 9-11** has been the source of much debate. However, a simple analysis will provide some clarity. The list is not made up by Luke, since he excludes regions like Samaria, Syria, Macedonia, etc, which are included in the narrative of Acts. Therefore, Luke must be basing the list on the specific memory of the apostles about which languages were being spoken. The list may or may not be exhaustive, however, and so we shouldn’t hang too much on the specifics. The large number of languages is not an issue—the gift of tongues is poured out on all those who were present, rather than just the 12, hence the large number of languages represented.

The ethnic and geographical names are listed in a circle which proceeds roughly counterclockwise from the east (Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia), to the north (Cappadocia, Pontus), to the west (Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya Cyrenaica, Rome, Crete), and to the south (Arabia)—with Jerusalem/Judea in the center.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The more important issue in these verses is the closing phrase, where Luke indicates that all who were present were hearing them proclaim the ‘mighty deeds of God.’ This is most certainly referring to the message about Jesus as the Christ, His confirming miracles, and the present offer of the kingdom—the role of the disciples as ‘witnesses’ (see 1:8).

In **vv. 12-13**, the two responses in the crowd are recorded. Some continue in amazement, asking ‘what does this mean?’ Others mock and accuse the disciples of drunkenness. Peter addresses the accusation of the latter in his sermon which will follow.

Questions:

1. Read 1 Cor 14:20-22. Why did God have the disciples perform this miracle of tongues first? What was His purpose?
2. Based on these verses, what does the arrival of the Spirit and His power provide for the apostles? How does this relate to Acts 1:8?
3. Why is this group of diverse language speakers NOT the ‘uttermost parts of the earth’ promised in Acts 1:8?
4. If you put yourself in the shoes of the apostles, what might they have been thinking during the 10 day interim between the ascension and Pentecost? How might this relate to us?

Day Two - Peter’s Sermon, Part 1 - Acts 2:14-24

**Read Acts 2:14-24**

Peter begins his defense in **v. 14** by standing with the eleven. While the whole group of disciples has apparently received the Spirit, the twelve are put forward as the front-line group of witnesses, and Peter stands as the spokesman for the group at large. He likely speaks in Hebrew or Greek, so that the whole gathering of people can understand what is being said.

Significantly, the word translated ‘declared’ in v. 14 is the same word as ‘utterance’ in v. 4. The connection is clear—the words that Peter speaks here are clearly the words of a man filled with the Spirit and prepared to witness about Jesus as the Christ. That Peter and the other apostles would have remembered this sermon (and the other significant sermons in the book) in order to convey it to Luke is no surprise. The moment is monumental.

Peter’s response in **v. 15** to the accusation of drunkenness is a potentially a little humorous. He essentially says it’s only 9 AM, and they wouldn’t have even had enough *time* to get drunk, had that been the case. The point is that the accusation is absolutely ridiculous, and he sweeps it out of the way.

Having brushed aside their accusation, in **v. 16** Peter moves directly to Scripture as the defense for what is happening. This statement is truly stunning. Peter tells the onlookers that what they are witnessing is the direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32.

**Vv. 17-21** are an almost complete quotation of the prophecy of Joel (an appendix is attached with a complete commentary for these verses in their original context. This commentary portion will deal with the minor edits that Peter inserts and the implications of this passage as a fulfillment statement.)

First, Peter edits the ‘after this’ in Joel to ‘in the last days’. This change makes sense because in the context of Joel, God is speaking about His coming to Zion and restoring the nation of Israel after they turn in repentance. Peter sees this event of the coming of the Spirit as the initiating reality of the last days of history when God will fight for the nation of Israel and they will turn, in total, in repentance and faith in Him.

Second, Peter adds ‘God says’, which is simply a reference to who the speaker is in the context of Joel.

The repetition of ‘pour forth of My Spirit’ in v. 17 and 18 in the original context of Joel 2 will come up again in the second half of Peter’s sermon—in v. 33 Peter will say that the Spirit is being poured forth by Jesus Himself, who is God.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Peter also adds the possessive pronoun ‘My’ in v. 18—again, this is likely a reference to those who have truly repented of their sin. The Spirit will not be poured out on the unrepentant. Peter’s point here is that, as the nation repents, each successive wave of repentance will be met with the pouring out of the Spirit.

At the end of v. 18, Peter adds the phrase ‘and they shall prophesy’ again. This language is important. Peter sees this moment, and the words that are being spoken in the various languages, as prophecy. This is not simply speaking truths that were known, but is divine revelation being granted through the Spirit. This work of the Spirit that leads to prophecy is the fervent wish of Moses in Num 11:29.

What about the cosmic signs?

The obvious question that must be considered is about the cosmic signs mentioned in **vv. 19-20**. Apparently Peter believed these events were about to take place. The question is, was Peter mistaken? Or were other forces at play?

