

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 2 THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTERS 2 A

INTRODUCTION

The events in Acts 2 mark the birth of the local church, as the new visible witness of God on earth. In chapter 1, the disciples were told to wait for the filling of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. In chapter 2, the Holy Spirit came upon them in mighty measure. In chapter 1, the disciples were instructed concerning the continued work of the kingdom of God. In chapter 2, the disciples were empowered to do the work. In chapter 1, they were held back. In chapter 2, they were sent forth.

The Local Church was born. It was the introduction. The Holy Spirit was given in full measure as promised by God the Father. Now the very first event after the filling of the Holy Spirit was Peter's preaching. Preaching has always been the ordained means of advancing the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus Christ began His earthly ministry with preaching (Matthew 4:17): "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Throughout Acts, the church continued to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – His resurrection and salvation.

In Acts 2, four important events took place: the filling of the Holy Spirit (vv.1-13); the Apostle Peter's preaching to the crowd assembled in Jerusalem (vv.14-36); the response of the people that heard Peter's sermon (vv.37-41); and the visible results of the converts (vv.42-47). The present study covers the first section concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit and part of Peter's sermon.

COMMENTARY

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Before the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism (filling in Acts 2:4) of the Holy Spirit whom God the Father had promised to give. The disciples were obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. They had waited for ten days. On the day of Pentecost, they were together in a house, which probably was near the Temple. "Pentecost" is the Greek word which means "fiftieth." It is the name of the Jewish feast called in the Old Testament, "the Feast of Weeks" (Deuteronomy 16:9, 10).¹ It began seven weeks after the Passover Sabbath on the fiftieth day (Leviticus 23:15, 16).² It is also called the Feast of Harvest.³ It was a good season for

¹ Deuteronomy 16:9 Seven weeks shalt thou

² Leviticus 23:15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: 16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

³ Exodus 23:16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, *which is* in the end

travelling, and Jerusalem was crowded with Jews from all parts of the known world to celebrate Pentecost.

The disciples were gathered in a house. They were sitting down. In other words, they were not praying for Jews prayed either standing up or kneeling down. And “suddenly” there was a sound from heaven like that of “a rushing mighty wind”, filling the house where the disciples were gathered. The disciples heard this great sound but there was no wind. The sound filled the house where the disciples were gathered. It did not fill the whole of Jerusalem. Then there appeared to them “cloven tongues like as of fire” which sat on each of the disciples. They could see these “tongues of fire” appearing on their heads but there was no actual fire. At the same time, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with other tongues (proper languages), as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The suddenness of the event indicates that there was an element of surprise. Although the disciples were expecting the filling of the Holy Spirit, they did not know the exact timing. They were not praying for the Holy Spirit to come. This was a fulfilment of John the Baptist’s prediction (Luke 3:16): “*I indeed baptise you with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*”

There is a distinction between the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” and the “filling of the Holy Spirit”. Paul carefully defined the baptism as an invisible act

of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the Holy Spirit indwells every believer.⁴ This baptism with the Holy Spirit is not repeatable. It is the sovereign act of God. A person, who has heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and believed in his heart, is “sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). The Holy Spirit then takes residence in the believer.⁵ This occurs when God justifies a sinner who repents and believes in Christ. There is no commandment to believers to seek the baptism with the Spirit. It is a sovereign act of God whereby a believer is automatically sealed forever as God’s child. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” (See also Eph. 1:13; 4:30) This is true of every believer from the time of Adam.

But the filling of the Holy Spirit can occur repeatedly. Although Peter was initially filled with the Holy Spirit, he was later filled with the Spirit again (Acts 4:8). Paul had the same experience too (Acts 9:17; 13:9). Being filled with the Holy Spirit is commanded by God.⁶ To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be under the influence or control of the Spirit. It is manifested in the believer’s praising, thanking and obeying God (Ephesians 5:18). In Acts 2, the disciples who were already baptised are

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

⁶ Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

now filled with the Holy Spirit for the ministry of preaching. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a once and for all experience. The Spirit indwells the believer and He is the guarantee that the believer belongs to Christ (Romans 8:9).⁷ The filling with the Spirit is repeatable. A believer should always and continually ask to be filled with the Spirit. Filling of the Spirit is for ministry and for living a holy life.

