

**TUTORIAL**  
**2.10**

# The arrival of the Holy Spirit

The Narrative continues from Acts - this time we look at the account in God's Word of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Acts 1:5,9-26, 2:1-41, John 14:16-17.**

## Last time

We scanned the road ahead...to chart the journey we're embarking on as we follow Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles. We considered just how important this record is for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century believers - that it isn't just dusty old history or facts for academic theology. In this account we continue to learn important elements of who we are as individual members of Jesus' *Body*, or *Church* here on the earth. We also anticipate with excitement the opportunity to learn - or be reminded of - important principles for us, the current generation of believers, and how we can play our part in the Task that Jesus entrusted to His disciples as He left the earth.

## “Why are you standing there...?”

But for now, the disciples and a few others of Jesus' closest relatives and friends are hanging out together in a room in Jerusalem. The talk is all about what happened just hours before, and what it means for the future. Gradually more people come upstairs and join them in the room that has become something of a headquarters for Jesus' followers in Jerusalem. It's a good-sized space, but it's crowded now with everyone gathered there (Acts 1:12,13).

They're all people who over the last few years have come to firmly believe that Jesus is the Messiah and God's substitute Lamb - the ultimate and final sacrifice for their sins that God has accepted completely. After all, God raised Him back from death - how could you not believe in Him now? Most, if not all of them, had seen Him at different times in the last six weeks. They'd all speculated that surely now He'll lead a movement to throw out the Roman occupying forces and put Himself on the Throne of the nation. But obviously that wasn't the plan, at least not immediately...because He's gone!

His eleven disciples have told and retold the story of how they'd been over on the Mountain of Olives just today talking to Him face to face. "And then suddenly", they said, "we're just watching Him go up, and then looking at the spot in the clouds where He's disappeared. Who knows how long we stood there...we were all just feeling like, what now? What do we do next? Then we were startled to find there were two angels standing there right beside us. They looked like people, like men, but in really white clothes. We knew straight away they had to be from God. They even had a bit of a joke with us. They said, 'Hey you guys from Galilee, why are you standing there staring up at the sky?'

They said that Jesus had gone to Heaven, but that He'd return in the same way He went (Acts 1:9-11). So that at least is encouraging. We're not sure how long He'll be gone...a few months, or years? He said that only God the Father sets dates and times for stuff to happen. Anyway, we reminded ourselves that He'd told us to wait here in Jerusalem until He sends the One He promised...to give us power He said, to be His witnesses everywhere."

As new people come upstairs to the room the story is repeated for them. Luke's account says that they prayed...in fact, they kept praying. It was their default response to whatever happened. They would talk with God about it, voicing their worship and also asking Him for His involvement in everything (Acts 1:14). After a while Peter speaks up and says it's time for them to choose a replacement for Judas the betrayer, who by now has killed himself. Eventually a guy called Matthias, who travelled with them regularly as they followed Jesus, is appointed as the twelfth Apostle. Very clearly they have a sense of the importance of the role they have as Apostles - they are going to lead the group's efforts to represent the Master and to fulfill the Task He's entrusted to them (Acts 1:15-26).

## **The arrival of the Holy Spirit**

It's a week and a half later, the day of Pentecost - the Jewish feast to celebrate and thank God for the barley harvest. The disciples and other believers in Jerusalem have gathered in the morning in the same room. Luke's record reflects the suddenness of what comes next. Everyone hears a loud noise. What's happening? It sounds like wind roaring down from overhead, filling the room. And what's that in the air? Flames...now they've settled above everyone's heads...but without burning them (Acts 2:1-4).

We're reminded of another time centuries before, when Moses was confronted with the alarming sight of a bush with flames dancing around it that didn't burn it up...God's presence there, he was told, made it holy ground. Then months later he was climbing the same mountain, having left the Israelites down below. This time the whole mountain was shaking and the air was full of lightning and the sound of thunder. God again was demonstrating His holiness as He initiated the First Covenant.

Now, at these early stages of the New Covenant, God's holy presence is once again represented in the physical world with fire. But instead of it being *external* and a cause for *fear*, the Holy Spirit's presence for Jesus' followers is *internal* and reason for real joy.

We're also reminded of God's glory, shining in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle. Then, God had graciously come to live among His people. Now, on this remarkable morning in Jerusalem, God's Spirit has come to live with His people under the New Covenant. But it won't be in a room in a tent, shut off from His chosen people because of their sin. This time He's actually come to live *in* these members of His image-bearing race who He has given so much for. And He can gladly do this because He has pronounced them to be holy and righteous through Jesus' death.

Luke's Account and the ongoing Narrative make it clear that the Holy Spirit has also come on this auspicious day to live in them not only as individuals, but also as a group. A very appropriate and helpful term for this group - one that the Narrative will frequently use - is *Body*. Another word used extensively by the writers is borrowed from Greek culture - *Ecclesia* - people called out from their homes or activities to gather for a specific purpose. Most English translators have chosen the word "Church", but centuries of western history has tended to weigh this term down with a lot of unfortunate baggage.