The consideration that Peter may have been mistaken in his interpretation of this passage is nonsensical. Luke has already explained that Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45-47) and the prophecies written of Him and the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Peter’s very first sermon references a prophecy of Jesus directly—this could not have been a mistake.

Another possibility is that the prophecy of Joel 2 was never actually going to be fulfilled with cosmic signs and wonders, or that those wonders had already taken place during the ministry of Christ or at the crucifixion. Neither of these explanations make sense of the text. Peter clearly understands these events as future, and is anticipating them taking place before the coming of the Day of the Lord.

Instead, a careful reader can see that Peter’s quotation shows that he believes the ‘last days’ have begun, and that the call at the end of the quotation about salvation is the offer that he is making to the nation of Israel at this time. The cosmic signs are part of these events, had the nation of Israel continued in repentance (particularly the leaders—see Acts 4:8-12)

This, interestingly, makes sense with what follows after the quote from Joel and the apostles’ odd behavior in remaining in the temple perpetually after the ascension. In Joel 2:32, the prophet informs the readers that those ‘on Mount Zion will escape’.

Therefore, it is best to understand that Peter believes that the beginning of the ingathering of Jews has begun, and that the Spirit is the sign that the promises of Joel 2 are beginning to make their way into the nation. For this reason, he tells them that they should call upon the name of the Lord for salvation.[[6]](#footnote-7)

In **v. 22**, Peter applies this passage to this moment in history, and especially in regard to Jesus and His life, death and resurrection. He tells them that Jesus was a man (specifically from Nazareth) who was clearly accredited by God with signs, wonders, and miracles (Interestingly, this is the same word used by Luke for the ‘power’ that will come upon them in 1:8.). These miracles were still continuing right up until His death, which at the time would’ve only been two months prior to this speech. The point here is that God was proving something to the Jews about Jesus’ identity—a point that Peter will return to in v. 36—the great statement of witness to the people.

Peter says that God did the works through Jesus, which makes sense because of the power of the Spirit that came upon Jesus at His baptism (see Luke 4 for details). Christ’s human nature worked through the power of the Spirit to perform miracles during His incarnation.

In perhaps one of the most stunning verses in all the Bible, Peter tells them in **v. 23** that the events of the life of Jesus were according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. The point of the verse is to lay the blame at the feet of the Jews. However, there are layers of responsibility here.

1. The Jews put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.
2. The godless (literally, ‘lawless’, or men without the Torah) men are the Romans, whose hands actually crucified Jesus.
3. God superintended the entire event

This concept is clearly taught throughout Scripture—God is the primary cause of the death of Christ (see for example the language of Rom 8:32 or John 3:16). That God would determine and plan to put His own Son to death clearly demonstrates His love for His people (Rom 5:8).

That Jesus died was an undeniable fact—everyone in Jerusalem, and probably most of the pilgrims in the city for Pentecost, would have heard about the events that had taken place. But Peter doesn’t stop here.

In **v. 24** he concludes the story. Human courts and trials were meaningless—God raised Jesus from the dead. The language is pictorial - God ‘raised Him’ because it was impossible for Him to be held ‘under’ death. In other words, death and the grave could not hold Jesus, simply because of who Jesus is.

Peter’s use of ‘agony of death’ is likely a reference to Psalm 18:4, where the ‘cords of death encompass’ the Messiah. This makes sense with the language of death being incapable of ‘holding’ Him. Essentially, the picture is that the ropes that bind the dead forever in death were, in a moment, broken apart through the power of the Messiah.

Questions:

1. Why is it so important to Peter to point these listeners toward Jesus as the true Messiah?
2. What are some characteristics of Peter’s Gospel presentation in vv. 22-24 that you notice? What are the main points he focuses on regarding Jesus?
3. Why doesn’t Peter try to ‘prove’ that Jesus rose from the dead with physical proofs? How does this relate to Christ’s command to the disciples in Acts 1:8?

Day Three - Peter’s Sermon, Part 2 - Acts 2:25-36

Peter continues his witness of Jesus with Scriptural evidence that the Messiah would rise from the dead. This is crucial, because the Jewish people had anticipated a conquering hero who would come to vanquish the Romans (rightly so, in one sense!) but had not understood the suffering and death that would precede the victory of Christ.

**Vv. 25-28** are a quotation from Psalm 16, which Peter says is about Jesus. This commentary is not intended to be an exposition of Psalm 16, but we would highly encourage you to meditate on this psalm. It is filled with beautiful statements about Jesus and His care over David.

In **v. 25**, Peter quotes from Psalm 16:8. He begins the quotation at this point because David’s language is in the present. The Lord, YHWH, is always before David, in the sense that David ‘saw’ Him. This is the same language used of Paul in 2 Cor 3:18—that we all see the glory of the Lord through the Spirit.

