



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

Notes: Week Four

Acts 2:1-21 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,^[b] **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. **15** These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! **16** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 “‘In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

18 Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.’^[c]

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 2:4](#) Or *languages*; also in verse 11
- b. [Acts 2:9](#) That is, the Roman province by that name
- c. [Acts 2:21](#) Joel 2:28-32

Acts 2:1-21 (HCSB)

Pentecost

² When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. ³ And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.

⁵ There were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ And they were astounded and amazed, saying, ^[a] “Look, aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ How is it that each of us can hear in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking the magnificent acts of God in our own languages.” ¹² They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, “What could this be?” ¹³ But some sneered and said, “They’re full of new wine!”

Peter’s Sermon

¹⁴ But Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them: “Men of Judah and all you residents of Jerusalem, let me explain this ^[b] to you and pay attention to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it’s only nine in the morning. ^[c] ¹⁶ On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ And it will be in the last days, says God,
that I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity;
then your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ I will even pour out My Spirit
on My male and female slaves in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will display wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below:
blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the great and remarkable Day of the Lord comes.

²¹ Then everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved. ^[d]

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 2:7](#) Other mss add *to one another*
- b. [Acts 2:14](#) Lit *let this be known*
- c. [Acts 2:15](#) Lit *it’s the third hour of the day*
- d. [Acts 2:21](#) [Jl 2:28-32](#)

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Acts 2:1-21

[2:1-12](#) The events of Pentecost, which mark the formal and public beginning of the church, involved a number of supernatural phenomena. These included the rush of violent wind from heaven, tongues like flames of fire, the infilling with the Holy Spirit, and speaking in languages as the Spirit gave believers the ability to do so.

[2:4](#) One of the supernatural phenomena at Pentecost was speaking in **different languages** as the **Holy Spirit** gave the apostles **ability** to do so. The languages have been interpreted as (1) supernatural languages given specifically for the purpose of communicating with the people gathered from all over the Roman Empire, (2) human languages that were recognized by individuals from various lands, or (3) the Greek language that was common to all the people gathered from throughout the Roman world. The second option seems to best fit the context.

[2:8-11](#) Those present in Jerusalem for Pentecost included people from a wide variety of places and ethnic backgrounds. All the regions listed in [verses 9-10](#) are known to have had Jewish populations. They encompassed the eastern Mediterranean area that ran from Rome to Libya. The gathering at Pentecost is thus inclusive, featuring Jews from throughout the eastern Roman Empire.

[2:14](#) Acts is primarily a narrative punctuated by numerous speeches. Most of the speeches are summaries rather than word-for-word accounts. Just as he did in the Gospel that bears his name, Luke relied on "the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word" to report the essentials of speeches and events for which he was not present ([Lk 1:2](#)).

[2:17-21](#) In his reply to the jeering crowd ([v. 13](#)), Peter cited three OT passages to demonstrate the biblical basis for the events of Pentecost. The first passage he cited was from [Joel 2:28-32](#). The quote follows the Masoretic Text version almost verbatim. Peter identified Joel's prophecy with **the last days**, and said those days had now arrived with the coming of the Spirit. There may also yet be a future, fuller fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 2".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

Acts 2:1-21

2:1-13 The Spirit Descends at Pentecost. The promise of the Spirit (cf. [1:5](#); [Joel 2:28-32](#); [Matt. 3:11](#)) is fulfilled at the feast of Pentecost. The event is narrated in two parts: the coming of the Spirit on the believers ([Acts 2:1-4](#)), and the reaction of the Jewish crowd to the Spirit-filled Christians ([vv. 5-13](#)).

2:1 Pentecost was the second of the annual harvest festivals, coming 50 days after Passover. **All** most likely included the entire 120 assembled in the upper room ([1:15](#)).

2:2 Jesus had compared the Holy Spirit's work to the wind ([John 3:8](#)), but here the Holy Spirit is coming in greatly increased power, and it was appropriate that this event be accompanied by **a sound** that was not like a gentle breeze but **like a mighty rushing wind**. The **house where they were sitting** probably was the upper room ([Acts 1:13](#)), which must have been located close to the temple grounds.

2:3 The **divided tongues as of fire** were not literal flames (for Luke says "as of") but looked enough like fire that this was the best description that could be given. "Fire" in the OT often indicates the presence of God, especially in his burning holiness and purity, consuming everything that is impure (see [Ex. 3:2](#); [13:21](#); [19:18](#); [40:38](#); [Isa. 4:5](#); [Ezek. 1:4](#)). These tongues may therefore portray both the purity and the power of the speech of these disciples as they proclaimed "the mighty works of God" ([Acts 2:11](#)), as well as the holy presence of God.

