



The Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-21)

Commentary: Week Four

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

New American Commentary¹

7. The Miracle at Pentecost [2:1-13](#)

Everything in chap. [1](#) is preparatory to the great outburst of the Spirit who poured upon the praying band of believers at Pentecost. Over a period of forty days they had listened to the teaching of their Lord ([1:3](#)). They had received his commission to be worldwide witnesses, and they had been given his promise that the Holy Spirit would be granted them as empowerment for that mission ([1:5](#); [1:8](#)). With the Lord's final departure in his ascension, nothing was left to do but to wait and pray for the fulfillment of that promise ([1:14](#)). In chap. [2](#) their prayer was answered in a mighty way.

Pentecost has often been referred to as “the birth of the church.” A significant parallel between Pentecost and the Lukan infancy narrative is the prominent role of the Spirit in both. John was to be filled with the Spirit for his role as witness to Christ ([Luke 1:15](#)), as were the various other witnesses to the significance of the child Jesus in God's saving purposes—Elizabeth ([1:41](#)), Zechariah ([1:67](#)), and Simeon ([2:25-35](#)). Above all, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit ([1:35](#)). Just as through the Spirit God and humanity were perfectly united in Christ, so through the same Spirit God was united with his church at Pentecost. Perhaps even more striking was the prominent role of the Spirit in equipping Jesus for his ministry. The Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism “in bodily form” ([Luke 3:22](#)). Likewise in its “baptism” of the Spirit ([Acts 1:5](#)), the church received the Spirit in visible form ([2:3](#)). Endowed with the Spirit ([Luke 4:1, 14](#)), Jesus delivered his “inaugural address” at Nazareth, the keynote speech that set the pattern for his entire ministry ([4:18](#)). The Nazareth sermon announced the fulfillment in his own ministry of the messianic prophecies and, with its examples from Elijah and Elisha, pointed beyond the boundaries of Israel to the worldwide scope of his messianic mission. With this point the congregation at Nazareth was enraged and rejected him. The “inaugural address” at Pentecost was Peter's speech ([Acts 2:14-40](#)). It too was delivered through the power of the Spirit, which had just come upon him. It too dealt with the fulfillment of the messianic times. It too assumed a worldwide outreach ([2:39](#)), and it too would be rejected by a large part of the Jewish community according to the unfolding story of Acts.

[Acts 2](#) forms a unity around the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. It falls into three main parts: (1) the miracle at Pentecost (vv. [1-13](#)), (2) Peter's sermon and its tremendous results (vv. [14-41](#)), and (3) a picture of the life held in common by the greatly enlarged community of believers in Jerusalem (vv. [42-47](#)). The first segment falls into two main parts: (a) the coming of the gift of the Spirit on the band of believers ([2:1-4](#)) and (b) the manifestation of this gift to the Jewish crowd ([2:5-13](#)).

1. John B. Polhill, *New American Commentary – Volume 26: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 94-109.

(1) The Gift of the Spirit [2:1-4](#)

THE SETTING ([2:1](#)). [2:1](#) The time was the day of Pentecost, which Luke noted with a phrase that is literally translated “when the day of Pentecost was fulfilled.” The “fulfillment” language bears more weight than mere chronology as the fulfillment of the time of the divine promise for the gift of the Spirit ([1:4f.](#)). The time of waiting was over. Luke was much more vague in his reference to the place. They were all together “in one place” (*epi to auto*). The next verse specifies that it was a “house” in which they were sitting. But where was the house? Was it a room in the temple? That would certainly explain how a large crowd could have been so quickly attracted to the scene. Luke, however, usually referred to the temple by the normal designation *hieron*, never by the word “house”; and there was really no room in the temple where a gathering of laypeople could “sit.” The most likely place for the gathering is the upper room where they had been praying. Perhaps it was near the temple, where large crowds would assemble on a feast day.

Who were the people gathered in the upper room? On whom did the Spirit descend? Was it the 120 mentioned in [1:15](#) or only the Twelve apostles? In [2:14](#) Luke mentioned only the Twelve, but there it probably was to connect them with Peter’s speech, which appealed to their special role as eyewitnesses to the resurrection ([2:32](#)). The presence of the large crowd testifying to the witness of the Spirit-filled Christians ([2:6-11](#)) would indicate that the full 120 were involved, as would the text Peter quoted from Joel that refers to women as well as men prophesying ([2:17-18](#)).

