

Acts 2

1. How was this day prophesied by the prophets and by Jesus? (2:1-4, and also see Joel 2:28-29, Luke 3:16, 24:45-49, John 14:15-21, 16:13-15)

2. Why was it especially appropriate that God sent the Holy Spirit to the early believers on Pentecost Sunday? (2:1-4, and also see Jer. 31:31-34, Rom. 7:6, II Cor. 3:6) How many of them were filled with the Holy Spirit? (2:4) Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?

Pentecost (from the Gk., ‘fiftieth’), a religious observance that has roots in the OT and continues to be observed in both Judaism and Christianity.

As a designation for a particular religious observance, the Greek word appears only twice in the LXX, namely, in Tob. 2:1, and 2 Macc. 12:32. In the Hebrew OT, the customary name for the observance is the Feast of Weeks (Heb. Shavuot). It is regarded as the second of three obligatory observances, coming between Passover and Tabernacles (cf. Exod. 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). In Exod. 23:16, it is called ‘the feast of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field.’ In Exod. 34:22, the Feast of Weeks is further defined as ‘the first fruits of wheat harvest.’ These phrases indicate that the Feast of Weeks was originally an agricultural festival, an occasion on which the community was expected to show gratitude to God for the first fruits, i.e., the early harvest.

Dating: The dating of this festival also suggests its original agricultural context. Deut. 16:9 says that it is to be dated seven weeks ‘from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain.’ Lev. 23:15-16 directs: ‘And you shall count from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh Sabbath.’ Josephus calculated the date of Pentecost as the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover, and, in time, this manner of calculation became standard.

According to OT regulations, one was not allowed to work on the day of Pentecost. The sacrifice of various animals and of bread made from newly harvested grain was required (cf. Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31).

In the Hellenistic period, (300 B.C.-A. D. 300) Pentecost began to lose its association with agriculture and came increasingly to be associated with the religious history of the Hebrew people. The book of *Jubilees*, continuing to refer to it as ‘first fruits’ (22:1), identifies it with the covenant between God and Noah (Jub. 6:1-21; cf. Gen. 8:20-22; 9:8-17). It was probably after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 that Pentecost was finally transformed into an observance of the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai. Exod. 19:1 was interpreted to mean that

the interval between Passover and the arrival at Sinai was fifty days. Thus, in Judaism, *Shavuot* continues to be an observance of thanksgiving for Torah.

The NT shows clearly that Pentecost was celebrated in the first century and that it came to have a special Christian significance. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says that he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). Apparently, he expects his readers to understand his meaning, a fact that has led some interpreters to suggest that Pentecost had become a Christian observance as early as Paul's time. Paul does not make another explicit reference to Pentecost, but in Rom. 11:16 he appears to have the observance in mind when he speaks of offering a lump of dough as first fruits.

Pentecost in Acts: The book of Acts also speaks of Pentecost in connection with Paul's travels (20:16), but of greatest interest is the description of the first Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1-42). In this passage, the apostles and others have convened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The author of Acts reports that there was a sudden sound 'like the rush of a mighty wind' (v. 2) from heaven, followed by 'tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them' (v. 3). As a result, the apostles began to speak in tongues, i.e., in languages that were understood by Jews and proselytes from many nations. The apostle Peter then interpreted the event as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:8-32. He proclaimed that the last days had arrived and that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and he called for repentance. As a result, about three thousand persons were added to the group of believers.

Within the literary context of Acts, the events associated with Pentecost constitute the fulfillment not only of the prophecy of Joel but also of the promise of Jesus. In Acts 1:8, just prior to his ascension, the risen Jesus had said, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' Thus, the events of Pentecost are presented in Acts as the fulfillment of this promise: on that day, the Holy Spirit did indeed come upon the apostles and empowered them to witness to Jesus the Christ. The event is celebrated in many Christian bodies on Pentecost Sunday, which is the seventh Sunday after Easter in the church calendar.

3. What were the "other tongues" that the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak? (2:4-11) has the Holy Spirit enabled you to do this? Do you want him to?

4. What was the one message that all of the believers spoke of in "other tongues"? (2:11) How often do you speak this message to others?

5. What was God's purpose in making the Holy Spirit's coming so dramatic? (2:1-12) Should this be the norm for today? Would you like this to happen to you? (In contrast see I Kings 19:9-13) In response to the crowd's questioning of what was happening, who spoke up and what did

14. Compare the dramatic results of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Christians in verses 1-4 with the daily results of the Holy Spirit in their lives in verses 42-47. What does this tell us about whether Pentecost is to be the norm in our Christian lives? What does this tell us is to be the norm?