2:4 filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a fulfillment of what Jesus promised (see notes on [1:5](#); [1:8](#)). It does not mean that the Holy Spirit was completely inactive prior to this time (for the Spirit of God was active in the world from [Gen. 1:2](#) onward), but now the Spirit was coming to people in a new, more powerful way, signifying the beginning of the new covenant age (the time from Christ's death until he returns at some time in the future). **to speak in other tongues.** The word translated "tongues" (Gk. *glōssa*, plural) can also be translated "languages," and that is the sense that it has in this verse. In this case the other languages were understood by various people present in Jerusalem, but in [1 Corinthians 14](#) Paul expects that no one present in the church at Corinth will understand the languages being spoken "in tongues" (see [1 Cor. 14:2](#)). Acts and 1 Corinthians are probably not speaking of different types of gifts but different kinds of audiences: people who understood the languages were present in Jerusalem but were not expected to be present in Corinth (see notes on [1 Cor. 12:10](#); [12:29-30](#); [14:2](#)). This is clearly a miracle of speaking, not of hearing, for the disciples began "*to speak* in other tongues." **As the Spirit gave them utterance** indicates that the Holy Spirit was directing the syllables they spoke. Speaking in tongues in this way also seems to be the phenomenon experienced by those at Cornelius's house ([Acts 10:45-46](#)) and the disciples of John at Ephesus ([19:6](#)).

2:5 The presence of the crowd indicates that the setting must be the temple grounds, the only place in Jerusalem that could accommodate more than 3,000 persons ([v. 41](#)). The fact that they were **dwelling in Jerusalem** suggests not only Jewish pilgrims but local residents as well.

2:6 hearing them speak. They spoke the "mighty works of God" ([v. 11](#)), the language of praise.

2:9-11 The long list of nations covers most of the first-century Roman world, particularly areas where Jewish communities existed (see [map](#)). It provides one of the most comprehensive ancient catalogs of the Jewish Diaspora (Jews living outside Palestine) and is confirmed by other ancient lists (esp. Philo, [Embassy to Gaius 281-284](#)), by early Jewish archaeological remains, and by many ancient literary sources. It is only natural that first-century Jerusalem would be filled with devout Jews "from every

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 2".

nation under heaven” ([Acts 2:5](#)). The list also demonstrates that already at Pentecost the Christians were starting their worldwide witness. At this point the converts were mainly Jewish. The only Gentiles at Pentecost were **proselytes** ([v. 11](#)), Gentiles who had become full converts to Judaism.

Nations at Pentecost

c. A.D. 30

Pentecost attracted Jews from all over the world to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual festival. Those who heard the apostles’ message in their native languages at Pentecost came from various regions within the two great competing empires of the day—the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire—with Jerusalem near the center.



[2:14-5:42](#) *The Witness in Jerusalem.* Beginning with Peter’s sermon at Pentecost and continuing through [ch. 5](#), the witness of the Christians is confined to the city of Jerusalem and restricted to Jews.

[2:14-41](#) *Peter Preaches at Pentecost.* Peter’s sermon is the first in a series of speeches and discourses in Acts (see [chart](#)). As a sermon to Jews it consists primarily of scriptural proofs: [vv. 14-21](#) interpret the miracle of tongues as a fulfillment of [Joel 2:28-32](#); [Acts 2:22-36](#) presents Christ as Messiah in fulfillment of [Ps. 16:8-11](#) and [Ps. 110:1](#); and [Acts 2:37-41](#) concludes the sermon with a call to repentance and baptism. There also is an allusion to [Ps. 132:10](#), which itself alludes to [2 Sam. 7:6-16](#).

Major Sermons in Acts

Speaker	Text	Audience
Peter	2:14-36	Jews in Jerusalem
	3:11-26	Jews in Jerusalem
	10:34-43	Cornelius’s household
Stephen	7:1-53	Jews in Jerusalem
Paul	13:16-47	Jews in Pisidian Antioch
	17:22-31	Greeks in Athens
	20:18-35	Church elders in Ephesus
	22:1-21	Jews in Jerusalem
	24:10-21	Felix and his court
	26:1-29	Agrippa and his court

[2:17](#) The **last days** are not just in the distant future but were inaugurated at Pentecost (cf. [1 Cor. 10:11](#); [2 Tim. 3:1](#); [Heb. 1:2](#); [James 5:3](#); [2 Pet. 3:3](#)) and will continue until Christ’s return. They are the “last days” in that the coming of the Messiah, long predicted in the OT, has now occurred. His saving death and resurrection have been accomplished, and now the work of the Holy Spirit in building the church is a key event in the history of salvation that needs to occur before Christ returns. Most rabbis believed that

the Spirit had ceased speaking through human prophets with the last of the OT prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). Joel's prophecy of an outpouring of the Spirit **on all flesh** was understood as referring to a new messianic age. **daughters**. The women in the upper room participated in the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, further confirming Joel's prophecy.

