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“How The Church Came To Be”

May 16, 2010

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Acts 2:1-4, 42-27

WHAT HAPPENED AT PENTECOST?

How would you go about starting something new, something big (like a movement)? You might plan a convention, advertise in the media, solicit friends and influential people to promote.

When God wanted to birth the Church—the means by which His message of salvation would get out to all the world—He pulled out all the stops.

It happened on a day that’s come to be known as PENTECOST—50 days after the Resurrection.

God used an already established event on the Jewish calendar—the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (i.e.: 50th day, meaning 50 days after Passover). Here we have another opportunity to “*embrace the connection*” with our Jewish brothers & sisters.

You remember Passover marked Israel’s emancipation from Egyptian slavery. It was a week of “bread without yeast” (Matzo). It also marked the first spring harvest when a sheaf of barley was brought to the Temple as a thanksgiving wave offering (cf. Leviticus 23:10-11).

Now, 7 weeks (or 50 days) later, another harvest thanksgiving service was observed in the Temple. This time, from the first fruit of the wheat harvest, “Two loaves of bread baked with leaven were waved before the LORD” as an act of thanksgiving (cf. Leviticus 23:16-20).

It’s interesting, Passover is celebrated with “bread without yeast” (Matzo); Pentecost is celebrated with it. But the purpose is different. Leaven in the Passover feast was a symbol of sin. Abstaining from it was associated with rooting sin out of their lives. Now leaven was a symbol of thanksgiving. This was the Jewish Thanksgiving Day ← → like our Thanksgiving in November. Specifically, the Jewish Pentecost is a thanksgiving for God’s gift of the Law (also known as the Torah) given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

So, here we have 1000’s of Jews from all around the Mediterranean in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish Pentecost. And God has 120 believers gathered together in one place. They had been instructed in **Acts 1** to “*tarry there*”.

The first 4 verses of Acts 2 tell what happened. . .

- There was **wind** (v. 2)—loud, violent, rushing wind which filled the entire house.
- There were **tongues of fire** that separated and came to rest on each one of them (v. 3). FIRE = purifying presence of God. This is the same as the fire that appeared to Moses in the burning bush; it’s how Moses knew he was in the presence of God. When this happened, the 120 knew the very Spirit of God was among them, taking up residence in their hearts.

This is why we wear **RED** on Pentecost. Red reminds us of these tongues of fire on the believers' heads. . .that the fire of the Holy Spirit burns inside us—and sets our hearts on fire for the Lord, and our tongues on fire as witnesses of Jesus.

- They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak in other languages** (v. 4). God needed to get His church established (fast). Jesus had ascended 10 days prior...there was no time to waste. At least **14** distinct people groups (each with their own language) were present on this day. There was no time for the Disciples to learn a bunch of new languages. So God “jump-started” the whole process with a miracle. The 120 began to witness and speak out the truth of Jesus. But the words that came out of their mouths were in languages they had never learned—the exact languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem that day. So everybody heard about Jesus in their own native language.

Some believed. Some mocked, saying these people were “full of wine”. At that point, Peter steps up to the plate to set the record straight. He delivers a powerful sermon, boldly declaring:

- That Jesus was the Messiah who had poured out the Spirit being experienced that very day;
- That they had killed the Messiah sent from God, but God had raised him from the dead.

When the people heard this, many were convicted of their sin, and asked Peter what they could do to be saved. Peter answers in **v. 38**: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” And **v. 41** tells us about 3000 accepted his message and were baptized that day. Thus began a new era in God’s plan for the world. . .**the beginning [birthday] of the CHURCH.**

It was a day of explosive power. You know, power can be used in two ways: it can be unleashed OR it can be harnessed. The energy in 10,000 gallons of gasoline can be released explosively by dropping a lighted match into the tank. . .OR. . .it can be channeled through the engine of a Ford Mustang in a controlled burn and used to transport a person hundreds of miles. Explosions are spectacular, but controlled burns have lasting effect...staying power.