Pentecost was the second of the three great harvest festivals of Judaism, coming between Passover and Tabernacles. In the New Testament (cf. [1 Cor 16:8](#)) it is referred to as “Pentecost,” which means *fiftieth* in Greek. In the Old Testament it is referred to as the Festival of Weeks or of the Firstfruits, the first term referring to its coming a “week of weeks” after Passover, the second to the fact that an offering of two loaves prepared from the wheat harvest was made on this day. Although there was a difference among the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the precise reckoning of the day, the Pharisaic procedure seems to have been followed in the period prior to A.D. 70 in which Pentecost was reckoned as coming exactly fifty days after the first day of the Passover. It was a day of “solemn assembly,” and all work ceased. It was also one of the most popular pilgrim festivals, even more so than Passover, which was likely due to the improved weather conditions by the time of Pentecost.

THE EVENT ([2:2-4](#)). [2:2](#) The coming of the Spirit is described in three carefully constructed parallel statements, each pointing to an aspect of the event: a *sound* came ... and it filled the house (v. [2](#)); *tongues* appeared ... and one sat on each of them (v. [3](#)); they were filled with the Holy Spirit ... and *began to speak* in other tongues (v. [4](#)). The emphasis is on the objectivity of the event. It was audible, visible, and manifested itself in an outward demonstration of inspired speech. The audible manifestation is described as coming suddenly from heaven. The picture is of a blowing blast of wind, like the roar of a tornado. Wind phenomena often accompany an appearance by God in the Old Testament (cf. [1 Kgs 19:11](#); [Isa 66:15](#)). In Greek *pneuma* has the double connotation of both wind and Spirit, and that connection is to be seen here. As in Ezekiel the wind, the breath of Yahweh, is God’s Spirit, which brings life in the vision of the dry bones ([Ezek 37:9-14](#)).

[2:3](#) The same sort of double meaning is found in v. [3](#) in the reference to the “tongues.” Much as in English, the Greek word *glōssa* can refer to the physical organ of the tongue. It also has the metaphorical meaning of what is spoken by the tongue, spoken *language*. So here, the lapping flames that had the visible likeness to tongues enabled the believers to speak in inspired language. Again it was a question of a heavenly manifestation. Throughout the Old Testament fire phenomena are used to depict the presence of God (cf. [Exod 3:2](#); [19:18](#); [1 Kgs 18:38-39](#); [Ezek 1:27](#)). Here the fire is described as “separated.” The picture is that of one great flame representing the Spirit, which separates into many tongues of flame with one resting on each individual. Luke was well aware that he was using metaphorical language in these verses by carefully employing adverbs of comparison: “like the blowing

of a violent wind” (v. [2](#)), “what seemed to be tongues” (literally, “tongues as of fire,” v. [3](#)). He was dealing with the transcendent, that which is beyond ordinary human experience and can only be expressed in earthly analogies.

[2:4](#) Verse [4](#) gives the result of the Spirit’s coming on those gathered in the upper room. They were “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and this led them to “speak in other tongues.” From this point on in Acts, the gift of the Spirit became a normative concomitant of becoming a Christian believer ([2:38](#)). The expression of this differs; in [9:17](#) Saul is said to have been “filled” with the Spirit, as here. Sometimes this experience is described as a “baptism” in the Spirit ([1:5](#); [11:16](#)). In other instances the word “poured out” is used ([2:17f.](#); [10:45](#)) or “came upon” ([8:16](#); [10:44](#); [11:15](#)) or simply “receive” ([2:38](#); [10:47](#)). All these instances refer to new converts and point to the Spirit’s coming in various ways, not always signified by tongues, as a permanent gift to every believer. This should be distinguished from other references to “filling,” where the Spirit comes upon one who is already a believer in a time of special inspiration and testimony to the faith (cf. [4:8](#), [31](#); [7:55](#); [13:9](#)).