This ‘sight’ of God’s glory is the direct result of God’s care for him. David says that God is always ‘at his right hand.’ This is a position of support and care. God is always supporting and caring for David, and this support means that he will not be ‘shaken’. This is language of protection from falling. God’s support and care (love) for David means that he is safe eternally—nothing can take him from God’s hand. (This idea is later summarized in v. 11 again.) Long story short, God’s love and care for David are the means by which David experiences a ‘sight’ of God’s glory in his heart (this maps perfectly onto Paul’s explanation of the New Covenant reality in 2 Cor 3:18-4:6).

**V. 26** continues this train of thought from Psalm 16:9. The sight of God’s glory through the Gospel thrills David’s heart, and fills him with joy in the present moment. However, he is also aware that this joy is only part of the blessing—his flesh will also live in hope. In other words, he isn’t afraid of what will happen when he dies.

In **v. 27**, David gives the ground of that hope—that God will not abandon his soul to Hades. Hades is the realm of the dead, or the grave, and David is confident that he will not remain there—that is, he will not remain dead forever.

In the second half of the verse, David switches from first person (my) to third person (Holy One). This change is significant. Here David is speaking of the Messiah. The Lord’s Holy One will not be allowed to see decay, or corruption. In other words, the body of the Messiah would not decompose as the bodies of other men.

Peter finishes the quotation in **v. 28** by completing the Psalm. The ways of life and the gladness in the presence of God are both references to the coming resurrection of the dead. David looks forward beyond the grave to a time when he will enjoy God’s presence.

In **v. 29-30** he states the obvious fact that David died, was buried, and everyone knows where his tomb is, even in Peter’s day. However, David also was a prophet (a shocking statement, but one that tells us that David understood he spoke about the Messiah) and he knew that God would someday seat one of his Seed on the throne of Israel forever. This is based on the David covenant found in 2 Sam 7:12. David knew that one of his great grandsons would be the Messiah, and so he knew that that coming One—the Holy One—would not suffer decay, but would rise again to live forever. The only way to have an eternal human king is for that King to have an indestructible body.

In **v. 31**, Peter tells us that David looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that His soul was not abandoned to the grave (just as David knew his wouldn’t be in Psalm 16:10), and specifically speaking of the Messiah, that His body would not suffer decay.

The final connection that summarizes Peter’s entire argument appears in **v. 32**—this Jesus (that is, the Jesus from Nazareth) God raised from the dead, and the people speaking in tongues now are all witnesses of this fact! In other words—Jesus IS the Holy One.

On the basis of this reality—the resurrection of Christ— in **v. 33**, Peter summarizes all that Jesus has done that has led to this moment. Peter explains two realities—Christ’s exaltation, and Christ’s receiving the promise.

The word Peter uses for ‘exalted’ is the same word used in Isa 52:13 in speaking about the Servant of YHWH who will be ‘lifted up’. The connection is obvious—it is the suffering Servant, the crucified Messiah, who has been exalted to the right hand of the Father.

The second statement about Jesus is that He has received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father. Again, this language is referencing the Joel 2:28-32 passage—the promise of the Spirit’s outpouring on the nation of Israel has been actuated by the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Jesus had to suffer in order to fulfill the prophecies, and provide salvation. Having suffered, His resurrection now opens the door to national repentance for Israel, and the promised Holy Spirit on the nation is available. Peter will say the same in v. 39.

Because of His exaltation and reception of the promise, Peter concludes in that it is He who has poured forth the Spirit that they are currently seeing and hearing in the foreign languages, the tongues of fire, and the sound of wind.

In **vv. 34-35**, Peter returns to David, and quotes Psalm 110:1 (a favorite text of Jesus’ during His ministry). Why bring up David here? Because Peter wants to make it abundantly clear that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father. He uses this verse to conclusively show that Christ’s exaltation has occurred and that what they are witnessing in proof of that fact.

Psalm 110:1 is conclusive proof—*the Lord said to my Lord*—David’s words reveal that the Messiah is YHWH, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

**V. 36** is Peter’s concluding statement and includes a massive amount of important data. There are five clear issues that Peter brings to their minds.

1. ‘House of Israel’ - If Jesus has been exalted, and is David’s rightful Son, they have crucified their King. This is political language.
2. ‘God has made Him’ - The Father has exalted His Son in accordance with Ps 110:1. It should not be assumed that Jesus was not Lord and Christ prior to this time. The language of ‘God has made Him’ indicates the public display and exaltation of the Son to His rightful place—a place that was unknown prior to the resurrection (Rom 1:4).
3. ‘Lord’ - Jesus is not only the Messiah, but He is YHWH, the Lord, with His Father. The word translated Lord in Greek is often used to translate the word YHWH in Hebrew (ie. Rom 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32).
4. ‘Christ’ - Jesus is the true Messiah, the One who has come to redeem the people of Israel and be their loving King.
5. ‘Whom you crucified’ - The Jews had put their King to death—not the whole house of Israel, but those residing in Jerusalem. Peter focuses this speech on his hearers. The pronouncement of Jesus as Lord and Christ is for the whole house of Israel, but the condemnation for His crucifixion falls on Peter’s immediate audience.

