

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON PENTECOST?

This past week, our reading for New Testament Studies brought us to the 2nd chapter of Acts. One of my teachers at Harding University many years ago, brother J.D. Bales wrote a book entitled, *The Hub of the Bible*, and it was a study of this amazing chapter.

But why did Dr. Bales call it the “hub of the Bible” and what is it that makes this such an amazing chapter? That is what I want to try to get across to you in the lesson today because something happened that day that needs to be fully understood. So please listen carefully as we explore together, “What Really Happened on Pentecost?”

Acts 2:1 says, “*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.*”

Pentecost, of course is the word used with reference to one of the three major Jewish *holydays* commanded in the Law of Moses. It was also called the feast of weeks or the feast of Ingathering. According to several texts in the OT, such as Leviticus 23, it was to be celebrated the day after seven Sabbaths had been observed following the Passover feast. Another way to say that was that it was to be celebrated fifty days after Passover. That meant that Pentecost, each year would have fallen on the first day of the week, or Sunday. Is it just a coincidence that Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week and the day that Christ began His kingdom or church was also on that day? We do know from other passages such as Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 that the early Christians used that day for their congregating together for the purposes of worshipping God and remembering the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In time, it became known as the Lord’s Day, which is how John refers to it in Revelation 1:10.

Now, the importance of all that is to be seen in the fact that because it was a Jewish holiday and a large number of people were in Jerusalem at the time. **Verse 5** says, “*Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.*” Scholars believe that in Jesus’ time the normal population of Jerusalem was about 40,000 people, but that swelled to perhaps as much as 175,000 during times like Pentecost.

Not only were there a large number of people there that day, but there were people there from all over the Roman world. According to **verses 9-11**, there were

“*Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.*”

It might be of interest to you to get out a good Bible atlas, or if you have one in the back of your Bible and just look at where all of these many people came from. Although it was primarily a Jewish gathering, it was truly an international assemblage.

What better plan could you have in order to get something started throughout the world, than to begin it in a place and at a time when people from throughout the world would be present? Keep in mind also, that God's intention was for Christ to save, not just the Jews, but men of every tribe and tongue. God's worldwide intention could not have been more forcefully illustrated than by what happened in Jerusalem that Pentecost day! Is there anyone here who thinks any of this came about simply by accident?

Obviously not, and in fact we know that this was just one of the many details God in His wisdom had worked out long before the heavens and earth were created. Think for example, about the fact that the apostles were specifically commanded by Jesus to wait for this time. In Acts, chapter 1, Luke tells us that for 40 days following his resurrection Jesus met with the eleven apostles speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Beginning in **verse 4**, we read:

"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

Maybe they had some idea, knowing that not many days from then it would be Pentecost, but they didn't know for sure. In fact, **verse 6**, of chapter 1, says, *"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'"* And what did he tell them? He said,

"It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

A little quick math will tell you that if Jesus was with the apostles for forty days, and he had been put to death three days earlier, this was about the 43rd day since Passover, which meant they had one week to wait. That means that not only was Christ raised from the dead on the first day of the week, but that Jesus ascended back into heaven on the first day of the week. No wonder then that they called that day, "the Lord's day."

But they were told to wait, and as it turned out they waited for seven days. Seven days they waited while the God's plan ripened for just the right moment. Do you get the idea that something important is about to happen? Keep in mind for seven days men and women all over the world were still dying. They were still sinning and still in need of being saved. And yet for seven days, not a word of good news was preached. No invitation was extended. Everything is waiting; just waiting; waiting for heaven to act. On Pentecost, heaven acted and acted decisively!

The Holy Spirit came! He came in such a way that His presence and power completely overwhelmed the apostles! They were literally baptized in the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that

there was a sound *“like a mighty rushing wind.”* He didn’t say there was a wind, but a sound like one. People have tried to describe the sound of a tornado coming. They talk about the roar that becomes deafening, like a freight train passing by right next to you. Maybe it was something like that, or louder. Luke also tells us that there appeared above them something like tongues of fire. Again, he didn’t say it was tongues of fire, but it was like tongues of fire. Both of those would have created immediate and complete attention from everybody in Jerusalem.

The people began coming together to where it seemed the sound and sight was coming from and in just a little while, they found themselves in the vicinity of the apostles who immediately knew that was their cue to begin doing what they had been called and trained and commissioned to do. They began preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time after it was possible to preach the whole gospel story—the story of Christ, his death, burial and resurrection.

And amazingly, they were preaching it in numerous languages; the languages of the various people who were there that day from all over the world. While it is very likely that most of those people spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, the fact that they heard these men in various languages had to make an incredible impression upon them. And it did! Some took note of the fact that all of these men were Galileans. Galilee was considered to be the backwoods of the nation, the people there for the most part were regarded as uneducated and unsophisticated, so it was unbelievable that such men could be speaking all of those languages.

