

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Pentecost: The Spirit Comes

Acts 2:1-13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 2:1-13 is one of the most doctrinally significant passages in all of Scripture, the day the promised Spirit was poured out and the Lord's church began. A great deal is at stake here, so handle it with care. This passage, with the rest of Acts 2, is the birthday of the church and the inbreaking of the kingdom. It also requires us to teach clearly what the tongues of Pentecost actually were, real human languages given to confirm the apostolic message, so that students are not swept into modern claims about sign gifts and continuing revelation.

The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at the question of tongues and miraculous signs. Teach that these gifts authenticated the inspired apostolic message in its foundational age (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4) and that, now the complete New Testament has come, our authority is the finished Word, not new revelation or present-day sign gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

But this passage is not only a doctrinal battleground; it is the thrilling fulfillment of a promise and the launch of God's mission to all nations. Aim to leave students both clear-headed about the Spirit and warm-hearted toward the God who keeps His word, dwells in His people, and longs to reach every tongue and tribe.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke says, when the day of Pentecost arrived, the believers were all together, and suddenly the Spirit came (vv. 1-4). How does this moment fulfill what Jesus had promised, and why is the coming of the Holy Spirit such a pivotal event in God's plan?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Pentecost is the keeping of a promise. On the hillside Jesus had said, wait for the promise of the Father; you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:4-5). Here, on the appointed day, the promise is fulfilled exactly as He said. God is faithful to His word, down to the timing.

The signs Luke describes, wind and fire, are deliberate echoes of the Old Testament appearances of God. When God came down at Sinai, the mountain was wrapped in fire and the whole place trembled (Exodus 19:18). Now God comes not to a mountain but to people, marking the beginning of a new era in which His Spirit dwells in His church.

This is pivotal because the coming of the Spirit inaugurates the age of the church and the spread of the gospel. Everything Jesus accomplished, His death, resurrection, and ascension, now begins to be applied to people through the message His Spirit-empowered witnesses proclaim. The kingdom Jesus announced is breaking into the world.

Help students grasp the scale. This is not a minor episode but a hinge of history. The God who once dwelt in a tabernacle and temple now pours out His Spirit to dwell among and within His people. The waiting is over; the mission begins.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The faithfulness of God in fulfilling Jesus' promise of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5)
- Pentecost as the inauguration of the age of the church
- Wind and fire as signs of God's presence, echoing Sinai (Exodus 19)
- The coming of the Spirit as a hinge in God's redemptive plan
- The kingdom of God breaking into the world through Spirit-empowered witness

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the Spirit came exactly as and when Jesus promised?
- What is the significance of God now dwelling in His people rather than in a temple of stone?
- How does Pentecost mark a turning point in God's plan for the world?

Question 2

Student Question:

The believers received the Spirit only after a long season of waiting and prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:1). Where in your life right now are you being asked to wait on God, and what would it look like to wait with trust rather than frustration or control?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The glory of Pentecost can make us forget the patience that preceded it. For days the disciples waited with nothing visible happening. Then, in God's timing, the Spirit fell. The waiting was not wasted; it was preparation.

Most of us find waiting agonizing. We want resolution, answers, and movement now. Invite students to name where they are waiting, on a prodigal child, a healing, a job, a changed circumstance, a prayer that seems to go unanswered.

Explore the temptations of the waiting season: to grow bitter, to take control and force an outcome, to give up on the promise, or to numb the ache with distraction. The disciples instead waited together in prayer, and that is the pattern of faithful waiting.

Encourage students that God's delays are not God's denials. The same God who kept His promise at Pentecost keeps His promises still. Waiting with trust means continuing to pray, staying in fellowship, and refusing to let go of God's character even when we cannot yet see His hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Waiting on God as a season of preparation, not abandonment
- Trust in God's timing over our own
- The temptations of the waiting season and the call to faithful endurance
- God's delays distinguished from God's denials

Discussion Prompts

- What are you waiting on God for right now?
- How are you tempted to respond in the waiting?
- What practices help you wait with trust rather than control?