What is one to make of their speaking in “other tongues”? Does this refer to their speaking in languages other than their own native tongue, or does it refer to the phenomenon of glossolalia, speaking in tongues, the ecstatic “Spirit language” Paul dealt with in [1 Cor 12–14](#)? Or does it refer to a miracle of hearing as well? A good case can be made for each of these views. Those who consider the miracle to be speaking in tongues can point to its being a well-attested, early Christian phenomenon ([1 Cor 12–14](#)) as well as to its seeming appearance elsewhere in Acts ([10:46](#); [19:6](#)). It is described as “declaring the wonders of God” in v. [11](#), and this could be likened to Paul’s description of tongue-speaking as speaking to God and speaking mysteries in the Spirit ([1 Cor 14:2](#)). Above all, the charge of some of the bystanders that the Christians were “drunk” could be linked to the ecstatic nature of tongue-speaking. Paul likewise worried that outsiders might consider the Corinthian tongue-speakers to be “out of [their] mind” ([1 Cor 14:23](#)).

There are strong reasons, however, for questioning whether the Pentecost experience could have been the sort of ecstatic language Paul dealt with at Corinth. From Paul’s treatment the glossolalia there was clearly not rational discourse but an ecstatic “praise language,” edifying to the individual tongue-speaker, but not to the church ([1 Cor 14:1–5](#)). It was as meaningless to others as indistinct musical notes or a language totally foreign to them ([1 Cor 14:6–12](#)). For the church Paul preferred to speak “five intelligible words” (“with my mind,” RSV) than ten thousand “in tongues” ([1 Cor 14:19](#)). The Pentecost experience did seem to involve intelligible communication to those in the Jewish crowd.

The word “tongue” may be ambiguous in v. [4](#), but the word “dialect,” or “language” (*dialektos*), in vv. [6](#), [8](#) is not. It can only refer to a known language or dialect. Luke used the expression “to speak in other [*heteros*, “different”] tongues [languages]” in v. [4](#), thus making a distinction from tongue-speaking (which he did know and referred to in [10:46](#)). Likewise, in v. [4b](#) he used an uncommon Greek word in the phrase “as the Spirit enabled them.” This rare word means *to utter, to declare, to speak with gravity* and is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for prophesying (cf. [1 Chr 25:1](#); [Ezek 13:9](#); [Mic 5:12](#)). Finally, the long list of nations in vv. [9–11](#) is sandwiched between references to people who marvel at hearing the Christians in their own language (vv. [8](#), [11b](#)). The list obviously illustrates the breadth of the languages that were spoken. Awareness of this has led some scholars to postulate a miracle of “hearing.” The usual form of this view assumes that the Christians experienced glossolalia, but the crowd understood this as their own language through a miracle of hearing. This would emphasize the word “hear” in vv. [6](#), [11b](#): “each one heard them speaking in his own language.” The major problem with this view is that it presupposes the reception of the Spirit on the part of the crowd. Indeed, if the miracle was in the crowd’s hearing rather than in the believers’ speaking, one wonders why it was even necessary for Luke to tell of the Spirit’s coming so powerfully upon them.

When one's attention is focused on Luke's story of Pentecost, the flow of the narrative does seem to favor the view of a miracle of foreign speech. Filled with the Spirit, the Christians began to speak in tongues different from their own (v. [4](#)). A crowd was attracted and utterly amazed to hear these Galileans speaking their languages (v. [7](#)), a crowd that represented the greater portion of the entire Jewish Diaspora (vv. [9–11](#)). Certainly it was an ecstatic experience. The disciples were brim-full of the Spirit. They praised God; they magnified his name (v. [11](#)); they prophesied (v. [17](#)). The members of the crowd were bewildered. It had to be a sign, but what did it mean (v. [12](#))? As in every crowd, there were scoffers (v. [13](#)). Still the inspired speech of the Christians demonstrated the spiritual power present that day. All were prepared to hear Peter's explanation.

(2) The Witness to the Spirit [2:5–13](#)