Of course, some accused them of being drunk, and it was at that point that Peter lifted up his voice and began speaking for all of the apostles. What he said that day could really be divided into two major parts. First of all, in verses 14-21, Peter basically explains what is happening; the significance of all these powerful signs they have heard and seen and are still hearing. In essence, he tells them that this is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel many hundreds of years earlier. And of course, being a people who prided themselves on being experts in the Law of Moses and the prophets, their minds would have immediately recognized what Peter was saying. Many people today might say, “Joel who?”

But what Peter does by covering that ground is to help the people realize that what they have just seen and heard is God’s way of getting their attention because they completely misunderstood who Jesus was and what He was about. Beginning in verse 22 through verse 36, Peter talks to them about Jesus. His argument is that Jesus is the Christ and that God has made that irrefutably clear. First of all, he says, God proved that he was the Christ by the mighty works and signs and wonders that he did, while he was in their midst. And Peter says, you know very well what I’m saying is true. Then he says, but this Jesus was delivered up in accordance with a precise plan that originated in the mind of God. All of that and all of this is no accident, but the outworking of God’s power and wisdom and love. Even so, Peter says, you were a part of that in that you were the ones who had him crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men—referring to Pilate and the Roman authorities.

However, even though you had him killed, God raised him up. And that's where Peter then begins to show that the great king of Jews—David—had made it clear that the Christ who was to sit upon his throne forever is one who could not be held by death. He quotes David saying, *"I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken."*

And you see, Peter's point is that when David talked about those things, he wasn't talking about himself, but about one that David calls Lord. He said you can still visit the tomb of David. But he says David was a prophet. A prophet was someone who spoke things God wanted the people to hear and know, and so as a prophet, David saw the resurrection of Christ. In fact, Peter says, David knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendents upon his throne. So knowing that, he looked ahead and prophesied about the resurrection.

So that was an argument from scripture, but then beginning in verse 32, Peter adds to that their testimony as eye-witnesses. "We are telling you things we have seen with our own eyes!"

Then Peter drives his point home. **Verse 36** says: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."*

Now that was pretty powerful! But it was also very personal. Peter pulled no punches. He says, you crucified him, the one that God has declared both Lord and Christ, you helped kill. Remember, in verse 23 Peter had already told the people they were guilty of crucifying and killing Christ.

What do you do when you hear things that you don't like? Do you just get mad at the person who spoke those things, or do you give those things any thought, as to whether or not they might be true? Sometimes we get angry when someone says something that convicts us in some way, but if it is true, isn't it better that we hear it and have the chance to do something about it?

Well, for at least some of those people who were there that day, and who heard the things that Peter was preaching, verse 37 tells us they were convicted in their heart. In other words, they realized what Peter was saying was true. They could no longer deny it. And so they interrupted the sermon right then and there, and they said, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*

You see, they realized that they were in serious trouble because they had killed the Lord, even though He had been raised from the dead, they were still in trouble because they were the ones who had wanted to put him to death.

So Peter told them what they needed to do. He didn't tell them what so many so-called preachers today tell people, to simply believe and receive Jesus into their heart as their personal Lord and Savior. Peter didn't preach what many people today are preaching, and many people today won't preach what Peter preached that day. Peter told them what they

needed to do—to *“repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.”*

They may have had a hand in putting Jesus to death, but God had raised him from the dead, and so now if they would put their faith in Christ and become obedient to him by repenting of their sins and being baptized, there was still hope for them that they could be forgiven of their sins. Not only that, God would give them an unbelievable gift. He would give them the Holy Spirit to dwell in them.

And as Peter continued his preaching that day, urging the people to save themselves (not that anyone can save themselves, but by deciding to obey the gospel of Christ, there is one who can save them), about three thousand people made a life-changing, soul-saving decision.

- They made the decision to turn away from their sins.
- They made the decision to be buried with Christ by baptism into His death.
- They made the decision to become disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world.
- They made the decision to enter the kingdom of God; that spiritual realm where people live each and every day, and in every part of their lives by the will of God.

Chapter 2 ends with a very interesting observation. You see, Pentecost was just the first day of God’s kingdom. The apostles and other Christian also kept on preaching the gospel, and people kept on hearing it and believing it and obeying it. These people became God’s people and they started living their lives like it, and so **verse 47** says, *“praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

Now, my question for each of you this morning is, after reading and thinking about that amazing day again, what about you? Have you believed? Have you repented? Have you been baptized? Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? Have you been added you to Christ’s kingdom?

If you have, God bless you, and keep on keepin’ on. But if you have yet to make that decision, please don’t put it off any longer. We don’t know how many people gathered that day to hear what God wanted them to hear, but I am sure of this, about three thousand of those who were there went away with their lives changed. How will you leave here today? Think about that as together we stand and sing.