Question 3

Student Question:

The crowd was bewildered because each one heard the believers telling the mighty works of God in his own native language (vv. 6-11). What exactly were the tongues spoken at Pentecost, and what was their purpose?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke could not be clearer about what the tongues were: real, recognizable human languages. The crowd was amazed precisely because Galileans, who would not have known these languages, were speaking them fluently. We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God (v. 11). The word translated tongues simply means languages.

This is crucial for sound doctrine. The tongues of Pentecost were not unintelligible ecstatic speech but actual foreign languages that the international crowd could understand. The miracle was that uneducated Galileans spoke them without ever having learned them.

The purpose was twofold. First, it was a sign that authenticated the apostles as God's spokesmen. A miracle this public and undeniable confirmed that their message was from God. Second, it served the mission: the gospel was being proclaimed so that pilgrims from many nations could carry it home in their own language. From its first day, the church's message was for all peoples.

Help students hold this firmly. The tongues were languages, given for confirmation and proclamation, not a private spiritual experience to be sought for its own sake. Understanding this protects us from much confusion about spiritual gifts today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tongues of Pentecost as real, known human languages (vv. 6-11)
- Tongues as a sign authenticating the apostolic message
- Tongues serving the proclamation of the gospel to all nations
- The distinction between Pentecost's languages and modern ecstatic-speech claims
- Miraculous gifts given for confirmation, not private experience

Discussion Prompts

- What evidence in the text shows the tongues were actual languages?
- What two purposes did the tongues serve on that day?
- Why is it important to define tongues by what Scripture actually describes?

Question 4

Student Question:

At Pentecost, God saw to it that each person heard the gospel in his own native language (v. 8). When you share Christ, how well do you meet people where they are, in words and ways they can actually understand? Where might you need to listen better or speak more clearly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

There is something tender in the way God reached that crowd. He did not make them learn a new language to hear good news; He spoke to each one in the language of home. The gospel meets people where they are.

This has practical force for our witness. We can fall into religious jargon, insider language, and assumptions that leave outsiders baffled. Loving witness takes the trouble to speak plainly, in words and pictures the other person can actually grasp.

Meeting people where they are also means listening. To speak someone's language we first have to understand their world, their questions, their wounds, their way of thinking. Invite students to consider whether they tend to talk at people or genuinely listen to them.

Encourage humility and patience. The goal is not to sound impressive but to be understood, so that the mighty works of God land clearly in another person's heart, in their own tongue.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel communicated clearly and accessibly to all people
- Loving witness that meets people in their own context
- Listening as part of effective evangelism
- Clarity over jargon in sharing Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to use insider religious language that outsiders find confusing?
- How well do you listen before you speak about Christ?
- What is one way you could make the gospel clearer to someone in your life?

Question 5

Student Question:

Luke lists the many nations represented in the crowd, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and more, all hearing the gospel at once (vv. 9-11). What does this international moment reveal about the scope of God's plan, and how does Pentecost begin to reverse the scattering of Babel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Luke's long list of nations is not filler; it is theology. From the very first day of the church, the gospel was proclaimed to people from every part of the known world. God's plan was never a narrow, national religion but a message for all peoples, just as He had promised Abraham that in him all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

There is a deliberate echo of Babel here. At Babel, proud humanity tried to make a name for itself, and God confused their language and scattered them across the earth (Genesis 11:1-9). At Pentecost, God reverses the curse, not by erasing the languages but by proclaiming His mighty works in all of them, beginning to gather the scattered nations back to Himself in Christ.

This sets the agenda for the whole book of Acts and for the church in every age. The gospel crosses every border of nation, race, and language. The kingdom of Christ is for the world.