THE GATHERING OF THE CROWD ([2:5–8](#)). [2:5](#) The constituency of the Pentecost crowd is given in v. [5](#). They were pious Jews “from every nation under heaven.” The NIV describes them as “God-fearing,” but “pious” would be a less confusing translation. “God-fearing” is a term used elsewhere in Acts for Gentiles who, like Cornelius ([10:2](#)), worshiped God and supported the synagogue but had not become full converts to Judaism. The word used here is *eulabeis*, which means *pious* and in Luke-Acts is always used of Jews, never of Gentiles (cf. [Luke 2:25](#); [Acts 8:2](#); [22:12](#)). These devout Jews are described as “staying” (or “dwelling,” RSV) in Jerusalem. The word usually implies residency, making it unlikely that these were merely pilgrims who had come to the feast. They were rather Diaspora Jews who had returned to the city of the temple to dwell there. A large contingency of these in Jerusalem has been well documented from inscriptions and excavated graves. The “Synagogue of the Freedmen” in which Stephen debated was likely comprised of them ([6:9](#)). A few manuscripts omit the reference to Jews in v. [5](#), and some scholars opt for so doing who want to see here the beginning of the Gentile mission. It is most unlikely that the omission is the correct reading and even more unlikely that the Gentile mission began here. The Gentile mission was a hard-won battle in Acts and only began in earnest with Peter's witness to Cornelius (chap. [10](#)).

Some have objected that to see these as Jews living in Jerusalem would render meaningless the witness of the Christians in foreign tongues, since they would surely have some proficiency in the Aramaic dialect spoken in Jerusalem. That, however, is to miss altogether the point of the speech miracle. The miracle was a demonstration of the Spirit's power and presence: these Diaspora Jews heard their own tongue spoken (not Aramaic or Greek) and realized that this should have been impossible for the “Galileans.” This “sign” prepared them for Peter's speech, which probably was in Aramaic and which they indeed understood. The note that they represented “every nation under heaven” is perhaps a bit of poetic license but a not altogether inaccurate description of the extent of the Jewish Diaspora.

[2:6–8](#) The crowd is said to have come together at the “sound.” What sound, that of the rushing wind or that coming from the Spirit-filled Christians? One cannot be certain, since Luke left out more detail than he told. The inspired Christians doubtless left the upper room and rushed forth, most likely to the temple precincts. Only there would be found sufficient room for a crowd of 3,000 plus. There also the crowds were to be found, assembled for the Pentecost festivities. Most likely the inspired cries of the Christians attracted the onlookers. Certainly the inspired speech perplexed them “because each one heard them speaking in his own language.” Luke heaped up words to describe the crowd's perplexity. They were “utterly amazed” (“astounded and amazed,” author's translation, v. [7](#)), not at what the Christians said but that such simple Galileans would know their languages. The label “Galilean” need not imply that all 120 were from Galilee, though a sizable band of disciples had accompanied Jesus from there to Jerusalem (cf. [Luke 8:1–3](#); [10:1–17](#); also see [23:49](#)). Verse [8](#) basically repeats v. [6](#), with the added note that it was in their “native” tongue, the language group into which they were born, that they were hearing these “Galileans.” This prepares for vv. [9–11](#), which list the various areas of the Diaspora represented.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE CROWD (2:9–11a). [2:9–11a](#) Verses [9–11a](#) are a part of the direct discourse spoken by the crowd, but likely they are a note from Luke enumerating the various nationalities present. The list has long intrigued scholars. It begins in what is present-day Iran (Parthia) and then proceeds across the Middle East (Mesopotamia), then southward to Judea, then north to central Turkey (Cappadocia), to northern Turkey (Pontus), eastward to the Aegean coast of Turkey (Asia), inland to Phrygia, then south to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey (Pamphylia). To this point, with the exception of Judea, which seems strangely out of place, the progress is a more-or-less regular curve, from southeast to north to southwest. After Pamphylia no real pattern is discernible. The catalog covers North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Cyrenaica), then north and west all the way to Rome, then southeast to the Mediterranean island of Crete, and finally much farther east and southward to Arabia. There are some striking omissions, areas of particular prominence in Acts, like Syria, Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Then there are the “problem” references, such as Judea. From ancient times interpreters have emended the text to give a more natural reference than the Judeans, who were scarcely foreigners in Jerusalem. Tertullian suggested Armenia, for example, and Chrysostom India. The most natural explanation would be that Judea is included in the widest sense as the extent of the Davidic Empire, from the Euphrates to Egypt. It would thus come naturally after Mesopotamia and would include Syria as well. Reference is often made to an astrological chart of the fourth century A.D. from Paulus Alexandrinus that links various nations to the signs of the Zodiac. A number of scholars have argued that Luke used an earlier form of Paulus’s list in his catalog. B. Metzger has shown rather convincingly that Luke’s list has little in common with Paulus’s chart.