Perhaps no greater sermon has ever been preached!

Questions:

1. What are some of the things the resurrection proves about Jesus? What does that mean for those we speak with about Him?
2. Why was it so crucial for Peter to prove the Messianic office of Jesus from the OT, and how does the Spirit’s outpouring relate to that?
3. What are some takeaways for us when being witnesses of Christ?

Day Four - Peter’s Gospel Message - Acts 2:37-41

Starting in **v. 37**, the response of the listeners is recorded. Luke tells us they are ‘pierced in the heart’. The inner pain of guilt regarding their actions against the Messiah is real—modern language would be ‘conscience pain’. It is not clear if this is an interruption in Peter’s sermon, though it seems that Peter had finished speaking. His final words were of condemnation.

Their question — ‘Brothers, what must we do?’ — is appropriate! They had sinned against God in the most profound of ways, and Peter’s sermon brings this into their hearts and minds. They are aware of their massive shortcomings before a holy God. In this moment of guilt, they do now know what to do to salve their consciences, and so they ask Peter and the other apostles (who were still present and evidently able to answer their questions).

In **v. 38**, Peter gives them the proper answer. They must repent. This is not simply acknowledging their sin, though that is involved. Instead, it is a complete change of mind, which leads to affirming the Messianic office of Christ.

“The exhortation to repent means, here, that the Jews in Jerusalem regret their (active or passive) involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus, that they confess this tragic sin, that they feel sorrow for their rejection of Jesus, that they turn away from their former attitude concerning Jesus, that they change their view of Jesus, and that they accept Jesus as the promised Messiah and the risen and exalted Lord.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

The next phrase has been widely misunderstood. Peter tells them to ‘be baptized in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of their sins.’ At first glance, it would appear that Peter is connecting forgiveness with the act of baptism.

The act of baptism was a very special one to these Jewish people (as of course, it should be for us!). Peter’s direction to them that they should be baptized carried heavy Jewish significance. To be baptized was to see purity through the one who’s name you are baptized in. In the OT, ritual purity was demanded for participation in the worship in the temple (see Ex 30:17-21, 40:30-32; Lev 14:8-9; 1 Kings 7:38). The washing was a way to reconnect with the nation as God’s people after being separated because of some form of ritual impurity.

Peter’s command for these people to be baptized ‘in the name of Jesus’ would have meant a specific connection with the person of Christ, and a confession of Jesus as the true Messiah. This confession of Jesus as the Christ, and as Lord, was the affirmation of their sin, and their faith in Jesus. The baptism that Peter then calls them to is not simply a washing, but a visible affirmation of their new faith in Jesus as Messiah (note Luke’s order in v. 41!). While Peter doesn’t make this connection explicit here, as Jews, they would have understood this clearly.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The final phrase of this verse offers to these people the same promise that the apostles and other believers had received—the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is clearly the same as what Peter has just referenced in v. 33—that the exalted Christ has now given the gift of the Spirit to those who are present.

Peter makes the connection explicit—those who are saved WILL receive this gift from Christ. This does not mean that all believers for all time will receive this, of course, but simply that those present would receive the gift. The fact that this would occur through the laying on of hands of the apostles is made clear later in Acts 8.

In **v. 39**, Peter provides an additional incentive to his hearers—the promise of the Spirit, he says, is for them, and for their children, and for all who are far off. It has commonly been held that this phrase means Jews and Gentiles alike—that is, that the ‘far off’ ones are Gentiles. This reading is difficult to prove, given the difficulty Peter has later with the conversion of Cornelius.

It seems better to understand this statement as referencing the nation of Israel, of all ages and all locations. Peter’s hearers and their children could receive the promise, and those in Jerusalem, and other Jews who were not there at that time could also receive it.[[9]](#footnote-10)

However, the final statement is crucial - the offer of the promise is contingent upon the Lord’s call. Peter understands that he is preaching a message that requires divine intervention to accept. The nation may or may not receive the promise, and Peter understands that this is in God’s hands, ultimately.

In **v. 40**, we discover that Luke has only recorded a portion of the sermon. Apparently Peter continues witnessing about Christ to these Jews with many other words. The discussion continues, but the overarching theme is laid out at the end—that they escape from the perverse generation.