Tongues Speaking

The Holy Spirit then gave all the disciples who were gathered in the house the ability to speak with “other tongues.” The Greek word for “tongues” is “glossa.” It can mean the literal physical tongue of a man or a language of a people distinct from that of other nations. In this case, the meaning is languages (2:6). The disciples were able to supernaturally speak in languages which they neither learnt in school nor knew how to speak before! They were speaking in the very languages of the natives, of the foreign land, who were then assembled before them. The crowds were all amazed and marvelled at the fact that each of them was hearing the disciples speak in their own “tongue” or language (Acts 2:8). There was a large crowd in Jerusalem at this religious festival time – devout men that came from every nation in the world at that time. There were no less than fifteen ethnic peoples. Luke named them in a circle starting from the regions in the east of Jerusalem – Parthians, Medes; then to the north – Mesopotamia; to the west—Egypt, Libya, Rome; and then to the south –

Crete, Arabia. The peoples from these nations were attracted by the commotion and they heard the disciples speaking in their native languages. The crowds were so amazed that they remarked: “Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born” (Acts 2:7, 8)? It can be safely assumed that they spoke in an orderly manner and that they were not all speaking at the same time. Each of them, as the Spirit gave utterance, spoke in a “tongue” which was at that time unknown to them. This is a miracle and it was fulfilling what the Lord Jesus Christ said that they would be, witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem, and in Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). This signifies that the disciples were to go forth to evangelise the world.

Misunderstanding of the truths of tongue-speaking has led to erroneous teachings in many Charismatic and some non-Charismatic churches. The text is plainly clear that “tongues” (plural, Acts 2:4) and “tongue” (singular, Acts 2:8) mean languages. It is not gibberish, ecstatic utterance, or even language of angels (who speak in the language of the people in all their recorded appearances). If they had appeared to be speaking in unintelligible sounds, it would not have been hailed by the crowd as an astounding miracle. The crowd would have ridiculed them as mad disciples or worse.

Now, the purpose of the gift of tongues at the birth of the local church was crucial. It was to attest to the presence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Such an attestation was needed at that time. This was the first time the disciples experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit, which turned them from

⁷ Romans 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

cowering cowards to courageous converts. They needed to know visibly that the Holy Spirit had come into them. This phenomenon occurred again when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19); when Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit (10:44-47); and when the disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2-6). In each instance, it was necessary for the signs and symbols to attest to the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans and Gentiles was hundreds of years old. The hatred was also deep on the part of the Samaritans and the Gentiles toward the Jews. This segregation, based upon a deep-seated prejudice, must not be present in the founding of the early local church. When the matter of whether non-Jewish converts needed to be circumcised and observe all the Jewish culture was raised in the Jerusalem council, Peter testified that the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles just as it was given similarly to them (Acts 15:7-11). The apostle Paul came back from his first missionary journey and concurred with Peter in his own testimony. After these first instances, there is no need of such signs to attest to the fact of the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment when a believer repents and believes in Christ. Everything that happened in Acts was for a purpose and it was orderly. The gift of tongues was used by the LORD to unify the church under the leadership of the apostles whom Christ had appointed to start and to oversee the birth and growth of the church and to eradicate all the animosity that existed among the different racial groups at that time.

It is significant that apart from Acts, later epistles such as Ephesians,

Romans and 1 Peter do not mention miraculous gifts, and in particular, the gift of tongue(s)-speaking, except 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth was a problematic group. They were guilty of many abuses of Christian beliefs and practices. One of them was tongue-speaking. It was serious enough for Paul to address it at length. Paul spent three long chapters (12 to 14) to deal with this serious problem. The abuse was one of showing off. They were interested in promoting self rather than God. The public demonstration of these gifts resulted in chaos where the worship of God and preaching of God's Word was done in languages that only the speaker himself understood. There was no one else who understood what he was saying and therefore could not be blessed by what he had said even if it was from God. That was why Paul said it would be better to speak five words that the people could understand rather than ten thousand words which no one could understand at all. The purpose of a gift is to edify others, not self. If anyone of them were to speak in tongues, they must have an interpreter. Otherwise, they were told to keep silent.