Most attempts at uncovering the source of the Lukan list have either been unconvincing or demanded radical surgery, such as the elimination of Judea or Rome or Cretans and Arabians, often with the desire to end up with a neat list of twelve (one for each apostle or one for each sign of the Zodiac). It seems prudent to stick with the list as it is and view it in line with Luke’s purposes in providing it. The territories Luke listed all had extensive Jewish communities. Parthia, Medea, Elam, Mesopotamia had large groups of Jews from the time of the exile on. There was a large Jewish contingent in North Africa, Philo noting that two of the five wards of Alexandria were comprised of Jews. Acts witnesses to the Jewish representation in Phrygia and Asia, and their presence in Pontus and Cappadocia is amply evidenced. The Jewish population in Rome is well-known. The single exception to the resident Jews at Pentecost may be the Romans, who are described as “visitors” in verse [10b](#). The verse division at v. [11](#) is somewhat disconcerting. The phrase “both Jews and converts to Judaism” probably refers to Roman Jews and Gentiles who converted to Judaism by embracing circumcision and the Jewish law, as well as by providing for a sacrifice in the temple. The reference to Cretans and Arabians comes at the end of the list, almost as an afterthought. There were Jewish communities on Crete as well as in Arabia, which most likely refers to the Nabatean kingdom that extended the length of the Arabian peninsula from the Red Sea to the Euphrates. Perhaps the mention of these two locales was Luke’s way of rounding off his list—not only mainlanders but islanders and desert dwellers as well. In all he gave a rather representative picture of the Jewish Diaspora and its presence at Pentecost.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CROWD ([2:11b–13](#)). [2:11b–13](#) Verse [11b](#) picks up the narrative, once again expressing the amazement of the Jewish crowd. This time the content of the Christians’ speaking is given, the only hint in the entire narrative about what they were saying. They were declaring the “wonders” of God. Their testimony was the language of praise. They may even have burst forth in song, for such can be a natural expression when one is filled with the Spirit ([Eph 5:18–19](#)). They were “utterly amazed” (cf. v. [7a](#)) and wondered, “What does this mean?” (v. [12](#)). They had observed the miracle of the Christians speaking in their own language, but there had as yet been no interpretation about the meaning of this sign. They were thus prepared for the explanation Peter would soon provide. Others, however, were more skeptical—“no spiritual power here, just people who’ve had too much to drink” (author’s paraphrase, v. [13](#)). Here for the first time appears a motif that runs throughout Luke-Acts—in itself, without the element of personal faith and experience, even the most profound aspects of the good

news are not self-confirming but can lead to skepticism and even rejection (cf. [Luke 24:11](#); [Acts 17:32](#); [26:24](#)).

Overview. Before turning to Peter's speech, it would be well to take a last overview of the Pentecost narrative and summarize its major themes. One of the most commonly cited interpretive keys for understanding [Acts 2:1–13](#) has been to compare it with the giving of the law at Sinai. This comparison is based on rabbinic sources which show that later Judaism celebrated the giving of the law at Sinai as a part of their Pentecost liturgy. If this was so, we can conclude that Luke wanted to show that the Spirit, not the law, is the mark of the new dispensation in Christ. Two problems exist with this view. The first is the lateness of the sources. Although it is beyond dispute that second-century Judaism celebrated the giving of the Torah as part of its Pentecost liturgy, no clear first-century references support such a connection. More important is that Luke himself did not make any such connection explicit. The superiority of the Spirit over the law is certainly a major Pauline theme (cf. [2 Cor 3:6–18](#)), but nowhere in Luke's account of Pentecost is any allusion made to the Torah: not in the narrative and not in Peter's speech. Luke's emphases lay along different paths.