This terminology is reminiscent of the wilderness generation. (Deut 32:5: “They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation” (LXX: γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη); cf. Ps 78:8: “their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation.) Peter’s reference here would be a warning similar to Moses’s in Deuteronomy—turn to the Lord in faith and be distant from anyone who won’t.

The results of Peter’s proclamation are seen in **v. 41** — those who had received the word (ie. believed the message) were baptized. Again, this order is critical. The total number is around three thousand people.[[10]](#footnote-11) This mass conversion event must have been wildly encouraging to the disciples! Any attempt to recreate this event is foolish—the salvation of these people is likely the result of the already-laid foundation of gospel preachingby the Lord Himself prior to His crucifixion.

Questions:

1. In spite of the weight of guilt on these people in murdering the Messiah, what is Peter’s exhortation? How might that be encouraging to us when we’ve sinned?
2. What is the command regarding baptism, and how does this inform our understanding of what baptism is?
3. The miraculous salvation of 3000 people all at once may never be repeated, but what does it tell us about God’s power to save?

Day Five - Life in the Early Church - Acts 2:42-47

The final section of Peter’s description of the events surrounding Pentecost moves forward in the narrative to the time that follows the substantial conversion experience. The church, all in one group, now begins to function, and has characteristics that are both prescriptive and descriptive for post-apostolic church life.

In **v. 42**, Luke gives a helpful summary statement, likely with the intent of showing that this church was focusing on the very things that every true church would focus on in the years to come. There are four specific statements that provide some helpful insight into what Luke sees as major anchors of the life of every church.

1. **Apostles’ Teaching** - This is likely referring both to the encouraging words regarding the Gospel of Christ, and to the evangelistic ministry of the Apostles. With all the chaos of thousands coming to Christ, the need for instruction about the message, about Jesus as the Christ, and certainly about the eschatological implications of the moment must have been paramount.

It is also important to note that the teaching that is being heeded and propagated is done by the Apostles. Certainly in a group of thousands, there were many qualified teachers. However, the devotion was not to the mutual discussion, but to the authoritative teaching of the apostles. Even in this early moment in church history, it was the apostles who were considered worthy of being heard and repeated.

Of course, our modern churches do the same—not personally, but through the word of God granted to us through the written teaching ministry of the apostles of Christ!

1. **Fellowship** - This is apparently the gathering of the church on a regular basis. The word has a definite article—‘*the* fellowship’—which would indicate that it is formal gatherings. Of course, since they were all remaining in or around the Temple Mount, these would have been far more frequent than once a week. Nevertheless, fellowship, even in a formal gathering sense, would have been regular—perhaps even daily in the early years.

While not as regularly, our gatherings mirror this early church event. Luke makes it clear that these early converts were devoting themselves to these times of fellowship. True converts love the people of God and seek to enjoy time with them, as they sense the unification they share in the bond of peace through the Spirit.

1. **Breaking of bread** - The third aspect of life in the early church was the breaking of bread. Some have argued that this is a technical term for the Lord’s Supper. Others argue that it is simply a statement on the sharing of fellowship around food. Something of a hybrid of both views is likely correct. The people were, of course, celebrating the Lord’s death and resurrection. However, they were also simply sharing meals together—a practice in the ancient world that showed a unified spirit.

Of course, this practice also functions in the modern church. Fellowship around food remains an integral component of life in the church, and the Lord’s Supper is a constant staple in the life of any biblical church.

1. **Prayer** - The term here in Greek has the article, and is plural—‘the prayers’. This would likely refer to gathered sessions of prayer as a church, or in small groups, but also to Jewish prayers which would now have had much deeper meanings for these new Jewish converts.[[11]](#footnote-12) While it is hard to recreate what was happening with the prayers of the saints, Luke makes sure to point out that this was a substantial part of the early life of the church.

Again, we find helpful parallels for the modern church. Corporate, small group, and private prayers are helpful for the heart, regardless. These should of course, be spontaneous, as well as organized by the church, but should be focused on Christ. The early church, and all churches since, have devoted themselves to prayer.

The language of **v. 43** is also important. The church watched as the Apostles performed substantial miracles, and were feeling a sense of awe. This language is probably also connected with the new ‘body life’ of v. 42—the sense of awe is both because of the glories of church fellowship, and the miracles that are being performed. Luke gives one example of such a miracle in chapter 3. While it is probably likely that many in the community were performing miracles, Luke’s emphasis is on the Apostles.

**Vv. 44-45** describe the economic and social life of the community during this time. First, the language of economic equality appears in v. 44. This is not, of course, modern Communism or Socialism. The disciples would freely and willingly sell their possessions and bring the money to the disciples to distribute (see Acts 4:32, 37). The distribution of the proceeds was at the disposal of the Apostles, who were aware of the needs of individuals.

