

The Book Of Acts: Verse-By-Verse

Acts 2:1-4

Study Notes – Part B

Okay, let's keep moving in the text. In verse 4 we read, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages as the Spirit gave them that ability." – Acts 2:2-4

I'm back to the subject of "all of them". Luke tells us that all of the 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and "began to speak in foreign languages as the Spirit gave them that ability."

This was a uniform experience. Peter, James, John, Jesus' Mother, and the rest of the group had an identical experience: They were "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages as the Spirit gave them that ability."

At that moment, the spiritual baptism John foretold now became a historical reality. In John 7 we have a very important precursor to what happened on the Day of Pentecost. Let me start reading at verse 37:

On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart." Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who were believing in him were to receive, because the Spirit was not yet given, and Jesus had not yet been glorified." – John 7:37-39

Jesus interfered in a very important traditional ceremony. As the priest filled a golden pitcher with water from the Pool of Siloam, Jesus shouted, "If anyone is thirst let him come to me and drink!"

The priests must have been shocked and angered by Jesus' disrespect, but He had a larger purpose. John gives us the

explanation. Jesus was speaking of a spiritual experience that would be available to all believers – but only after his resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit.

Now notice what Jesus promised: “The one who believes in me will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart.” He’s pointing to a spiritual infilling – a spiritual baptism.

On the Day of Pentecost the Baptism in the Spirit took place as the 120 were praying. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in foreign languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Was there any precedent for this unusual experience? Yes. In the Old Testament, as the Spirit came upon certain individuals, they spoke prophetically.

Let me give you an example. In Numbers 11 we read:

Moses gathered 70 men from the elders of the people and stationed them around the tent. The Lord came down in a cloud, spoke to Moses, and took of the Spirit that rested on him and put it on the 70 elders. When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do it again.” – Numbers 11:24-25

What happened on the Day of Pentecost is similar. As the 120 were filled with the Spirit they began to speak in foreign languages. Now we know these were real languages because the crowd told Peter, “We hear them talk in our own languages about the great deeds of God?”

Speaking with tongues, or glossolalia (as it is commonly called), is not an unparalleled phenomenon. Not only are the speakers’ words partially or completely beyond their conscious control, but they are uttered in languages of which they have no command in normal circumstances.

Nor is this the only time this will be recorded. In Acts 11, as Peter gives his report to the Jerusalem Council he notes what happened to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house:

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If, then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?"

While Peter doesn't specifically say the Gentiles "spoke in tongues", the implication is there when he says "The Holy Spirit came down on them just as on us at the beginning...". Peter is saying they had the same kind of experience as the 120 in the upper room.

This "glossolalia" was a frequent experience throughout Acts and the New Testament churches. Paul found it necessary to give specific instructions to the Church at Corinth because they considered it a highly valued "spiritual gift".

While it was the same gift as experienced at Pentecost, the purpose seems to have been more broadly applied at Corinth. Paul suggests this gift had two parts: One person spoke a spiritual message in such a language and another needed to interpret what was said.

On the Day of Pentecost, no interpretation was necessary as the gift functioned in such a way as to express the wonderful works of God to a large variety of people who already understood the various language spoken.

Having said all of this, let me quote F.F. Bruce. He writes, "The matter is more important than the manner; the medium is not the message. On the present occasion the content of the ecstatic utterances was "the mighty deeds of God" and the range of the languages in which these were proclaimed suggests that Luke thought of the coming of

the Spirit more particularly as a preparation for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel."

This is an important statement because it goes back to what I said near the beginning of this lecture: The new manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost was about a spiritual harvest.

The 120 were being equipped with power to spread the gospel to their known world. God chose the Feast of Pentecost because it was a parallel of what he was doing spiritually.

Just as the Jewish festival celebrated the "firstfruits" of the agricultural harvest, the outpouring of the Spirit pointed to the spiritual harvest God intended for the first century world.