

Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2: 1-12

From the time of Moses onwards God ordained that the Jewish people celebrate three great pilgrim festivals each year by appearing 'before the Lord' in Jerusalem. These three Festivals are Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (**Deuteronomy 16:16**)

According to Paul, writing to the church in Colossae (**Colossians 2:17**), each festival though important in itself, is 'a **shadow** of things to come'. Each foreshadowed an ultimate fulfilment which has been found in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, Pentecost Sunday, our attention is on the pilgrim Festival of Pentecost.

Pentecost possesses special significance for both the Christian and Jewish communities of faith.

For the Jewish community Pentecost celebrates the time when God gave The Law to His beloved people, Israel. It was at Sinai fifty days after Passover, when God saved the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, that a worn and weary throng of former slaves was birthed as a nation of free people under God. Pentecost celebrates the birth of a nation.

In the biblical period Pentecost was a harvest festival of great rejoicing (referred to as Shavuot ("weeks")). It was the time when farmers offered the first fruits of the spring barley harvest as thanksgiving to God. (**Exodus 23:16,19**)

If these great commemorations were as Paul explains, foreshadowing some even greater fulfilment in Jesus, how exactly did Jesus become the 'substance' ?

Jesus spoke of Himself as coming '..to fulfil The Law and The Prophets' (**Matthew 5:17-18, 11:13**)

The bible records that exactly fifty days after Passover, when Jesus 'died once for sin' the promised Holy Spirit (**John 7: 37-39; 14:26; 15:26**) was poured out on His disciples at Pentecost (**Acts 2:1**). Jesus birthed a re-invigorated community of faith baptised in the Holy Spirit. Pentecost celebrates the birth of the church.

For the nation of Israel, the Feast of Pentecost was a celebration of liberty from bondage. They were now free to serve the true God, who had bound Himself to them by covenant; the Lord their Redeemer.

For believers in Jesus Christ, the miracle of Pentecost means a liberty for unrestrained worship and service in 'spirit and truth' (**John 4:24**), empowered by Holy Spirit Himself. As Moses ascended Mount Sinai, the Presence of God was evident in supernatural manifestations: the sound of the trumpet, thunder, lightning, fire and a voice. The impact on those at the foot of the mountain was trembling, fear and quaking.

In a house somewhere in Jerusalem 1400 years later the Presence of God was also evident in supernatural manifestations: a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire and speech in unlearned languages (**Acts 2:1-4; 4:31**). The impact on the multitude who thronged around was amazement, wonder, perplexity.

At Sinai, God wrote with His finger on two tablets of stone. Israel's subsequent violation of the commandments through idolatry, resulted in 3000 people dying.

In Jerusalem, almost 1400 years later, God wrote by the Spirit on the hearts of the disciples (**Jeremiah 31: 31-34**). Peter's subsequent speech to an astonished crowd resulted in 3000 people being saved – the first fruits of a glorious harvest!

God's timetable is stunning; a truly awesome fulfilment of the Festival of Pentecost!

When the Spirit Comes

Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to 'rivers of living water flowing out of a person who believed in Him' **John 7:37-39**

(Note: individuals could not receive the Holy Spirit unless they 'believed in Him')

Jesus characterised the Holy Spirit as

1. 'Another Helper and Comforter, the Spirit of Truth' who will be with believers forever'

John 14:16,17

(Note: a helper and comforter whom the natural man cannot receive, because the natural man neither sees Him nor knows Him.)

2. One who will continue to teach Jesus' followers all that Jesus began to teach them **John 14:26**
3. One who will bear witness to Jesus, upholding the cause of Christ in the world, notwithstanding the opposition it meets with **John 15:26**
4. One who had been with the disciples, but in the future He will be in them **Acts 1:4**
5. One whose work will be to glorify Jesus, breathing life into His followers, empowering them, transforming them **John 16:13-15**

The group of Jesus' followers gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost 2000 years ago had no notion of the miracle that was about to happen.

In the event the whole place was shaken with God's Presence (**Acts 2:1-4**)

1. Holy Spirit came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind and filled the place where they were gathered. No one had experienced such a phenomenon before
2. A tongue of fire rested on the head of each one of those present; just like Moses' burning bush the fire neither burned them nor harmed them
3. Holy Spirit filled them all. Just as Jesus had promised Holy Spirit engulfed them; He spoke through them in languages they did not know

This became their reality. It was something that had never been before. It marked a major upheaval in their experiences. Their lives were radically transformed. Jesus was real in a more intimate way than ever before.

Whether or not they had heard the words of John the Baptist, "I baptise you with water, but the One who comes after me ...He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (**Matthew 3:11**), baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire was their new reality.

The Unfinished Book

The Book of Acts is the only unfinished book in the Bible. It records the first 32 years of the Holy Spirit's work following Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is still in the business of transforming lives 2000 years later.

God wants to do for each believer what He did for those gathered in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' gift, His promise to all who believe; His empowering of believers to be His ambassadors for world-wide outreach.

Have you encountered Holy Spirit in the way His followers in Jerusalem experienced Him on that Pentecost morning? In the same way that the three thousand who responded to Peter's address knew Him?

The disciples waited patiently, expectantly, in Jerusalem as Jesus had instructed them. They were completely unaware of the miracle God was about to perform clueless as to how dramatically their lives would be impacted.

But when the Holy Spirit flooded their lives they were revitalised beyond recognition. They performed the same miracles Jesus performed, and more. They overflowed with the power of the Risen Christ!

Just like rivers of living water gushing out of them wherever they went

This Pentecost God is poised to do the same:
to baptise with His Holy Spirit and with power.

Only believe, and Jesus will make good on His promise,

"...for John truly baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit..."

Acts 1:5

Malcolm Parker