Help students feel the wonder and the obligation. We belong to a worldwide family being gathered from every tongue and tribe (Revelation 7:9), and we are part of God's plan to keep gathering them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel for all nations from the church's first day (Genesis 12:3)
- Pentecost as the reversal of Babel's scattering (Genesis 11:1-9)
- The worldwide scope of God's redemptive plan
- The church as a family gathered from every tongue and tribe (Revelation 7:9)
- Missions rooted in the very nature of the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Luke take care to list so many nations?
- How does Pentecost answer and reverse the judgment of Babel?
- What does this say about a church that stays comfortable within one culture or group?

Question 6

Student Question:

The gospel at Pentecost crossed every barrier of nation, language, and background (vv. 9-11). Are there people or groups you quietly assume are beyond your witness, or simply outside your circle of concern? What barrier is God asking you to cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

If the gospel is for every nation, then no person is outside its reach, and no group should be outside our concern. Yet we all carry invisible boundaries, the kinds of people we assume would never be interested, or whom we would rather not approach.

Invite gentle honesty. Are there people I write off because of their politics, their lifestyle, their background, their hostility to faith, or simply because they are not like me? Pentecost confronts every such boundary.

Crossing barriers is uncomfortable. It may mean befriending someone very different from us, speaking to a person we have judged, or caring about a group we have ignored. The early church was constantly being pushed across such lines, and so are we.

Encourage one concrete step. Whom is God placing on your heart that you have been quietly excluding? The same Spirit who reached every nation at Pentecost can give you love and courage to cross that line.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal reach of the gospel applied to our witness
- Examining the invisible boundaries we place around God's love
- Crossing barriers of culture, class, and background for Christ
- Concern for those outside our natural circle

Discussion Prompts

- Who do you tend to assume is beyond the reach of the gospel?
- What barrier, comfort, prejudice, or fear, keeps you from certain people?
- What is one barrier God may be asking you to cross this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

The miraculous outpouring at Pentecost was a public, undeniable sign that confirmed the apostles as God's messengers (vv. 4-12). According to the New Testament, what was the purpose of such miraculous signs, and how should that shape the way we understand them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The miracle of Pentecost was not given for the disciples' private enjoyment but as a public confirmation. When the crowd asked what this meant, the sign opened the door for Peter to preach. Miracles in Acts consistently function this way: they authenticate the messengers so that people will heed the message.

The New Testament states this purpose plainly. The Lord confirmed the apostles' message by accompanying signs (Mark 16:20). Salvation was declared by the Lord and attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:3-4). The miracles were God's seal on His spokesmen.

This shapes how we read every miracle in Acts. They are not random displays of power or models of what every believer should expect, but divine credentials for the inspired message in its foundational era, before the New Testament was complete.

Help students see the implication. Once the message was fully delivered and confirmed and recorded in Scripture, the credentials had served their purpose. We do not need new signs today; we have the confirmed and completed Word to which they pointed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Miraculous signs given to confirm the apostolic message (Mark 16:20)
- God bearing witness to His spokesmen by signs and wonders (Hebrews 2:3-4)
- Miracles as divine credentials, not private experiences
- The foundational, confirming role of miracles in the apostolic age
- The completed Word as the lasting fruit the signs pointed to

Discussion Prompts

- What was the consistent purpose of miracles in the book of Acts?
- How do Mark 16:20 and Hebrews 2:3-4 explain why God gave miraculous signs?
- Why does understanding their purpose guard us from misusing these accounts?

Question 8

Student Question:

Some in the crowd were amazed, while others dismissed the whole thing with mockery (vv. 12-13). When it comes to your walk with God, are you more drawn to seek dramatic experiences and feelings, or to rest in His settled Word? What does healthy spiritual hunger look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The crowd at Pentecost split into two reactions, sincere amazement and cynical mockery. But there is a third danger for believers today: an appetite for spiritual thrills that outpaces our love for God's truth.

Many sincere Christians measure their spiritual life by feelings and dramatic experiences, and grow restless when worship is quiet or when God seems silent. Invite students to examine their own hunger. Do I crave an experience more than I crave the Lord Himself and His Word?

Healthy spiritual hunger is real and good; we should long for God. But mature faith is anchored not in the intensity of an experience but in the certainty of God's promises. Feelings rise and fall; the Word endures.