Modern day tongue speaking is gibberish and ecstatic nonsense. The Corinthian church spoke proper languages but they abused it and use it to show off. The proponents of today's Charismatic kind of tongue speaking call tongue speaking the language of angels. Angelic languages are proper languages, not gibberish. Today's proponents of tongues speaking are deluded and they are living in self-deception. Satan will use the leaders of these groups to bring about the ecumenical movement. The tongue speaker does not know or understand what he is speaking. The one who

“interprets”, acknowledges that he does not understand what has been spoken, but admits that whatever comes into his mind becomes the interpretation! This is ludicrous! Yet millions have bought into this ridiculous global phenomenon.

An Ethiopian priest attended a “glossalalic gathering” which he took to be an informal multilingual praise service. He made his contribution by standing and reciting Psalm 23 in Ge’ez, the archaic tongue of his native Coptic worship. At once, it was publicly interpreted but the interpretations were all wrong. One interpreted it as a prayer for “guidance about a new job offer” and another as “thanksgiving for one’s recent return to health after a serious illness” (*Keep in Step with the Spirit* by J.I. Packer, page 212). The basis for establishing truth and error is the Bible. But these experiences help only as illustrations of deception of the last days and how biblical truth cannot be dependent upon one’s IQ but God’s Word for discernment.

The gift of languages in Acts was therefore a transitory sign between the Old and the New Covenants. In the Old Testament, the visible witness of God’s Way was through the nation of Israel. But in the NT, it is through the local churches throughout the world made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This transition was completed in the time of the Acts of the Apostles. Having fulfilled its purpose, the gift of languages has passed away as Paul states it in 1 Corinthians 13:8 – *“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail (passive voice i.e. an external source will cause it to cease); whether there be tongues, they shall cease (middle voice i.e. stop by itself); whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away (passive voice)”*. The verb

translated “cease” from the Greek middle voice means that the gift of tongues shall stop by itself. As more and more people from different nations and ethnicity receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour, the gift of tongues became unnecessary. If I wish to have someone speak to my grandfather who speaks only Hakka, I look for a Hakka speaking pastor. I do not need to pray for tongues and God does not need to give me this gift.

Peter’s Sermon

The crowd that gathered before the apostles and disciples expressed their astonishment and sought an explanation. Some mockingly answered that the disciples were drunk with wine. But, Peter stood up and stepped forth to address the crowd. He assumed his leadership as he reminded himself of what the Lord told him three times, “Feed my lambs.” (John 21:15-17) So, Peter spoke in a loud voice. He addressed the men of Judaea and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He told them to pay attention to what he was about to say to them. He was no more the fearful and timid man about one and a half months ago. He was a changed person. He spoke with confidence and boldness. He easily refuted the charge that he and his fellow disciples were drunk. He simply told them that it was only “the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). The Jews counted their day beginning from sunrise at 6a.m. The “third hour” of the day would be 9a.m. It was too early in the day to drink wine (fermented grape juice). Peter continued to explain the phenomenon over which the crowd was amazed and puzzled.

Peter explained that what happened was the fulfilment of that spoken by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-

32). The prophet Joel used “afterward” (Joel 2:28) which Peter interpreted as “in the last days.” This term “in the last days” is a common Old Testament expression.⁸ It denotes the time when the Messiah would come to set up His kingdom. This would mean the two comings of the Messiah: in the first coming of the Messiah, He came as the Suffering Servant to die for the sins of the world; and in the second coming, He would come in glory and majesty to establish His millennial kingdom. “In the last days” spans the period between the first and the second coming. That means that the first coming ushered in “the last days” as taught by John and the writer of Hebrews.⁹ The outpouring of the Spirit shall be upon “all flesh” at the first coming of the Messiah. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—sons and daughters, young and old

men, servants and handmaidens—and, who shall be given the gift of the Holy Spirit, shall “prophesy”. The word “prophesy” should be understood not in the sense of the ability to predict future events but in the sense of being able to know and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the will of God. The prophecies concerning signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, blood, fire, vapour of smoke, and cosmic changes in the sun and the moon have yet to be fulfilled. They would be fulfilled in the end time prior to the Lord Jesus Christ’s second coming (compare with Luke 21:25-27).

