

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 5

ACTS 2:5-13

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

This passage opens with the apostles speaking in other tongues as flames of fire rested on their heads. Verse 5 shifts perspective and describes the audience who heard them speak: “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.”

It is important to remember that Passover had happened only a few weeks before; Jesus had died on Passover as the perfect Lamb of God. Passover was one of three Jewish feasts mandated in the Torah for people to celebrate in Jerusalem. Thousands of Jews had no doubt flocked to the city, and, because they had traveled so long, they had likely stayed to celebrate Pentecost as well which occurred just over 50 days after Passover. It is likely that the devout men dwelling in Jerusalem were a mixture of people who lived there and people who were staying there for the religious holy days.

To understand what Luke likely meant when he calls them “devout”, we’ll look at a couple of other texts he also wrote. Luke 2:25 describes Simeon whom we remember because he blessed Jesus on the day His mother and step-father brought Him to the temple to be circumcised: “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”

Simeon, a Jew, was expecting the birth of the Messiah. He was in Jerusalem, and he was “righteous and devout”. “Devout” means deeply religious and God-fearing, devoted to the fulfillment of religious obligations, reverent, heartfelt, sincere, and earnest. Simeon was all these things. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was upon him.

In other words, Simeon was devoted to God and knew the time was near for the promised Messiah to be born. He was living out his life in Jerusalem waiting for word that He had come. God had revealed to him that he would not die before seeing “the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26).

Luke 2:27 tells us Simeon came “in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God...”

Simeon believed God. A devout Jew, he knew God was sending the Messiah, and he was listening to the Holy Spirit. He recognized God’s voice to him and was the first to publicly confirm Jesus’ identity after He was born. He lived his life in submission to God, and God used him to speak truth into the world.

In Acts 8:2 is the story of the stoning of Stephen. After he died, Luke tells us, “Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.”

Again, these men were deeply committed to God. They were part of the fledgling church, and they were willing to honor God and live for His purposes.

In a similar way, the “devout men” who heard the apostles were Jews who were committed to honoring and obeying God. They were not merely cultural Jews who kept the feasts as a means to political and social position or as habits. They worshiped God and were committed to His will. When they heard the apostles speaking in their own languages, they were open to God’s Spirit teaching them the truth. These men were willing to change their paradigms for the sake of honoring God.

UNDOING BABEL

The miracle of the apostles speaking in tongues had deep significance. To understand more fully what this meant, we’ll look back at Genesis 11:1-9 when the post-flood civilization disobeyed God and refused to scatter through the earth and fill it. God had explicitly told Noah, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” in Genesis 9:1. Just a few generations later, mankind was already in rebellion and chose instead to settle in Mesopotamia and build a tower together, a tower that would reach the heavens and make a name for them. In fact, they specifically said they would collaborate on this project “lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

God saw their self-centered rebellion, and he intervened. “And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech’” (Gen. 11:6-7). A unified, arrogant humanity that did not honor God would have been a grave danger to the world and to the human race. Once again, so soon after His judgment on the world with a flood, God judged the world and forever changed the way humans would relate to each other.

By confusing their languages, He succeeded in causing them to scatter and fill the earth as He originally commanded. Each language group would likely have had certain knowledge and skills that they had developed, and with the lack of understanding that suddenly existed, they could no longer collaborate with each other. They scattered according to their languages, and they began to see those who spoke differently as dangerous because they couldn’t understand each other. They began to protect their own expertise and strengths, and animosity flourished against those who were different.

God’s judgment at Babel was a divine act that preserved the human race, but it also signified His lack of favor. People who were evil in their hearts could no longer be trusted to have easy access to collaborate because they would work towards their own destruction and would come to dishonor God more and more. The judgment at Babel preserved the knowledge of God’s sovereign authority and

reminded humanity that they could not collectively outsmart God or thwart His plans. Moreover, God's act at Babel was a perpetual curse on depraved humanity.