Another common interpretation sees [Acts 2:1–13](#) as depicting the “reversal of Babel.” This view sees the disunity of humanity that resulted from the many languages of Babel being overcome by a new language of the Spirit, which brings a new unity. Jewish tradition maintained that all people, and even the animals, spoke one common language in Eden. It was lost by the animals in Eden and by humans at Babel but will be restored at the end time. Certainly the reversal-of-Babel understanding is an attractive, and to some extent legitimate, interpretation of Pentecost. Luke, however, did not seem to have made the connection. Nothing in the text of [Acts 2](#) recalls [Gen 11:1–9](#). When Luke saw connections with an Old Testament tradition, he usually gave echoes from the Old Testament text, and these are lacking here. This is not to say that it is illegitimate to make such an application when expounding on the miracle at Pentecost. It is certainly not contrary to the meaning of the event. The Spirit does unify humanity around the lordship of Christ, and that is a major message of Acts and even of this immediate context (cf. [2:41–47](#)). One thing should be kept in mind when expounding this theme, however. It would be contrary to the text to speak of the Spirit giving a new common language. The opposite is rather the case. The Spirit gave the Christians many languages, all the languages represented by the nationalities listed in vv. [9–11](#). And is this not how the Spirit continues to work? He empowers Christian witnesses to take the gospel to the many different languages of the world to create a worldwide people of God, united by a common confession in the lordship of Christ.

What, then, are the emphases Luke expounded in his treatment of Pentecost? First, his major emphasis doubtless was that the church has now been empowered for its mission. Everything in chap. [1](#) has anticipated this event ([1:5](#), [8](#)). With the coming of the Spirit, the witness began. It began with the enthusiastic praise of the Spirit-filled Christians and the inspired sermon of Peter, and it resulted in the immediate harvest of 3,000 converts to Christ ([2:41](#)). And there is certainly a second, closely related theme of the text. Just as Pentecost was the festival of the firstfruits, so these are the “firstfruits” of the harvest in the Spirit. This connects with a third emphasis of the text: the spiritual harvest did not culminate at Pentecost. It began there and continued in ever-widening circles, from Jerusalem to Samaria to Antioch, from Cyprus to Asia Minor, from Greece to Rome, from Jews to Samaritans, from God-fearers to Gentiles.

The worldwide scope of the Christian witness is anticipated at Pentecost in the roll call of nations (vv. [9–11](#)). To be sure, it was a question of only Jews and Jewish proselytes at this point, but they were Diaspora Jews and represented “every nation under heaven” (v. [5](#)). Already the national barrier had been overcome. The racial barriers would be overcome, and the gospel would be shared with “every *people* under heaven” (alternate rendering of the Greek *ethnos*). Pentecost foreshadowed the worldwide mission. Finally, the pouring out of the Spirit has eschatological significance. It inaugurated the final period in God's plan of salvation. He acted decisively and definitely in Jesus Christ to create a people

for his own. The Spirit is the sign of these final times. This central emphasis comprised a major part of Peter's sermon.

8. Peter's Sermon at Pentecost [2:14-41](#)

Peter's sermon comprised the first of the "missionary addresses" of Acts. C. H. Dodd popularized the view that these addresses, such as the one here and those in chaps. [10](#) and [13](#), represented the early "kerygma" of the church, the primitive form of gospel preaching, usually consisting of scriptural proofs concerning the Messiah, some reference to Jesus' ministry, an emphasis on his death and resurrection, and a call to repentance. Although Dodd's structure may be too "pat"—there is considerable variance in pattern among the speeches—nonetheless he has isolated the major recurring elements in the missionary addresses to Jews in Acts.

In this, Peter's first sermon, the element of scriptural proof dominates. Three major texts form the framework of the speech: [Joel 2:28-32](#); [Ps 16:8-11](#); [110:1](#). Echoes of other texts and Old Testament traditions occur as well. The sermon falls into three main divisions. First, the full citation of the Joel text serves to connect the sermon with the immediate occasion of the Spirit-filled Christians ([2:14-21](#)). The central section of the speech establishes that Jesus is the Messiah, with [Ps 16:8-11](#) pointing to his resurrection and [Ps 110:1](#) to his exaltation ([2:22-36](#)). Finally, there is a call to repentance, with a final allusion to the text of Joel to "round off" the sermon and a report of the response of the Jewish crowd ([2:37-41](#)).

(1) Scriptural Proof Concerning the Pentecost Experience [2:14-21](#)

[2:14-16](#) Verses [14-16](#) form the introduction to Peter's sermon, marking the transition from the Spirit-filled utterance of the Christians to Peter's explanation of the event. Peter stood up along with the eleven other apostles. The eleven are not incidental to the narrative. As the Twelve, the apostles were the witnesses to the resurrection, which would be the central subject of Peter's sermon. As always in the early chapters of Acts, Peter was their representative, the spokesman for the testimony of all Twelve. Peter "raised his voice," a common Semitic expression for beginning to speak. He "addressed" the crowd. The verb means *to speak seriously, with gravity*, a word often used for prophetic, inspired utterance. He most likely spoke in the Aramaic dialect used in Jerusalem, which all these residents of Jerusalem would have understood (cf. [2:5](#), *katoikountes*, "residents" [author's translation]). "Fellow Jews" and "all of you who live in Jerusalem" refer to the same group. Such parallel expression typifies Semitic style, as also the expression "give ear to my words" (NIV: "listen carefully to what I say"). Luke's writing skill is apparent by his preservation of the Semitic flavor of Peter's language.