During the period between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all believers and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, a period which is known as the Period of the Church, the gospel will be preached and proclaimed to all peoples. The kingdom of God is now in the hearts of believers. Believers have now a foretaste of the glory that is awaiting them. They are experiencing peace now in their hearts. When the millennial kingdom comes, they will have perfect peace. Christ now reigns in their hearts but in the kingdom of God, He will be seated on the throne ruling the whole world. He will judge all men, irrespective of race and creed.

⁸ For examples: **Isaiah 2:2** And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly.

Hosea 3:5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

Micah 4:1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

⁹ **1 John 2:18** Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

Hebrews 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

PRACTICAL VALUE

The fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy is a strong evidence for the verbal inspiration of the Bible. It was actually not Joel’s prophecy. Peter declared in Acts 2:17 that it was God who said in Joel’s prophecy. In other words, the real speaker and author in all Scripture is God. The human writers were only God’s media or mouthpieces or instruments. If we have believed in the

Lord Jesus Christ, God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we do not have this gift, we do not belong to God, and more sadly, we are not saved. But we are saved because we have believed. Then, the Spirit that indwells us is able to empower in witnessing Christ to others. Are we making full use of available opportunities to lead someone to Christ? Having been baptised with the Holy Spirit (His indwelling), are we filled with the Holy Spirit? In other words, are we under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit? We ought to be. Paul exhorted that we should not be under the control and influence of wine but be under that of the Holy Spirit. We should be occupying ourselves in the work of the Lord while waiting earnestly for His second coming. We have the promise given in Acts 2:21 that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—saved from eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

The first sermon of Acts is Peter's preaching. Preaching is God's ordained way of spreading the gospel of salvation. Paul wrote that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching the gospel message to save souls (1 Corinthians 1:21). And Paul continued that his preaching was not done with persuasive words of man's wisdom but by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4). Today in many churches, there is a lack of powerful biblical preaching. In these churches, worship services become more of an entertainment time rather than a time of sober thinking on God's Holy Word and decision making about one's eternal destiny. Preachers in these churches preach what the people want to hear and not what God wants them to hear. Be sure that the church you attend is a

church, which faithfully and boldly declares the whole counsel of God.

Do not be perturbed by those who say that if you cannot "speak in tongues", you do not have the Holy Spirit and that you are powerless. Now we know the truth. The gift of the Holy Spirit comes upon every one who repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ from the heart. At one point of your life, if you have taken that step of repentance of sin and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into your life as your Saviour and Lord, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The next thing to do is to ensure that you are filled with the Spirit. It plainly means that you ought to be under the control of the Holy Spirit in your life. By reading and studying God's Word and with much prayer, the Spirit of God will lead and guide you in your service and daily life. Modern day tongue-speaking is either self-induced or self-taught or of satanic influence. The truth shall set you free from false and erroneous teachings. Do not be afraid. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 2:1-13; Ephesians 5:15-21.

Tuesday: Acts 2:14-28; 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

Wednesday: Acts 2:29-36; Philippians 2:3-11.

Thursday: Acts 2:37-40; 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Friday: Acts 2:41-47; Psalm 133:1-3.

Discussion Questions

1. What three signs were given in relation to the filling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2?

2. What is the meaning of “tongues” which is used in the passage? In what way is the tongue-speaking then different from that of today?

5. What Biblical evidence did Peter cite to explain the phenomena that the first Christians experience?

3. Why did Luke highlight the multi-lingual composition of the crowd that were around the early believers?

6. How does Peter’s message reassure Christians about their faith and the certainty of their hope?

4. What were the different reactions of the people to the events that happened on the day of Pentecost?

7. What does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord” and a person is saved?

8. What can we learn from Peter's message (vv.14-21) about Christ that should encourage us in our effort in personal evangelism?