Encourage students to feed their hunger the way the early church did, in the apostles' teaching, in prayer, in fellowship, in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). These ordinary means are where God reliably meets and forms His people, whether or not the emotions run high.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith grounded in God's settled Word rather than shifting experiences
- Healthy spiritual hunger directed toward God Himself
- The danger of craving experiences over truth
- The ordinary means of grace as where God forms His people (Acts 2:42)

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to measure your spiritual life by feelings or by faith in God's Word?
- What is the difference between hungering for God and hungering for an experience?
- How can you feed a healthy spiritual hunger this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

The tongues at Pentecost were real languages given to confirm the apostles' inspired message in the foundational age of the church (vv. 4-11; Hebrews 2:3-4). In light of the whole New Testament, how should we understand claims of present-day tongues, new revelation, and miraculous sign gifts, and where does our authority finally rest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, so give it room and clarity. We have seen that the tongues of Pentecost were actual human languages and that the miraculous gifts served to confirm the apostles' message as the inspired word of God. The key question is whether such gifts continue today as some claim, and where the Christian's authority finally rests.

Scripture itself points to the temporary, confirming purpose of these gifts. Paul wrote that, unlike love which never ends, the miraculous gifts, including tongues and prophecy, were partial and would pass away when the complete came (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). The gifts belonged to the church's foundation-laying age (Ephesians 2:20), when the New Testament was still being given. They authenticated revelation that was not yet written down.

Now that the foundation is laid and the complete New Testament has come, we are no longer dependent on miraculous confirmation or fresh revelation. The faith was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Scripture is breathed out by God and able to make us complete, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Nothing needs to be added to it.

This means we should be cautious and discerning about modern claims of new apostles, new revelations, and sign gifts. Where such claims contradict or try to supplement the finished Word, they cannot be from the same God who gave us a complete and sufficient Scripture. The God who confirmed His message in the first century does not need to keep re-confirming it; He has spoken, and His Word stands.

Pastorally, this is steadying rather than diminishing. We are not left to chase uncertain signs and competing voices. We hold in our hands the confirmed, completed, sufficient Word of God, and through it the same Spirit who came at Pentecost teaches, convicts, and forms us. Our authority rests not on private experiences but on the sure Word of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Miraculous gifts as a temporary, confirming feature of the apostolic age (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)
- The foundation-laying purpose of apostles and prophets now complete (Ephesians 2:20)
- The faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)
- The completeness and sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Discernment toward modern claims of new revelation and sign gifts
- The Word of God, not private experience, as the believer's final authority
- The Spirit's ongoing work through the completed Word

Discussion Prompts

- What does 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 indicate about the duration of miraculous gifts?
- Why does a complete and sufficient New Testament remove the need for new revelation?
- How should a Christian respond to claims of new apostles or revelations today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the coming of the Spirit, the keeping of the promise, the confirming sign, and the gospel going out to all nations. Name one specific way the events of Pentecost are calling you to live differently, and what is one step you will take this week in response.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone moves students from the doctrine of Pentecost to its claim on their lives. The same God who kept His promise, poured out His Spirit, confirmed His Word, and reached the nations is at work in them.

Invite each person to name one concrete response. Perhaps it is to trust God in a season of waiting, to share Christ more clearly with someone, to cross a barrier toward a person they have excluded, or to anchor their faith more firmly in the Word rather than in feelings.

Keep the focus on transformation, not mere information. Pentecost is not only a doctrine to defend but a reality to live in, a Spirit-empowered people on a mission to the world.

Close by reminding students that they belong to the church that was born on this day, indwelt by God's Spirit and sent to the nations, and that the Lord is forming them to take part in that mission.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living as part of the Spirit-empowered church born at Pentecost
- Personal response to the truths of the gospel
- The believer's share in the mission to all nations
- Transformation as the goal of studying God's Word

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from Pentecost most challenged or encouraged you?
- What specific step will you take this week in response?
- How can this group pray for you in it?