This practice is not encouraged elsewhere in the New Testament. During this time, the disciples believed that Jesus was going to return at any moment (see Peter’s testimony of that in 3:19). This was not a far-fetched idea, since Jesus Himself had offered the kingdom to the nation. In that sense, the believers at this time were effectively divesting themselves of material possessions for the maintenance of the larger whole, with the hope that Christ’s return and their redemption would be imminent.

In **v. 46**, further evidence of their thinking is given in the statement that they were remaining, more or less, at or near the temple. This practice continued until 8:1 when they are scattered from the persecution that arises after the murder of Stephen. Until that time, the church remains more or less within walking distance of the temple.

This likely is the result of the rest of Joel 2:32 — “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Will be delivered; **For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls**.” The anticipation of the immediate kingdom would have caused them to remain near the temple mount, believing that those nearby would be saved.

The language of ‘house to house’ indicates that some of those who were saved had homes in Jerusalem where they would have large gatherings of believers and would enjoy a meal together. These homes provided places where the larger congregation could gather in smaller groups to eat and fellowship.

Luke says that they were continuing to take their meals with gladness and sincerity of heart. These believers are simply enjoying the fellowship, and serving one another with their resources. Joy isn’t about buildings or comforts in the church, but about the glory of Christ in the heart, and experienced through brothers and sisters.

In **v. 47** we hear that they are having favor (having ‘grace’) with all the people. This obviously didn’t include the leaders who knew what they had done against Christ and who hated His disciples (see 5:13), but represents the commoners. This gracious attitude continues among the people, even to the stoning of Stephen.

Finally in **v. 47**, Luke tells us that the Lord was adding to His church - their number was growing. Again, this shows God’s hand in the apparent growing ingathering of Jews that is causing the hopefulness of the coming kingdom in these first disciples.

Questions:

1. Does your heart feel joyfully encouraged in the four areas of church life above? What are some ways the church can improve, and what are some ways that you can improve in these areas?
2. Is the redistribution of resources prescriptive or descriptive? (Careful!) Why?
3. How has the Good News changed these first Christians? What are areas in your life where you see God’s grace in similar ways?

Appendix 1 - Textual Analysis of Joel 2:28-32

**The Lord’s Vindication of His People (2:28-3:21)**

**1. The Outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-32)**

28 It will come about after this

That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;

And your sons and daughters will prophesy,

Your old men will dream dreams,

Your young men will see visions.

29 “Even on the male and female servants

I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

The Day of the Lord

30 “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,

Blood, fire and columns of smoke.

