

The Promise Fulfilled



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 23:16; Mark 16:17; John 4:35; 14:16-26; 16:7-13; Acts 1:4, 5, 14; 2:1, 2, 5-7, 22-35.*

Memory Text: “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (*Acts 2:2-4*).

This week we read about one of the greatest and most important events in salvation's history: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This remarkable and phenomenal event came in fulfillment of what the Lord had promised before He returned to heaven: that these apostles and disciples would be “baptized with the Holy Ghost” (*Acts 1:5*) and would be given “power from on high” (*Luke 24:49*). The Holy Ghost came upon them as He had promised, and they began speaking in other languages “the wonderful works of God” (*Acts 2:11*). How interesting and insightful that the first thing they did with this gift was witness for their Lord. Of course, this was only the beginning of what the Holy Spirit would do, and is still doing, for the Lord's church.

As we will soon see, this great event didn't happen in a vacuum. It was the culmination of many other events, all centering around the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Among those events, too, was the Lord's preparation of His people in order that they be ready to receive this wonderful outpouring from heaven.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 29.*

Faith and the Promise

“Being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (*Acts 1:4, 5*).

In the above verses, Jesus talked about the promise that you “have heard of me.” What promise is He talking about? *See John 14:16-26, 16:7-13.*

According to Acts 1:4, the disciples were to remain or stay or even sit in Jerusalem until the promise was fulfilled. The emphasis in the command to “wait” or “sit” is upon the fulfillment of God’s promise in due time. The waiting itself would not bring the Spirit. The word translated “promise”—*epaggelia*—as it is used in other parts of the New Testament, stresses God’s grace rather than human effort. It is God’s gift, received by faith.

Faith, of course, is a gift from God, as well (*Eph. 2:8*), but there are things believers can do in order to strengthen faith. It’s very foolish and presumptuous to assume that just because we have been promised faith that we will be given all we need, with no effort or cooperation on our part. Great things are promised to those who have faith (*Rom. 5:1, Heb. 11:6*), but faith is something believers must cherish, cultivate, and protect.

What are some practical ways in which we, even with a modicum of faith, can cultivate that faith and create a personal environment in which it can grow stronger? The following texts will help provide answers (*Deut. 4:9; Ps. 119:1, 2; Col. 3:1, 2*). What other things can you think of that protect and even strengthen faith? What works especially well for you personally?

Key Text: *Acts 2:1-4*

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss the importance of faith, obedience, and unity in the church.
2. To examine the significance of not only the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit but what it signified in heaven.
3. To highlight the importance of understanding the gift of tongues and its purpose.

Lesson Outline:

I. Gathered in One Accord (*Acts 2:1*)

- A. They stayed together physically.
- B. They prayed together and reached unity of heart.

II. The Promise Fulfilled (*Acts 2:1-4*)

- A. Pentecost—a celebration of material and spiritual blessings.
- B. Mighty wind and fire—represents the power and passion of the Holy Spirit.

III. Like the Holy Spirit, Tongues Is a Gift From God (*Acts 2:5-15*)

- A. They spoke in languages they didn't understand but their hearers did.
- B. Gibberish is NOT a sign of the Holy Spirit for His gift of tongues is meant to be understood.

Summary: At the appointed time, and when the believers were united in their faith and willingness of heart, the promise was fulfilled. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were manifested in accordance with the needs of those God was trying to reach. Just like the listeners on that day needed to hear the truth in their own languages, people today need to hear and see the truth in ways that reach them. All gifts of the Holy Spirit have a purpose: to glorify God, and God alone. No gift was ever given to glorify people. Let us then use all the gifts of God to further His work and to meet the needs of those He directs us to.

COMMENTARY

Introduction

Christ's completion of His sacrifice, followed by His resurrection and ascension, gave full release to the gifts and power of the Spirit (*see Ps. 68:18, 19; Eph. 4:8-16*). This bestowal was signaled at Pentecost by a marvelous outpouring of power to witness for Christ and to exercise divine gifts for the salvation of humanity. Thus the Father honored Christ's sacrifice and imbued the church with power to fulfill the great gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20. The Spirit was given not to exalt the disciples or their amazing gifts, but rather Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

Waiting as Preparation

Yesterday, we looked at the texts where Jesus told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem, which is exactly what they did (*Acts 1:12*). Here we see immediately one of the great principles of faith: obedience. One can hardly expect the promises to be fulfilled in those who disobey the Lord.