But the important point here - and one that helps us sort through all the potential confusion about the whole idea of 'church' - is that from the very beginning, God's people on earth were united and defined by their relationship with His Spirit. All those that were His then, and since, have had the permanent presence of God's Spirit in them individually and corporately. So that means *us*. We are, as the Narrative will declare elsewhere, God's Temple...in other words, the special, holy, place here on earth that is reserved just for Him.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God claims us as His own...His Holy Spirit moves in to make our lives His home. He doesn't overpower our personalities, but He co-exists with our own spirits and gently works with us to teach, guide and encourage. And, in the process, He merges us as individuals with the larger Body of His people...He is the blood, if you like, that courses through the veins of His called-out group of people, giving life and unifying us for Christ's purposes.

So what Jesus said He'd do, had happened. Just before His death, when the disciples were disturbed and discouraged, He promised to send Someone who'd encourage them and guide them into Truth (John 14:16-17). And then again recently, just ten days ago, as He was leaving to return to Heaven, He'd reconfirmed that promise, saying they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). This dramatic event at the inception of the Church left them in no

doubt that the Spirit had come. The experience was all consuming...a genuine "baptism of fire". As a result, they all felt the Holy Spirit directing their words and actions completely... "filled" is the term Luke and other Narrative writers use.

We too can be filled - we can allow Him to guide us by His truth and respond to His gentle promptings, regardless of how we might *feel* at a given moment. But in this wonderful, wild, exciting time at the beginnings of the journey for the new Church and the Good News it was entrusted with, the Spirit's filling had some very special and dramatic results. Suddenly they could speak, and understand, languages they'd never known before. This is enormously significant and provides a signpost for how God was intending to continue with His great Rescue plan in this new era.

On this day of Pentecost - the day for celebrating a harvest - God was demonstrating in a most emphatic way that this New Covenant would not be just for the Jewish people, would not just be proclaimed in Hebrew or even Aramaic...but would go out to the ethnic non-Jews, the *goyim* in Hebrew or *Gentiles* that English would borrow from Latin. And, because He is the communicating, revealing God, His Narrative that culminates in the Good News about Jesus, would be communicated in languages that spoke to people's hearts. God has always graciously taken it on Himself, to speak to humans in their languages and in ways they can understand.

Now the Spirit is telling the members of the newly established *Ecclesia* - the Gathering, the Church - that they would go out communicating God's Good News Narrative to the nations in ways that would be clearly understandable to their audience. But they would not have to undertake this Task on their own...He would give them the resources to get it done. Now the formerly confused and frightened group is confident. They begin to tell everyone they can see in the narrow streets around. And, Luke records that there was an immediate harvest then and there. God-fearing Jews who've travelled to Jerusalem from all over the Mediterranean area for the Passover are still here for Pentecost (Acts 2:5-13).

They hear the noise of something going on that's reverberating off the stone walls and overhanging buildings: "What's going on?" - "I'm going to climb up here where I can see." - "It's that group from Galilee, the followers of Jesus." - "What language is that? They're babbling, must be drunk...and so early in the morning, pathetic" - "No, no, I can understand, that's the language of where my family settled, out in Mesopotamia." - "Yes, and that one over there is speaking our trade language in Cappadocia." - "Hey, now this one is speaking Egyptian."

And Peter, by now the established spokesman of the Jesus group, gets where he can be seen and loudly makes himself heard (Acts 2:14-41). "Come on, we're not drunk...at this time of the morning? What's happening here was foretold

centuries ago. This is God's Spirit who has come to us like wine or oil being poured out. It all has to do with Jesus of Nazareth who the religious leaders collaborated with the Romans to execute recently. But He is the long-awaited Messiah. The One King David spoke of. He is the Lord! The fact is, it was *you* - His own people - who crucified Him. But God raised Him again and now He's gone back to the place of highest honor in Heaven. And now He's sent His Spirit. So that's what's going on here."

The message strikes home. They repent...recognize their sin, realize that they've been trying to make themselves righteous before God through their own efforts; they put their faith in Jesus the Messiah as God's substitute who took their sins on Himself. Some 3000 people are baptized and become a part of this *Body*, this *Church* that is not even really a day old. Those people are our brothers and sisters...we're joined to them despite the intervening centuries by the Holy Spirit who lived in them, just like He lives in us today.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

### *The arrival of the Holy Spirit*

1. In your own words, explain what it means when we say that the Holy Spirit lives *in* people, lives *in you*. Do you think that who you are, the things that make you a distinct person, are lessened somehow by this?
2. Explain what you understand God's purpose was in bringing the *Ecclesia* - the Church - into being. (Note: don't go beyond what we've covered in the Narrative so far and try to tie your answer into the themes that have been highlighted.)
3. What is your personal response to the thought that as the great Communicator, God is graciously reaching out through His *Body* the Church, to share the Good News in whatever way is most understandable to people? Do you find anything in this that might help define a value or commitment for your own life? If so, how would you describe it?



## ACTIVITIES

### *The arrival of the Holy Spirit*

1. Write up to 500 words explaining your understanding of (a) *baptism* of the Spirit (b) being *filled* with the Spirit...are they the same thing, or different and if so how? (Note: If you are not quite sure what you believe about these issues, please state that. Also, you're obviously free to look up any resources you like, but please describe your own viewpoint rather than cutting and pasting someone else's opinion.)