The Holy Spirit works both ways: At Pentecost, He exploded on the scene with volcanic force. But He also works through the Church as we tap the Holy Spirit’s power for the long haul. **The church is successful in what God gave us to do to the degree that we are filled with the Holy Spirit (who is the very the presence of God).**

Now I’d like to anticipate a few questions that might be raised in your minds.

I. WHY IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SO IMPORTANT?

The highest joy you & I will ever have is knowing God, feeling God, experiencing God. We will find much joy in food, friends, marriage, work, and entertainment (i.e.: all good gifts from God). But our highest joy is knowing God. That’s how we’ve been created. We’re all square holes, which can only be filled by a square peg (i.e.: God).

But how can we know-feel-experience God? This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit is the 3rd person of the Trinity. He is a personal being who thinks, feels, and acts; He is not an impersonal force or power. And He is fully God—meaning, all of who God is, is in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit’s job to make God real to us in our experience, so that we know Him and feel His presence.

That’s why the link-up between Pentecost and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Remember, Pentecost recalled the occasion when God gave the Law (the 10 Commandments) to Moses. Fire appeared in the burning bush, which meant Moses was in the presence of God. By the same token, Pentecost means God is present; He is in your heart.

- It is the Holy Spirit who woos us to Christ. . .who makes Him real to us;
- It is the Holy Spirit who “warmed John Wesley’s heart” (which led him into a deeper experience; and he became the founder of the Methodist movement);
- It is the Holy Spirit in our hearts who empowers us to live for Him;
- It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us as individuals + as a church to make Him known.

II. HOW DID PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Many people think the Holy Spirit was a “Johnny come lately” to the Trinity. . .the newest member of the staff. Where was the Holy Spirit before the Day of Pentecost? Did He exist? **[YES!]**

The Holy Spirit was active from the very beginning. The second verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:2) tells us God’s Spirit was actively involved in creation—that He was “hovering” over the formless void that came to be the beautiful world we live in today.

My opinion is that people in the Old Testament had a very similar experience of the Spirit as we do today. His job was the same then as it is today—to make God real to them so they could know and feel His presence.

That’s why David could say that in God’s presence he has fullness of joy (cf. **Psalm 16:11**). . . and why in **Psalm 51** he could pray and ask God not to take the Holy Spirit from him. That’s why Zechariah & Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s parents, are both said to be filled with the Spirit (cf. **Luke 1:41,67**).

All this was before Jesus’ death & resurrection, so the Holy Spirit could not bear witness to that in people’s hearts. Although the Spirit was powerfully at work in the Old Testament, many Old Testament prophets & saints looked forward to a more widespread coming of the Spirit upon God’s people. . .to a time when He would not just sprinkle a few drops, but pour out His Spirit upon the earth (like a torrential downpour of rainfall).

- [Ezekiel 36:26b-27](#)—“*I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*”
- [Joel 2:28](#) (Peter quotes)—“*It shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*”
- [John 7:37-39a](#) (Jesus promises)—“*‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. . . and streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.*”

And that happened on the Day of Pentecost: The Holy Spirit came in all His fullness to make the death & resurrection of Jesus real to them.

III. CAN I RECEIVE THIS SAME GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Yes-Yes-Yes! God is still in the business of pouring out the Holy Spirit.

Remember what **Jesus** said? “*Believe in me, and streams of living water will flow from within*”.

Remember what **Peter** said? “*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and all who are far off*” (i.e.: down the eons of time). **Acts 2:38-39**

Putting that all together, the fullness of the Holy Spirit comes. . .

- 1) **BY WANTING IT!** You have to be hungry & thirsty for those “streams of living water”. Watch out, this could radically change your life (e.g.: priorities-passions-course of life).
- 2) **BY REPENTING:** What, besides Jesus, are you trusting to satisfy you? Look at what’s worrying you, what’s distracting you. Ask Him to forgive you for trusting something besides Him to satisfy you. . .and turn from whatever it is. It is impossible to trust Jesus to satisfy the desires of your heart while you are clinging to other things to satisfy. So the first step is to let go of those other things.
- 3) **BY BELIEVING WHAT JESUS SAID:** By embracing His promises. Just like your salvation, this is for everyone who believes...and asks. . .

