

The Holy Spirit

Week 6: Pentecost and Holy Spirit Baptism -- Acts 2:1-21, 32-33; Acts 11:15-18

Jerusalem is bursting at the seams. It is Pentecost, fifty days after Passover, and devout Jews “from every nation under heaven” have filled the city, Parthians and Medes, Egyptians and Romans, a census of the ancient world crowded into one festival. In a house in that city sit twelve men with an assignment and a promise. Jesus had told them to wait: “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). They did not know what day it would be. And then, suddenly, a sound like a mighty rushing wind fills the house. Divided tongues as of fire rest on each of them. And these Galilean fishermen begin declaring the mighty works of God in languages they never learned, while the gathering crowd, hearing native dialects from foreign mouths, asks the only question left to ask: “What does this mean?”

Peter stands up to answer, and his answer reaches back eight hundred years: “this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” Then he preaches Jesus, crucified, raised, and exalted, and explains where the wind and fire came from: “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” Follow that sentence upward. The risen Jesus, enthroned in heaven, personally poured out the Spirit on His apostles. Pentecost was the coronation announcement of a King, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit was His royal signature on the message the apostles were about to preach to the world.

Years later, it happened once more, and the exception proves the design. In the house of a Roman centurion named Cornelius, while Peter was still preaching, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word,” and they spoke in tongues just as the apostles had. Peter himself reached for the comparison: “the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning... If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” Notice his words: “at the beginning.” Not last month, not at every baptism he had witnessed since. In a decade of conversions, Peter could only compare what happened at Cornelius’s house to Pentecost itself, because nothing in between matched it. God was signing one more message: the Gentiles are in.

All of this matters because few subjects are more confused today than Holy Spirit baptism. Multitudes are taught to seek it, tarry for it, and measure their salvation by it. But Scripture presents it as a promise, not a command, something God poured out at two hinge points of history for purposes no other moment required: to empower and confirm the apostles’ word at the kingdom’s opening, and to settle forever that Gentiles belong in it. What God promises every believer today is something different and, in its own way, just as wonderful, and we will

study it carefully in the weeks ahead. This week, stand in the rushing wind of Acts 2 and watch a King keep His promise.

Group Discussion: When you hear the phrase “baptized with the Holy Spirit,” what have you heard people mean by it, in books, on television, or from friends? Why do you think experiences like Pentecost are so widely expected today, and how can we tell what Scripture actually promises us?

Personal Reflection: Peter’s Pentecost sermon climaxed with the exalted Jesus, “Lord and Christ,” reigning at God’s right hand. Be honest: does Jesus function as a reigning King in your daily life, or more like a distant figure from history? What is one area where His present reign has not yet reached?

Read Acts 2:1-21, 32-33; Acts 11:15-18

Study Questions

1. Jesus told the apostles they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4-5), calling it “the promise of the Father.” Looking at Acts 1:1-8 carefully, to whom was this promise spoken, what were they told it would empower them to do, and why does it matter that Scripture calls Holy Spirit baptism a promise rather than a command?
2. The apostles had to wait in Jerusalem for the promise, not knowing the day or the hour, and they devoted themselves to prayer while they waited (Acts 1:14). Waiting on God without a schedule is one of faith’s hardest assignments. What are you waiting on God for right now, and what would it look like to wait the way they did, together, prayerfully, and obediently?
3. When the Spirit came, the apostles spoke “in other tongues” and the crowd marveled: “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:4-11). What exactly were the tongues of Pentecost, according to the text itself, and what purpose did they serve in getting the gospel’s first sermon heard and believed?
4. The crowd heard “the mighty works of God” declared in their own native languages, God speaking their dialect, meeting them where they stood. When the gospel reached you, it came through someone who made it understandable to you. Who did that for you, and who in your life is waiting for you to make the good news plain to them?

5. Peter explains Pentecost by quoting Joel 2:28–32, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” and by pointing to the exalted Christ who “has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:16–17, 33). What did Joel’s prophecy promise, how did Pentecost begin to fulfill it, and what does the outpoured Spirit prove about where Jesus is and what He is doing right now?
6. Pentecost proves that Jesus is not waiting to become King someday; He was made “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36) and reigns now. If Jesus is reigning today, then His commands are current orders, not historical documents. In what specific corner of your life have you been living as though the King were absent?
7. Compare Acts 10:44–48 with Acts 11:15–18. What happened at the household of Cornelius, why did Peter connect it to Pentecost (“just as on us at the beginning”), and what unique question did this outpouring settle for the early church (see also Acts 15:7–9)?
8. God went to extraordinary lengths, a vision to Peter, an angel to Cornelius, and the Spirit poured out, to convince His own people that those they considered outsiders were welcome in Christ. Who do you find hardest to imagine sitting beside you in the kingdom? What does Acts 10–11 demand that you do with that feeling?
9. Many sincere believers today are taught to seek Holy Spirit baptism as a personal experience required of every Christian. From this week’s passages, who actually received Holy Spirit baptism in Scripture, what did each outpouring accomplish, and why do Ephesians 4:5 (“one baptism”) and the command of water baptism in Acts 10:47–48 show that the baptism which continues today is baptism in water into Christ?
10. Look back across this week’s passages, the wind and fire of Pentecost and the astonishment in Cornelius’s house. The same exalted King who poured out the Spirit still adds the saved to His church today (Acts 2:38–41, 47). Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth, and one concrete way you will live under His present reign this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Joel 2:28–32, the prophecy of the outpoured Spirit that Peter declared fulfilled; Matthew 3:11, John's promise that the Coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit; Acts 1:1–8, the promise of power and the worldwide commission; Acts 2:36–41, the crowd's question and Peter's answer, repent and be baptized; Acts 15:7–11, Peter's later testimony about what God did at Cornelius's house