31 “The sun will be turned into darkness

And the moon into blood

Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

32 “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord

Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem

There will be those who escape,

As the Lord has said,

Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

* This portion of the book is set off as its own chapter in the Hebrew text. This passage is a notoriously complex one because of Peter’s quotation of the text in Acts 2:17-21. A quick reading of Peter’s quotation seems to indicate that these events are fulfilled at Pentecost. However, a careful reading will indicate that this is not Peter’s point at all. However, prior to understanding Peter’s usage, we must understand the text in its original context.
* The passage begins in **v. 28** with an important temporal marker. Joel says that ‘after this’, certain events will occur. The presence of God among the people in 2:27 will not only be external, but internal. Each person, from the least to the greatest of those included, will have the blessings which are detailed in vv. 28-29.
* After Israel’s repentance, and after God’s abundant blessings through His presence, God’s Spirit will dwell upon the people of Israel. This will be a time of corporate rejoicing and worship, as the Spirit of God rests upon His people completely.
* Just as the rains would come in abundance and water the earth, so also the Spirit of God would be **poured out** on God’s people. This language is used elsewhere to depict the Spirit’s coming as well (Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; **Zech 12:10**). The presence of the Spirit of God among the people is the sign that the nation has repented and turned, and is in the path of physical blessings on the land as well.
* The use of the term **mankind** in the translation can cause confusion. The promise is not that all humanity that is alive at that time would receive the Spirit, but that the nation of Israel that is alive at the time of the fulfillment of this passage will receive the Spirit. The term mankind is actually the term ‘flesh’, which would indicate a distance group of people. That group is describe in the rest of vv. 28-29—the repetition of the pronoun **your** three times during these verses would indicate that the nation of Israel is in view. The whole of Israel will receive the Spirit—a fulfillment of Moses’s wish in Num 11:29.
* The promise that the Spirit of God would indwell the entire nation of Israel from the least to the greatest of them should not be surprising. This is the very language of the New Covenant texts in **Jer 31:31-34** (They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them”) and **Ezek 36:27** (“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances”). Note especially that the promise in Ezek 36:38ff is tied to physical land blessings which are detailed in Joel 2 as well!
* This prophecy is referencing the future end of the age, when the whole of the nation of Israel will be converted and the New Covenant will be fulfilled at a corporate level for the nation (the New Covenant is made with Israel and Judah and must be fulfilled with them—Jer 31:31).
* The work of the Spirit will be supernatural. He will provide revelation through **prophecy**, **dreams**, and **visions**. Again, this is to be expected during the end of the age, and the outpouring of spiritual blessing on the nation.
* This understanding helps us to see what Peter is saying in Acts 2:15ff. The men of Israel suppose that the disciples are drunk. Peter tells them that isn’t the case—that they are filled with the Spirit, as Joel promised. This leads into a sermon where Peter defends Jesus’s Messianic position. The hearers understand this, and are told to repent and receive the promise of the Spirit (the promise of the Spirit is, of course, here in Joel 2:28-29!). Peter sees this as the inaugural events of the end of the age, and believes that Israel is in the process of corporate repentance. In fact, in his second sermon, Peter literally tells them that if they ‘repent and return’ (significant covenant language, given the call to return in Joel 2:12-14), God will send times of ‘refreshing’, which will include the return of Christ. Peter clearly believes that Jesus will come again as the nation turns in repentance. This was not confusion—this was a true reading of Joel.
* In **vv. 30-32**, the tone suddenly changes. Rather than spiritual blessing, there are catastrophic **wonders** in the heavens and on the earth.
* On earth, there will be **blood**, **fire**, and **smoke.**  These terms are often used in relation to the Lord’s appearance, and to the details surrounding the Exodus.[[12]](#footnote-13)
* In heaven the **sun will be darkened** and the **moon turned to blood**. This language has been used frequently by end-times prophecy junkies. Every solar eclipse and ‘blood moon’ becomes a moment to dust off the charts. This isn’t the point. These aren’t just natural phenomena—they are wonders—miraculous events that prove that the end of the age has come upon the world. (For more on these cataclysmic miracles, see Isa 13:10; Amos 8:9; and especially Rev 6:12-13)
* The final phrase of v. 31—**before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes**—has also caused some controversy. The word ‘before’ has been used to indicate a temporal marker, meaning that there will be cosmic signs before the DOTL actually occurs. However, this is placing far too much weight on this preposition. The term in Hebrew means ‘face’ or ‘front part’ and is used of the front of the army in Joel 2:20.[[13]](#footnote-14) This meaning would render the phrase ‘the face (or beginning, or front) of the coming of the DOTL’. Using the term as a temporal signifier is not helpful.[[14]](#footnote-15)
* The final statement in **v. 32** is redemptive. At that time, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered. To call upon the name of God for rescue is synonymous with salvation (Jer 33:3; Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13).
* In summary, in the final days, at the time of the DOTL, God will do a mighty work in the world, both on the Earth and in the sky. These wonders will be an indicator to the world that the DOTL has come, and whoever calls on the name of God will be delivered. The nation of Israel will be converted, and will receive the Spirit en masse as a sign that God has brought them into the finally ratified New Covenant.

Appendix 2 - “Be Baptized…for the Forgiveness of Your Sin” - Acts 2:38

Our analysis above regarding the connection that Peter makes between baptism and forgiveness of sins is a summary of the general consensus among commentators. A sampling is below.

“So it is that here repentance is linked with being baptized. Since elsewhere repentance and faith are closely linked (20:21; Mark 1:15), it is certain that, whatever else it may be, baptism is an expression of faith…Baptism was performed *in the name of Jesus*, a phrase which may represent a commercial usage, ‘to the account of Jesus’, or a Jewish idiom, ‘with reference to Jesus’. However precisely the phrase be understood, it conveys the thought that the person being baptized enters into allegiance to Jesus, and this would tie in with the evidence that at baptism it was customary to make a confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). Thus Christian baptism was an expression of faith and commitment to Jesus as Lord.”[[15]](#footnote-16)

“It would indeed be a mistake to link the words “for the forgiveness of sins” with the command “be baptized” to the exclusion of the prior command to repent. It is against the whole genius of biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite could have any value except insofar as it was accompanied by the work of grace within. In a similar passage in the next chapter (3:19) the blotting out of the people’s sins is a direct consequence of their repenting and turning to God; nothing is said about baptism, although it is no doubt implied (the idea of an unbaptized believer does not seem to be entertained in the New Testament).”[[16]](#footnote-17)

“In the apostolic preaching, the offer of forgiveness is directly linked with repentance towards God and faith in Jesus as the Christ (cf. 3:19–20; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38–39). Baptism is not always explicitly mentioned in this connection. It is regularly associated with commitment to Christ, but it is not a rite that can secure the blessings of salvation apart from genuine repentance and faith. Christian baptism is virtually defined as being *in the name of Jesus Christ* (cf. 10:48). This expression may suggest that the person being baptized actually called upon Jesus as Lord and Christ, as a way of confessing faith in him (cf. 22:16). The *name* of Jesus represents his divine authority and power to grant the blessing of the Spirit and to save people from the coming judgment through the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jl. 2:32; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38). At the human level, calling upon Jesus as Lord and Messiah is essentially what makes a person a Christian (cf. Rom. 10:9–10).”[[17]](#footnote-18)