Read Acts 1:14. What key element is found in this text that helps us understand the attitude among the disciples that enabled them to be ready to receive, as a group, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? See also Acts 2:1, 46.

There's a story told about the great English Admiral Lord Nelson, who, right before a major naval battle, took two feuding officers to a place where they could see all the enemy ships amassed to make war against them. "Yonder," said the admiral, "are your enemies. Shake hands and be friends like good Englishmen." In other words, the issues at stake were too great to let personal differences stand in the way of victory.

In the same way, we can see here how important unity was among these disciples, who, in the past, weren't always united.

Read Mark 9:33, 34 and Luke 22:24. What caused dissension between the disciples in the past?

What the above texts from Acts show is that after the disciples had come into unity and were no longer striving for the highest place, the Spirit was poured out. They were of one accord. Differences had been put away. They had a common goal, a common purpose much more important than any and all personal quibbles. They had to work through these things before they would be ready to work together toward their common mission. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (*Acts 4:32*).

What are some of the things that work against unity in your own local church? What can you do to be a unifying force in your church?

I. Faith and Promise

During their 40 days with Christ after His resurrection, “The disciples began to realize the nature and extent of their work. They were to proclaim to the world the wonderful truths which Christ had entrusted to them. The events of His life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies that pointed to these events, the sacredness of the law of God, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins,—to all these things they were witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world. They were to proclaim the gospel of peace and salvation through repentance and the power of the Saviour. . . .

“The more abundant impartation of the Spirit did not take place till after Christ’s ascension. Not until this was received could the disciples fulfill the commission to preach the gospel to the world. But the Spirit was now given for a special purpose. Before the disciples could fulfill their official duties in connection with the church, Christ breathed His Spirit upon them. He was committing to them a most sacred trust, and He desired to impress them with the fact that without the Holy Spirit this work could not be accomplished.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 805.

II. Waiting as Preparation

As the disciples tarried in Jerusalem awaiting the promise of the Spirit, they did not lounge in idleness, but prayed, repented, made amends to one another, reverently reviewed Christ’s teachings together, and pondered the exalted privilege that had been theirs to walk with the Lord of glory for three and a half years. Gone forever was the wrestling for supremacy, the collision of wills, the exalting of self, and the practice of evil surmising about one another. They endeavored to keep the unity of the Spirit and a bond of peace (*see Acts 1:14*), and when they came into one accord (*see Acts 2:1*), God blessed their efforts beyond their highest expectations and their natural abilities.

III. The Pentecostal Fulfillment

“Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers, as a token that He had, as Priest and King, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.

“God is willing to give us a similar blessing, when we seek for

The Pentecostal Fulfillment

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1, 2).

Pentecost is derived from a word that means “fiftieth,” a reference to the 50 days between the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and Pentecost—which is the Feast of the First Fruits. In this feast, the children of Israel would present a wave offering of the wheat harvest to the Lord, expressing their thankfulness for His material benefits to them (*Lev. 23:15-21*).

Also, because the rabbis had concluded that 50 days after the Exodus the Lord had given Israel the law at Sinai, the festival came to be understood among the Jews as a memorial of Sinai, as well. In that sense, it commemorated the founding of the 12 tribes of Israel as the nation that had entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord, a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (*Exod. 19:6*) that would preach the truth about God to a world steeped in sin and idolatry. How fitting that this feast day would represent a crucial phase in the founding of the early Christian church, which also was called to preach the truth about God to a world steeped in idolatry and sin.

Look up Exodus 23:16 and John 4:35. How do these texts help us understand the spiritual context of what was happening in Acts 2?

What’s fascinating, too, about this time is that of all the festivals, Pentecost attracted the largest number of Jews from different lands. Acts 2:5 talks about the devout Jews from “every nation under heaven” who were there. What a perfect opportunity for the incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the early church in order that it be ready to fulfill its mission to the world.