God's judgment at Babel removed "word" from humans. Instead of being united in understanding and purpose by means of language, or "words", they were fragmented and became hostile to one another, divided by means of their words. This act of judgment from God, removing the seminal and creative and collaborative force of words, ushered in a time of silence from God. We have no knowledge of how many years passed between Genesis 11 and Genesis 12. We only know that God's act at Babel resulted in people finally moving away from their congregation on the plains of Shinar and beginning to fill the earth. Babel caused the birth of the nations.

God, however, was silent in recorded history between His removal of unifying "word" and His call of Abraham in Genesis 12, when He began a new thing: the birth of Israel.

SIGNIFICANCE OF "WORDS"

When the Feast of Pentecost was brought to fruition on that day recorded in Acts 2, God tangibly restored Himself and His generative force, Word, to His human creations. John 1:1-4 identifies the Lord Jesus as "the Word" who was both with God and was God "in the beginning". Jesus, the Word, created all things. In Him was intrinsic life, and His life is the light of men.

Jesus' own word brought physical reality into existence. His own life brought Adam and Eve to life, and at Pentecost, this very life returned to mankind. His own Spirit indwelt believers, and the life of Jesus now brings believers' spirits to eternal life. His own power, Jesus the Word, indwells His people, and believers now house the regenerative life of God. They not only are spiritually eternally alive now, but they also have the power of Jesus to speak words of life to the spiritually dead.

Moreover, this indwelling Word makes Romans 10:8-10 possible: "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Romans 10:8-10 echoes Deuteronomy 30:11-14: "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

God's Spirit has always been working in human hearts and minds. It is always His Spirit that gives birth to believing faith, and it is always His Spirit that makes obedience and submission to God's will possible. Pentecost, however, ushered in something new: the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit in those who believe. This indwelling in the mortal bodies of believers defines the church, the "something new" which Jesus' finished work made possible.

Pentecost powerfully fulfilled the words of Deuteronomy 30. The "Word" is now not only "very near" but literally indwelling. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus can speak eternal truth with authority and power. They can confess that Jesus is Lord and proclaim His death and resurrection with the power of His Spirit. They

can speak the words of life that will give light to all mankind, and they can speak those words with the authority of God Himself—who indwells them and gives them the experience and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and His salvation.

Because of the miracle of the Word indwelling mankind, Romans 10:13-15 is fulfilled: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

Jesus specifically instructed His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until what He had promised would come. He specifically forbade them from attempting to speak of His death and resurrection until after the Holy Spirit indwelt them and gave them His own words and power. Neither they nor we can preach the good news effectively without being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is the restoration of God's living Word to His people that makes it possible for us to bring the good news to the spiritually dying. We can believe only when we have heard of Jesus, and we cannot hear unless someone brings us that word. The indwelling Word gives us living words that bring regenerative truth to those who are dead in sin.

Faith, as Paul said in Romans 10:17, "comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Pentecost not only gave God's people the power and authority and understanding to preach the truth that leads to life, but it also literally put that living Word into their own spirits. The "hearing" that leads to believing faith comes through the word of God spoken to mankind through Scripture and through the Holy Spirit's power communicating through believers. The word of Christ brings believing faith—it both bears the news of reality, and it resides in our own human spirits and restores them to eternal life with the literal indwelling life of Jesus.

EFFECTS ON HUMANITY

Pentecost not only restored the life of God to humanity, but it restored unity among God's people. Ephesians 2:14-16 states, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

The Lord Jesus broke down the walls of division erected by God's judgment at Babel. In Jesus' own flesh He abolished the law that separated Jews from Gentiles, and He created peace between them, making one new "race" in Himself where previously there had been two. In Himself He reconciled every believer to God, whether that believer is Jew or Gentile. By reconciling us to God in His own body and giving us His own Spirit with His own life, He kills the hostility between people groups.

Instead of being defined by culture or ethnicity as our primary identity, when we are in Christ we are defined as God's own children. The indwelling Word creates unity among those of us who naturally would be at odds with each other.

Paul continues in Ephesians 2:19-22 by saying, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

As believers, the Lord Jesus is our unmovable foundation, our “cornerstone”. Together we are united by the Holy Spirit into a unified building, a household of God. We are not separate entities with hostility between us; we are alive with the life of the Lord Jesus, and His Spirit knits us together in His life and for His purpose and glory.