“The preposition “for” (εἰς) in the expression “for the forgiveness of sins” raises the question of the relationship between immersion in water (baptism) and the forgiveness of sins. Some interpret the preposition as expressing purpose (the purpose of baptism is the forgiveness of sins), some as expressing result (baptism results in forgiveness).716 A contextually more plausible interpretation assumes a causal meaning (forgiveness of sins is the cause of baptism)—the Jews who had heard Peter explain that Jesus was the crucified, risen, and exalted Messiah and Lord who saves Israel in the “last days,” had repented of their sins and come to faith in Jesus. Otherwise, they would not have been willing to be immersed in water for purification “in the name of Jesus the Messiah”; they were immersed in water for purification “on the basis of the forgiveness of sins” which they had received from Jesus. Peter (Luke) does not spell out at this point the precise relationship between repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sins, or how this association “works.” However, in the context of Peter’s sermon, and also in view of passages such as Acts 3:19, the connection is obvious: the remission of sins is the direct consequence of the fact that the Jews in Jerusalem repent of their rejection of Jesus and that they turn to Jesus as Messiah, as forgiveness of sins “in the last days” has been achieved by the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Lord.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

1. David E. Garland, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac2.1&off=446&ctx=+the+law+on+Sinai.3+~Philo+mentions+the+n), 25–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. David G. Peterson, [The Acts of the Apostles](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.4&off=2016&ctx=he+Spirit%E2%80%99s+coming.+~They+were+filled+wit), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “If the reference to the day of Pentecost in 2:1 not only provides a chronological reference but also the context for the language miracle, festival pilgrims are likely to be in view as well. Some scholars estimate that one million pilgrims visited Jerusalem for Pentecost.” - Eckhard J. Schnabel, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.8&off=633&ctx=f+Nations+in+2:9%E2%80%9311%0a~The+ethnic+and+geogr), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. In a Jewish context, this addition is unnecessary—nobody but God himself could pour out God’s Spirit, who is the personal and effective presence of the transcendent God himself. This change of the text sets up the later point in Peter’s speech that it is Jesus, the Messiah, who pours out the Spirit and who has thus, after his exaltation, taken over a divine function. - Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.17&off=2817&ctx=ours+out+his+Spirit.~+In+a+Jewish+context), 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Check the appendix 1 for a complete note packet from Joel 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.38&off=3916&ctx=iving+salvation.672+~The+exhortation+to+r), 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See Appendix 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. “Those who are “far off” are the Jews in the Diaspora (Dan. 9:7; Isa. 57:19; Esther 9:20). Peter thinks of the reconstitution of Israel.” — David E. Garland, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac2.38-40&off=746&ctx=he+coming+judgment.%0a~Those+who+are+%E2%80%9Cfar+o), 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Some have suggested approximately 3% of the city’s population at the time. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. "The earliest believers not only viewed the old forms as filled with new content, but also in their enthusiasm they fashioned new vehicles for their praise. In addition, it is not difficult to envision the earliest believers using extemporaneous prayers built on past models—such as Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), Zechariah’s Song of Praise (Luke 1:67–79), or Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:28–32).” - Richard N. Longenecker, [“The Acts of the Apostles,”](https://ref.ly/logosres/ebc09?ref=Bible.Ac2.42&off=5473&ctx=wish+and+Christian.+~The+earliest+believe) 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See Busenitz, p. 185. Ps 18:8, 144:5; Isa 4:4-5; Rev 15:8; also Ex 7:17-27; 9:23-29; 19:16-18, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, 680. “…*the forepart, front* of a thing (Arab. وَجْهُ id.). Jer. 1:13, וּפָנָיו מִפְּנֵי צָפוֹנָה “and the front thereof (of the pot) looked towards the north;” used of *the front* of an army (Gr. πρόσωπον), Joel 2:20. See also BDB and DBL, Swanson, entry 7156. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. See also Busenitz, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc65acus?ref=Bible.Ac2.38&off=1101&ctx=s+of+the+same+coin.+~So+it+is+that+here+r), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. F. F. Bruce, [The Book of the Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/nicnt65ac?ref=Bible.Ac2.38&off=3593&ctx=ew+people+of+God.99%0a~It+would+indeed+be+a), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. David G. Peterson, [The Acts of the Apostles](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.38&off=2902&ctx=ion%2c+and+ascension.+~In+the+apostolic+pre), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac2.38&off=16827&ctx=Jesus+of+Nazareth.%0a%0a~The+preposition+%E2%80%9Cfor), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 164–165. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)