How do you understand your own role in the mission of the church to preach the gospel to the world? What role are you playing? What more could you do?

it as earnestly. The Lord did not lock the reservoir of heaven after pouring His Spirit upon the early disciples. We also may receive of the fullness of His blessing. Heaven is full of the treasures of His grace, and those who come to God in faith may claim all that He has promised.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 193.

IV. Heaven and the Outpouring

A close analysis of Acts 2 reveals that Peter’s Pentecostal sermon is a full-blown scriptural exposition of the purpose and power of Calvary, and the triumphant reality of Christ’s resurrection. This brings forcibly to our notice that the key to a new Pentecost is

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 10:37; Acts 1:4, 5; 2:5, 22-24; 1 Corinthians 12:10*

- 1 In the days immediately after Christ’s departure, the disciples were instructed to wait—literally to sit still and stay where they were—for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Why might they not have been inclined to do so? What lessons could they learn from following these instructions?
- 2 The disciples were a rather unruly lot. In fact, to say they were greedy and self-serving would not be an exaggeration. However, we see few, if any, examples of such attitudes in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. What caused them to change? How can such a change occur in us?
- 3 The visible descent of the Holy Spirit was timed for the important festival of Pentecost. What do we know about this festival? Why was it an appropriate time for the Holy Spirit to come in such a special way, both from a practical and a symbolic viewpoint? What does this tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit in building up Christ’s church?
- 4 What was the significance of the events that occurred with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? What do these events tell us about the role and nature of the Holy Spirit?
- 5 Many Christians today claim the ability to speak in tongues. Is this practice in any way similar to what occurred at Pentecost? If not, is there any biblical support or justification for it? Are there any benefits to it, or conversely, any dangers or pitfalls?

Heaven and the Outpouring

Read Acts 2:22-35 and then answer the following questions:

1. What contrast is Peter making there between David and Jesus? What was his crucial point?

2. How central is Christ’s death and resurrection to Peter’s whole speech?

3. What was the promise of the Father? (vs. 33).

4. What incredible event in heaven prompted this outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

“Christ’s ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 39.

What does today’s study reveal to us about the close harmony between heaven and earth? In what ways can you be more sensitive to the reality of this close tie between heaven and earth? What things might you have done in the past 24 hours that showed a callousness toward the reality of this close link?

immersion in the study and the absorption of the practical benefits of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

V. The Gift of Language

The gift of tongues given at Pentecost was not some ecstatic form of utterance given to generate emotional excitement, but a reversal of the confusion of languages that God had caused at Babel to shatter the confederacy of evil.

“ ‘There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.’ During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in

Witnessing

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing at an enormous rate of speed. Each of the 13 world divisions located around the globe are reporting exciting advances in soul winning. As a result, the Adventist Church has in excess of thirteen million members who represent every culture, race, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, and so forth. How to keep united a church family this diverse is a challenge requiring the commitment of each individual church member. How, with all our differences, can we accomplish the degree of unity required for a wholesome, fulfilling Christian experience in our church?

First, we need to embrace—not hold at arm's length—our unique qualities. We must remember that in God's eyes, we are all the same. So if God is color-blind, draws no gender lines, nor values us according to socioeconomic or cultural differences, why should we?

Second, we need to educate ourselves, and others, as to how our individual differences enhance our collective strength, making our church healthier as a result. Just as certain chemical compounds become stronger when additional elements are added to the mixture, so our church becomes richer and better fortified when diverse components are mixed together. We must guard against letting our greatest strength—our diversity—become our greatest weakness. Satan would love nothing better than to keep God's church fractured rather than whole.

Finally, we always must keep the example of Jesus Christ before us as a church. Christ invited all sinners to follow Him. He offered kindness and love in exchange for hatred and bitterness. He made the plan of salvation available for all. So, too, must His church be for *all* people. We must *treasure*, not tolerate, our differences so that our church reflects a true mosaic of God's children.