Nine a.m. (v. [15](#)) was a customary prayer hour (literally, "the third hour"), and Jews would only eat after that—at the fourth hour. Probably this is an example of the sort of humor that runs throughout Acts: "Folks don't get drunk first thing in the morning ... that comes later in the day" (author's paraphrase). That would be especially true of a solemn feast day like Pentecost when the celebrating would only begin in earnest in the evening. Often the speeches in Acts begin with a correction of a misunderstanding (cf. [3:12](#); [14:15](#)), a natural attention-getting device. Here, after having obtained the crowd's attention, Peter explained the real basis behind all the ecstatic behavior at Pentecost: the outpouring of the Spirit predicted by the prophet Joel (v. [16](#)).

[2:17–21](#) Peter gave the relevant passage in Joel in full. Luke reproduced this for his readers in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. The Septuagint of [Joel 2:28–32](#) (LXX, [3:1–5](#)) is followed faithfully with only a few minor, though perhaps significant, differences. Joel’s prophecy was originally given after a locust plague had ravaged the land, creating a severe famine. Joel called the people to repentance, promising the restoration of their prosperity and going on to foresee the coming of the Day of the Lord, the dawn of the messianic age, when the Spirit would be poured out on all of Israel.

Peter could not miss its applicability to Pentecost. Joel began his prophecy by saying “and afterward.” Peter’s version refers more specifically to “in the last days,” reflecting his conviction that the messianic age had already dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that we are indeed already living in the final days of God’s saving history. Peter’s conviction was very much in keeping with the rabbinic consensus that the Spirit no longer rested on all Israel but would return as a universal gift at the end time. For Peter the universal pouring out of the Spirit on the whole Christian group was demonstration that the end time had come. Perhaps the clearest indication that the entire 120 received the Spirit at Pentecost is Joel’s inclusion of daughters as well as sons—all were prophesying. Joel undoubtedly had seen the Spirit’s outpouring only as a gift to Israel, and perhaps many of those Jewish-Christians at Pentecost saw it the same way. The remainder of Acts clarifies that the promise applies to the Gentiles as well: it is indeed poured out on “all people.”

Verse [18](#) is probably best understood as being parallel to v. [17](#). “My servants, both men and women” are the same as the sons and daughters, young and old of v. [17](#), with the added refinement that those who received God’s gift of the Spirit are indeed his servants. The final phrase in v. [18](#) expands the text of Joel, reiterating the point made in v. [17](#), “They will prophesy.” Whatever the actual phenomenon at Pentecost, Peter emphasized here that it was prophecy, inspired utterance from the Lord.

The signs referred to in vv. [19–20](#) have often perplexed interpreters. Did Peter see them as having transpired at Pentecost, or did he relegate them to the final times, to the period of the second coming? Did he perhaps include them only in order to get to the crucial v. [21](#) with its reference to salvation, which would become the final appeal of his sermon? A key may perhaps be found in the little words “above” and “below,” which have been added to the Septuagint of Joel. D. Arichea has suggested that we may have a chiasmic *a-b-b-a* pattern here with *a* comprising the signs above: the darkened sun, the blood-colored moon. The signs below are the blood, fire, and thick smoke, which could more easily be related to the events in Jesus’ passion and at Pentecost. In any event the signs in v. [19](#) are standard apocalyptic language and almost certainly refer to the final cosmic events preceding the Parousia.

Verse [21](#) was the most important verse for Peter: “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” For Peter the “Lord” in the context of this sermon was Jesus Christ. Everything that followed in the sermon—Christ’s death, his resurrection, his exaltation—pointed in the same direction. Whoever calls on his name, whoever confesses him as Lord, will be saved. Appropriately, Peter concluded his appeal with this same theme of calling (v. [39](#)).