- 4) **BY ASKING:** Do you know what Jesus promised in **Luke 11:13**? *“If you then, though you are evil (and undeserving), know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* So ask Him!

Will the same signs & wonders accompany this gift? Probably not. Those had a special purpose in God’s plan to launch the church (whose birthday we celebrate today). Don’t get hooked on the “signs & wonders”. Remember Elijah? The Spirit of God came to him in a *“still small voice”*.

IV. HOW MIGHT THIS IMPACT OUR CHURCH?

Well, let’s look at how it impacted the early 1st century believers. Read **Acts 2:42-47**—

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

What can we glean from that? Well, the early church was a church that:

- Experienced UNITY (*“All the believers were together”*);
- Experienced wonderful times of WORSHIP & PRAYER (*“Everyone was filled with awe”* and they saw *“many wonders and miraculous signs”*);
- Gave themselves to TEACHING (*“Every day they met together in the temple courts”*);
- Experienced great FELLOWSHIP (*“They broke bread in their homes and ate together”*);
- MET NEEDS (They sold possessions and goods and *“gave to anyone as he had need”*);
- Was GROWING (on a *daily* basis).

I don’t know about you, but a Spirit-filled-Acts-2 church is the kind of church I want to be part of. And I believe I am! We have many of the elements. But I long for even more.

The Church will never grow, never do all these things in vv. 42ff by its own power. We can’t “do” or “be” the church unless He fills us from head to toe with His Spirit. That’s how the church came to be. . . and it’s how it will continue to accomplish Jesus’ Great Commission until He returns.

STUDY GUIDE: Acts 7-11

Monday: Read Acts 7. As you read through this chapter, make a list of the strengths and accomplishments of Stephen. What are the lessons from his life? In v. 60, the NT introduces the word “sleep” for death (cf. John 11:11; I Cor. 15; I Thess. 4:13-18). This becomes the way Christians think about death. How does this term affect your view of immortality?

Tuesday: Read Acts 8. Twice in this chapter, Acts speaks of converts undergoing water baptism (vv. 13 & 38). Why do you feel this practice was important in the early church? Why might it be important to us today?

When John the Baptist started baptizing, he emphasized what (cf. Matt. 3:6,8,11)? What did he promise (v. 11)? When was that promise fulfilled? Baptism is spoken of in two ways in the NT: there is “water baptism” and there is “Spirit baptism”. What is the difference? Hint: One is external; one is internal. One is an outward sign of commitment; the other introduces the work of the Holy Spirit—who produces an internal change in our hearts.

Wednesday: Read Acts 9. Look up “Paul” in a Bible dictionary. What things do you find outstanding about Paul before his conversion? How does Saul/Paul seem different after his conversion? How does he seem the same? Why do you think God used such dramatic means to get Saul’s attention? Where has been

your road to Damascus—the place where God first got your attention? How does He get your attention now? Where is your Straight Street—the place where it's tough to obey the Lord? What makes this place so difficult for you? Who has been an Ananias in your life? What did that person do for you? To whom have you been an Ananias? How?

Thursday: Read Acts 10. How effective was the vision of vv. 11-16 in changing Peter's attitudes toward Gentiles? In vv. 27-29 and 34-35, what do you learn about God's view of people? About his view of non-believers?

Friday: Read Acts 11. The believers in the early Jewish church were still seeing strict observance of Mosaic law as the basis for fellowship in the church (vv. 1-3). Peter's defense was geared to changing that to what? Lifetime attitudes are always hard to break. Yet God carefully and graciously acted to show Jewish believers that He intends them to accept others who are different as brothers. What differences tend to divide Christians today? Has Jesus' prayer in John 17 (that "they may be one") been answered? What do we learn about the nature of Christian unity from these Acts passages?