The Gift of Language

Read Acts 2:5-15. In what clear way does the Bible here explain the meaning of the gift of tongues that accompanied the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? What kind of languages were being spoken here, and why is this answer important for us today?

Try to imagine the scene. Devout Jews from all over the then-known world were assembled (as they did every year) for the great festival, when suddenly—what happens? A bunch of Galileans, known as rather rough rural types (not exactly the sophisticated elite of Israel) suddenly start speaking in all these different languages! What’s going on here?

One could imagine the consternation of those who suddenly heard them speak in their own language. They were so baffled that at one point (*Acts 2:13*) someone accused them of being “full of new wine,” a rather silly reply if you think about it. (After all, how many people under the influence of alcohol suddenly start speaking in foreign languages that they never knew before?)

Along with what’s here in Acts 2, read Mark 16:17. How does that verse help us understand what the gift of tongues meant?

It’s very clear from Acts 2, where the gift of tongues is first mentioned, that “tongues” is the Spirit-endowed ability to speak in foreign languages. In fact, the word translated “tongue” (such as in 1 Corinthians 14) is *glossa*, which means “language.” If we use the principle of interpretation, in which difficult passages are interpreted on the basis of simpler ones, then some of the more difficult texts that deal with tongues (*1 Corinthians 14*) need to be examined in light of what’s clear—and it’s clear that in Acts 2 the gift of tongues was the ability to speak in foreign languages. This point is important, especially in light of the phenomenon now called “speaking in tongues,” in which people believe their repetition of unintelligible utterances are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly not what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.

a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 39, 40.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Take a census of your Sabbath School class. How many different languages can the members speak? Share how these languages were learned (the speaker grew up in the country, studied abroad, and so forth). Read Acts 2:1, 2, 5-7, and 22-35 together. Discuss what was happening to the disciples and the community. What was the first thing the disciples did with their new gift?

Thought Questions:

❶ Consider the act of gardening. What are the necessary steps to having a successful garden? How do you determine if your garden has been productive? What hazards do gardeners encounter? Jesus encouraged the disciples to “Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (*John 4:35, NIV*). What did He mean? What was He trying to teach the disciples? What keeps us from being involved in spiritual gardening?

❷ Read John 16:7-13. At the top of separate sheets of paper write each of the things Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would do when He came. Then discuss how you have seen these things happening around you. For example, under “convict the world of guilt in regards to sin” (*vs. 8, NIV*), you might list a neighbor who had been abusing his family, then changed as he learned about Jesus, and so forth. If you find this to be a difficult assignment, why aren’t we more aware of the Spirit’s activity in our world? How can we prepare to be more receptive? Consider *Acts 1:4, 5, 14*.

Application Question:

When my daughter, Eva, was a toddler, she had a favorite blanket. Even when it was falling apart, she refused to let her parents replace it with a new one. Jesus told His disciples He was preparing to grant them a powerful Gift. (*See John 14:16-26, NIV*) What if they had refused the ministry of “another Counselor” (*vs. 16*)? What does it mean to be a spiritual “orphan” (*vs. 18*)? If you recognize that you have been refusing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life, ask God to lead you on a journey of understanding and acceptance.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 30–37; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 19–21; *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 242–247.

“The Holy Spirit, assuming the form of tongues of fire, rested upon those assembled. This was an emblem of the gift then bestowed on the disciples, which enabled them to speak with fluency languages with which they had heretofore been unacquainted. The appearance of fire signified the fervent zeal with which the apostles would labor and the power that would attend their work.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 39.

“Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Some have been deceived here.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 412.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, read aloud Acts 1:14. What important elements help bring about such unity among those who, in the past, had been at variance with one another? What can you do, as a class, to help your whole local church find the same kind of unity so apparent in the early church?
- ❷ We saw how the disciples had to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Is there anyone in your class or church who is waiting for a promise from God—of any kind? If so, what can you do, as a class, to help keep this person or persons from being discouraged as they wait? What can you do, in a practical way, to help them not give up?
- ❸ The “tongues” phenomenon has been growing. Why not, as a class, work together to create a good Bible study on this topic that you could give to help anyone with questions about “tongues”?