2:19-21 The darkened **sun** and bloody **moon**, whether literal or symbolic, indicate the final consummation of the earth. Peter included the full prophecy even though not all of it was yet fulfilled. Peter's quotation from Joel ended with the key verse ([Joel 2:32](#)), which assures that **everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**. Although the audience would have thought the God of Israel is meant, for Peter the "name of the Lord" that saves is Jesus (see [Acts 2:36](#); cf. [4:12](#)). Peter's application of the title "Lord" ([Joel 2:32](#)) to Jesus points to his deity.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Acts 2:1-21

2:1 Held 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the Festival of First Harvest. It was one of three major annual festivals ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)), a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Jesus was crucified at Passover time, and he ascended 40 days after his resurrection. The Holy Spirit came 50 days after the Resurrection, 10 days after the Ascension. Jews of many nations had gathered in Jerusalem for this festival. Thus, Peter's speech ([2:14ff](#)) was given to an international audience, and it resulted in a worldwide harvest of new believers—the first converts to Christianity.

2:3, 4 This was a fulfillment of John the Baptist's words about the Holy Spirit's baptizing with fire ([Luke 3:16](#)) and of the prophet Joel's words about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ([Joel 2:28, 29](#)). Why tongues of fire? Tongues symbolize speech and the communication of the Good News. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame to ignite the lives of others. On Mount Sinai, God confirmed the validity of the Old Testament law with fire from heaven ([Exodus 19:16-18](#)). At Pentecost, God confirmed the validity of the Holy Spirit's ministry by sending fire. At Mount Sinai, fire came down on one place; at Pentecost, fire came down on many believers, symbolizing that God's presence is available to all who believe in him.

2:3, 4 God made his presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way—roaring wind ([2:2](#)), fire, and his Holy Spirit. Would you like God to reveal himself to you in such recognizable ways? He may do so, but be wary of forcing your expectations on God. In [1 Kings 19:10-13](#), Elijah also needed a message from God. First came a great wind, then an earthquake, and finally a fire. But God's message came in a "gentle whisper." God may use dramatic methods to work in your life—or he may speak in gentle whispers. Wait patiently and always listen.

2:4-11 These people literally spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability—a miraculous attention-getter for the international crowd gathered in town for the festival. All the nationalities represented recognized their own languages being spoken. More than miraculous speaking drew people's attention, however; they saw the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles continued to minister in the Holy Spirit's power wherever they went.

2:7, 8 Christianity is not limited to any race or group of people. Christ offers salvation to all people without regard to nationality. Visitors in Jerusalem were surprised to hear the apostles and other believers speaking in languages other than their own, but they need not have been. God works all kinds of miracles to spread the Good News, using many languages as he calls all kinds of people to become his followers. No matter what your race, color, nationality, or language, God speaks to you. Are you listening?

2:9-11 Why are all these places mentioned? This is a list of many lands from which Jews had come to the festivals in Jerusalem. These Jews were not originally from Palestine because their ancestors had been dispersed to other parts of the world through captivities and persecutions. Very likely, some of the Jews who responded to Peter's message returned to their homelands with God's Good News of salvation. Thus, God prepared the way for the spread of the Good News. As you read Acts, you will see how the way was often prepared for Paul and other messengers by people who had become believers at Pentecost. The church at Rome, for example, was probably begun by such Jewish believers.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1816-1818.

2:12 When the gathered crowd recognized that something supernatural was taking place, they naturally wanted an explanation. At this point, Peter stepped forward and explained the truth about God. This should be the pattern in our lives as well. Hopefully we are living in such a way that people will see Christ in us. If we *do* shine and sparkle ([Matthew 5:14](#); [Philippians 2:15](#)) and if we are "salty" ([Matthew 5:13](#)), we will get the attention of others. They will surely want to know what is so attractive and different about us. Then we can explain our "Christian hope" ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). What is different about your life? What supernatural evidence would cause someone to stop you and say, "What can this mean?"

2:14 Peter had been an unstable leader during Jesus' ministry, letting his bravado be his downfall, even denying that he knew Jesus ([John 18:15-18](#), [25-27](#)). But Christ had forgiven and restored him ([John 21](#)). This was a new Peter, humble but bold. His confidence came from the Holy Spirit, who made him a powerful and dynamic speaker. Have you ever felt as if you've made such bad mistakes that God could never forgive and use you? No matter what sins you have committed, God promises to forgive you and make you useful for his Kingdom. Allow him to forgive you and use you effectively to serve him.

2:14ff Peter tells the people that they should listen to the testimony of the believers because the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus had been entirely fulfilled in him ([2:14-21](#)), because Jesus is the Messiah ([2:25-36](#)), and because the risen Christ could change their lives ([2:37-40](#)).

2:16-21 Not everything mentioned in [Joel 2:28, 29](#) was happening that particular morning. The "last days" include all the days between Christ's first and second comings and is another way of saying "from now on." "That great and glorious day of the LORD" ([2:20](#)) denotes the whole Christian age. Even Moses yearned for the Lord to put his Spirit upon everyone ([Numbers 11:29](#)). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was released throughout the entire world—to men, women, slaves, Jews, Gentiles. Now *everyone* can receive the Spirit. This was a revolutionary thought for first-century Jews.