Before Jesus died He prayed that His disciples and all of us who would believe in Him through the words of the disciples—recorded for us in Scripture—that we all would be one just as the Father is in Jesus, as Jesus is in the Father, and that we also would be in Them. The purpose of this unity of the Trinity and Christ-followers is “so that the world may believe that [God] has sent [Jesus]” (John 17:21). Jesus further prayed, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

Jesus’ intent from before His incarnation was to restore humanity to oneness and unity with Himself—and not only with Himself but also with each other. The tearing apart that happened between humans because of sin and that was sealed tangibly at Babel by God’s confounding of our words is repaired when we are born again. The Holy Spirit brings the life and presence of the One True God into our mortal flesh, and we are united with God and also with each person who is sealed by the Holy Spirit.

When we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we go from being “not a people” to being God’s people. We are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

This new ability for humanity to be united, to understand each other and to work together for a common goal is possible only when individuals have been born of God. John 1:12-13 says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Apart from our new birth by the Holy Spirit, we have no ability to transcend our own self-centeredness, to collaborate for God’s purposes, or to understand and minister to each other. The Holy Spirit in us is the One who makes this unity possible.

Romans 8:15-17 explains this phenomenon this way: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow

heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Romans 9:8 emphasizes the new identity and permanence of the new birth: “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”

It is only those who trust in the Lord Jesus and lay down their attempts to please God, accepting His grace and mercy as their only means of forgiveness and life, who are counted as God’s children. Galatians 3:23-29 explains it this way: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

The new birth reverses the effects of Babel. God’s judgment on the self-centeredness of natural man is removed when we are made new creatures by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by means of our having been justified by faith in the perfect, finished work of Jesus. Only in Christ can humanity have any hope of transcending destructive self-centeredness. Only in Christ is the life of God restored to humans.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we were finally able to behold the glory of the Father. The Word was crucified and rose again from death, and now He dwells not among us but within us, and our lives are now hidden with Him in God. We as born-again Christ-followers take His presence into the dark world of natural man, and through us He reveals the love and forgiveness of God. Through us, the church, God reveals His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10). We who experience the new birth are a miracle of God. When the Word indwells us, our words become vehicles of life and truth and power.

Without the indwelling Word, our words are destructive and ultimately futile, bearing deceit and discord, tearing down rather than building up. Empowered and transformed by the Holy Spirit, however, our words become the means of bearing the gospel, the means of proclaiming truth and of teaching the word of God.

Ask God to give you His power and authority to speak truth and to be His agent in your dark world.

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

5

ACTS 2:5-13

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

STUDY

In the first four verses of Acts 2, the Holy Spirit has fallen upon the believers waiting in Jerusalem, and they “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In this passage we begin to learn the effects of this miracle.

1. Verse 5 states there were Jews living in Jerusalem who were devout men from every nation. What conclusion can we draw about the meaning of “devout” in reference to these Jews?

Luke 2:25 _____

Acts 8:2 _____

2. Besides the miracle of people suddenly speaking in languages they didn't know, what historical and spiritual significance did this gift at Pentecost represent?

Genesis 11:1-9 _____

3. What is significant about the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself on the first believers by means of “words”?

John 1:1-4 _____

Romans 10:8-10 _____

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 _____

Romans 10:13-15 _____

Romans 10:17 _____

4. Based on the effect Babel had on humanity (see Genesis 11:7-8), What reversal to this effect did Pentecost have?

Ephesians 2:14-16 _____

Ephesians 2:19-22 _____

John 17:20-23 _____

1 Peter 2:9-10 _____

5. What is the cause of this reversal of Babel among believers?

John 1:12-13 _____

1 Peter 1:22-25 _____

1 John 2:28-29 _____

Romans 8:15-17 _____

Roman 9:8 _____

Galatians 3:23-29 _____

MEDITATE

Have you been born of the Spirit? If so, how has your life and identity changed since being born again? Ask God to be Lord of your Life and Jesus to be your own Sin-bearer. Ask Him to help you see yourself as He sees you and to plant you into His body as His child. Ask Him to give you the courage and faith to address Him as Father and to learn to trust Him as completely faithful and true to His promises.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV