

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE HOLY SPIRIT POURED OUT

(Acts 2:1-13)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 1

I. The time was at Pentecost - it “was fully come.”

1. Selected because of its prophetic significance.
2. Because of the great gathering at Jerusalem (v. 5).
3. Because of the purity of the Christian church.
4. Because of the willingness of the church to serve.

II. The Place (v. 1).

III. The effects of the out-pouring of the Spirit.

1. The miraculous effects.

- (1) Sounds as of a wind (v. 2).
- (2) Sight - tongues as of fire (v. 3).

2. The spiritual effects (v. 4).

They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

3. The effect upon the ministry.

The message went forth with the mighty power.

4. The effects upon the world (v. 7-13).

Amazed - perplexed - mocked - believed.

The Holy Spirit has manifested His power in every age. He does not lack power. Men do not receive power because they are cold and indifferent. The church is limited by her:

1. Lack of faith.
2. Lack of purity.
3. Lack of obedience.
4. Lack of enthusiasm.

The day of Pentecost had come. The disciples, with their minds opened to understand the Scriptures, had no doubt understood that this was to be a great occasion. They were gathered in one place. Many a prayer had gone up from them individually and from the assembled group. Many a prophecy had been called to mind and reconsidered. Passages from the prophets had come to them with new force and they expected a speedy fulfillment of some of them. Many a song of praise had ascended on high. They had perhaps united in singing those Messianic Psalms from which Peter quoted, with such striking effect, a little later.

As they were thus engaged, **“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, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”** (2:2-4).

Residents of Jerusalem and strangers from every nation who were in the city, hurried to the spot. They looked: they listened: they stood in amazement. Nothing like this had ever occurred in the history of the world before. What could it all mean?

THE TIME

“*Pentecost*” is the Greek word which means fiftieth. This feast began seven weeks, or forty-nine days, after the presentation of the first ripe fruit which was presented on the second day of the Passover. It was sometimes called the feast of harvest. It was intended to teach the people to acknowledge the goodness of God in giving the harvest. It was the Thanksgiving day of Israel.

Why was Pentecost selected as the day on which the Spirit should be poured out and a great revival should begin in the Christian Church?

1. Because of its prophetic significance. It had pointed to the day when the early church should begin to reap a great harvest. God has always been teaching men to be more concerned about the harvest of souls than the harvest of wheat or barley. He would teach the leaders of the church, in the very beginning, that the harvest depends upon the blessing and power of His Spirit.
2. Because of the great gathering at Jerusalem. **“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven”** (2:5). They are named beginning with the eastern nations and continuing westward (vss. 9-11). Some were apparently making their residence at Jerusalem because of the expectation which was among them that prophecy had been fulfilled, and it was time for the Messiah to come.

Multitudes of men and women were gathered there from the various nations to attend the feast of Pentecost. When the World's Fair was held in Chicago Mr. D.L. Moody said, this is a great opportunity to reach men from every part of the world with the Gospel. "I have been going out over the world," he asserted, "now the world is coming to me." He arranged for prominent auditoriums and churches in Chicago, and for speakers to address the audiences which should gather every day to hear the Gospel messages. He was following the example of the disciples at Pentecost when the Gospel was proclaimed to the multitudes already gathered.

3. Because of the purity of the Christian church. The disciples were living pure and devout lives. They were placing the glory of God before everything else. They were fit instruments to be used of the Holy Spirit to do His work.

4. Because of the willingness of the church to serve. The disciples were waiting in obedience. But their waiting was with the object of earthly service when they were given power from on high. The Holy Spirit does not come with power into the hearts of men who are not willing to be used of Him.

THE PLACE

"They were all with one accord in one place" (1:1). They were all in the same place. They were evidently gathered in the same place where they were accustomed to meet, the hallowed upper room. This place always brought to them precious thoughts of Jesus. Here, they remembered, He had instituted the Lord's Supper. They recalled those precious hours with Him and how He had told them that they were to keep in mind all that His death meant to them and to the world. They remembered His advice and were trying to be obedient to it.

I recall very clearly the words of a woman, who was closely related to a man who was a victim of intoxicating drink. He had almost died at different times as a result of it. She said, "If he dies as a result of drink I will go down to the street corner in the center of the city and cry out against it." Jesus had been killed by wicked hands. The disciples were ready to go forth and tell of His death: not because they sought revenge upon the slayers of their Master: but to tell men that He had forgiven them: that He had risen from the dead and was pleading with them in His desire to seek and save them.

THE EFFECTS OF THE OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT

1. The miraculous effects.

(1) There was a sound as of a rushing mighty wind. The word that is used for sound, means a sound which arrests attention. It was not the sound which causes a rumor. The sound came from Heaven. It came suddenly. It was not a wind. It was a sound like that of a mighty wind. The sound filled all the house. It could be heard through the city. The people gathered in multitudes to hear and see what was taking place.

It was quite fitting that the Spirit should manifest His presence in the sound, as of a wind, for He is represented in various Scripture passages as powerful, though invisible, as a breath or wind.

(2) **“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire”** (1:3). It appeared to sit upon each one of them. The tongues of fire seem to have remained upon them for a time, as we infer from Peter’s statement in the thirty-third verse.

The disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues. The disciples had waited according to Christ’s command. They were now clothed with power from on high as He had promised. They were all to be messengers. Their tongues were to be consecrated and used to testify of Christ and of the wonderful works of God.

This was done as a sign. It was a wonderful and convincing sign. There are some who think that the gift of tongues was to be a permanent gift to the church. We do not so believe. God does not perform miracles continually to save men the labor of learning languages. Jesus could give men food miraculously and save them the labor of preparing it. He did that as a sign; He did it to fill a special need, but He does not continue to do it today. There is no need of supplying men with food miraculously today. There is no need of giving men a miraculous gift of tongues today. We have the proof that the Holy Spirit is present. We have the opportunity to learn the language of men to whom we wish to preach the Gospel. The Bible, or portions of it, is now published in hundreds of languages. Men of almost every nation can read or hear the Gospel in their own language at the present hour. Jesus’ parting command to His disciples is still urging us to take the Gospel to men who have not heard it.

The language of men was confounded miraculously at Babel because of sin. God in His mercy reversed Babel at Pentecost and enabled every man to hear the Gospel in his language. The opportunity of forgiveness was offered to the various nations. These men who heard could take the Gospel to their own people. In this case differences of speech were not a barrier, but an aid to convince men of the truthfulness of the Gospel. They could hear in their own language from the tongues of fishermen. They ought to realize that none but Almighty God could give power to men so to speak.

This should also be an encouragement to the disciples. They should know, ever afterward, that the Lord was able to give them utterance that they might make the Gospel known to the world. God had said long before to Moses that He would be with his mouth. He need not fear to try to speak for Him. He will be with our tongues also, if we are ready to use them for Him. God calls all of His disciples to witness for Him today.

The church will never be a church with Pentecostal power where the testimony is given by the minister alone. Every member of the church should be a witness for Christ.

The form was significant in each case. He appeared as a dove upon Christ. The dove is a symbol of peace. Christ came to make peace between God and man. He appeared in the form of tongues upon the disciples. The tongue is the member used to communicate the Gospel. The great work of the disciples is to preach the Gospel to every creature.

THE SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

The effects of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit at this time were not all miraculous. The work which Christ continued to do, by His Spirit, through His disciples was not usually to be miraculous. Signs and wonders were needed at first. Their testimony remains. It is not necessary that they shall be repeated now. Even in that day the usual work of the Holy Spirit was not to be miraculous. John the Baptist was a man filled with the Holy Spirit from his infancy, but John did no miracle. The deacons were to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Later the disciples, led by Peter, received the Holy Spirit for boldness to testify in the face of opposition. The Holy Spirit was to be a comforter, a guide, a revealer of truth, a witness in the hearts of men and through men.

The disciples had received the Holy Spirit in some measure before this. Our Lord, after the resurrection, had breathed on them and said: “**Receive ye the Holy Ghost**” (John 20:22). The difference between receiving the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit is one of degree rather than of kind. Two neighbors may walk over their farms; they may look toward the sky; the one may see the sun while the other does not. A cloud intervenes to cut off the sun from one. Two men may stand in the presence of God; one has a dim knowledge of Him while the other discerns His presence, experiences His power and sees His light.

We often think of fire as being destructive. Fire, however, may be constructive. There is the fire of the sun which lights and blesses the world. There is the fire of lightning which burns and destroys. Jesus said: “**I am come to send fire on the earth**” (Luke 12:49). He had sent that fire, a fire which warmed, enthused, gave energy and power. That fire enthused and gave power to the early church. It enabled her messengers to witness to nations, to silence councils and to stand before kings.

When men are filled with the Spirit in any age they are enthusiasts. The energy and manner of Rowland Hill were said to have been at times overwhelming. Once when preaching he said: “Beware! I am in earnest; men call me an enthusiast, but mine are words of truth and soberness. When I first came into this part of the country, I was walking on yonder hill; I saw a gravel pit fall in and bury three human beings alive. I lifted up my voice so loud, that I was heard in the town below, a distance of a mile. Help came and rescued two of the poor sufferers. No one called me too enthusiastic then; and when I see eternal destruction ready to fall upon poor sinners, and about to entomb them irrevocably in an eternal mass of woe, and call on them to escape by repenting, and fleeing to Christ, shall I be called too enthusiastic?” Do not be afraid of being too enthusiastic when speaking for Christ! This will always be one of the effects of the Spirit.

THE EFFECT UPON THE MINISTRY

When the disciples spoke, especially when the message was centered in Peter, it went forth with a power the like of which had never been known before. Three thousand souls were added to the church in that one day. When men have this gift the intellect is illumined, the moral powers are quickened and the physical organs are used to speak with great power.

The apostle Paul spoke of this as the gift of prophecy, and declared that it was the highest gift. It was greater than to speak with tongues.

Almost everything seemed to be arrayed against the success of the early church. The enemies of Christ, it seemed, had triumphed and what was to hinder their triumph again? What was to hinder their continued opposition to the Christian church until they had silenced her witness? The tradition of the Jews was against them; the prejudice of the people was against them; the influence of the rulers was against them; the weight of great numbers was against them; in fact everything human was against the success of the early church. With her tongues of fire: with her message of divine truth she gave her testimony against the existing system: against the wicked, even murderous men, and the effect was electric. Concerning Stephen, it was said later, they could not resist the wisdom and power by which he spoke.

Without religious papers and religious tracts: without the printed page; without written material other than a few Bibles - and the Bible at that time did not include the Gospels - with the tongues of fire they went on turning enemies to the Lord. It was not long until it was said by their enemies that they had turned the world upside down. Words spoken in weakness are made powerful by the Spirit. The Spirit fell upon a persecutor near Damascus and made him a missionary; upon a libertine named Augustine and made him a great preacher and theologian; upon a monk in Germany and awakened the Reformation; upon a cobbler in the "core of England" and made him a father of modern missions.

More than once has the gift and power of the Spirit been overlooked and other things substituted in its place. They have been often tried and have failed. Recently I attended a convention in a large church whose minister is a devout earnest preacher. When he came to that church the audiences in the evening were small and the people wanted to introduce entertainment to draw the crowd. He said: "We'll preach the Gospel." One of the members told me that now they have six times the number in their evening audiences that are found in other churches of that city. Formerly they raised much of the money for the church through the Ladies' Aid. Now they have dispensed with the Ladies' Aid entirely and serve no dinners for the purpose of raising funds for the church. She said, "The minister preaches the Gospel, the people believe in giving to the Lord, the members have a deeper conviction and engage in a more active Christian service and there are numbers being added to the church continually."

THE EFFECTS UPON THE WORLD

When the signs of the Spirit's presence and power appeared, the people were first amazed, then they were perplexed, while some mocked. The power of the Gospel sometimes amazes, and still perplexes the world. When there is a great revival and many are turned from following Satan to Christ, there are still those who mock. Not long ago, a missionary who worked among the Moslems said that the Moslems recognized a power in Christianity that they did not have and some of them had entered mission schools in order to discover, if possible, the secret of that power. Like the Jews of long ago they were perplexed. When men are perplexed and are seeking to know more about the Gospel they are making a hopeful beginning. When the Spirit is working through His servants and the Word is being spoken and expounded men will soon go beyond perplexity to faith.

It has always been true that there are some mockers. Peter denied the charge that they were full of new wine, as we shall see later, but he did not cease to preach. It did not quench his enthusiasm because some ridiculed him. What if men do criticize? Some will always do so when the Gospel makes an impact upon evil systems. They said Jesus was a wine-bibber because he ate with the publicans and sinners. They said John the Baptist had a devil because he remained separate from society and spoke in the wilderness.

The Holy Spirit would convince the world of sin, said Jesus. The miracle prepared the audience, it did not convert them. The Holy Spirit did that. Preaching may instruct and prepare an audience today, but it does not convert them; it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to do that.

Human nature remains the same. The natural man turns from God. Even though a truth may appear to be from God, human nature turns from it if it calls for giving up the gratification of the world.

The walnut by nature turns rain and sunshine into a walnut, not into a cherry. To change the nature of the walnut would require superhuman power. To change human nature requires superhuman power. Though you may journey to the torrid regions of the south; though you may wend your way to the arctic regions of the north; though you may plow through the sea to the distant island of the ocean; though you may search through country, town or city, still you will find human nature ever the same. The problem of our nature is how to make the bad good. It is impossible in a natural way.

It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to change the heart of man. It took more than human power to make the sea stand up as a wall while God's people passed through. It took more than human power to give to the tongue new languages so that men without previous knowledge of those languages could make others understand clearly. It took more than human power to make the wicked hearts of scribes and Pharisees suddenly good. Three thousand people, after one sermon, turned from following sin to Christ. The same power today can make the vile become noble, the sensual pure, the selfish liberal, and change sinners of all kinds to saints. The recovery of human nature from her sinful state, creating man anew in the image of God, presenting the fir instead of the thorn, the myrtle instead of the briar - this is the everlasting sign which shall not be cut off.

The Holy Spirit is the sanctifier as well as the regenerator. His fire burning in our souls separates them from the filth and dross. This is the process, we must first know of Christ's love, then we must believe it, then we must manifest our love to Him, and then we must allow that love to pervade our whole life, warming, brightening and enriching it.

One of the dreadfully serious facts about this Fire is, that though it purifies, it also destroys. Electricity is one of the modern blessings in the home to lighten, heat and furnish power. There are certain kinds of wire through which the electric current may pass without heating or harming them; there are other kinds which, if the current is sent through in power it flashes, consumes and destroys. If the Spirit of God does not sanctify He consumes. If we resist His influence in our hearts He becomes in us an agent of death.

The same fiery pillar which lightened and guided the host of Israel as they passed through the sea, blazed forth in flashes of disaster, warning and doom to the Egyptian army. The same Ark which blessed the Hill of Zion and the house of Obed-edom, brought sickness and death upon the Philistines and smote their gods to the ground.

There is then in the Fire of the Spirit either life or death, blessing or cursing. Which shall we choose? The Jewish people, in general, rejected His pleading and in less than forty years the Roman army was trampling down Jerusalem and the flames were consuming its houses, temple and inhabitants. There were those in and about Jerusalem who accepted Him, and the fire that fell on them at Pentecost caused them to rejoice and glow with a warmth and light which has shone round the world and sent its blessing everywhere.

Oh! How the church needs cleansing today! The Spirit of God will not use an unclean vessel. God is saying, “**Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love**” (Revelation 2:4). We need to put away the evil from our hearts; we need to present our bodies a living sacrifice. Jesus demanded in His day on earth, that they take away from the temple the things which defiled it. He drove out the sheep and oxen and ordered out the money changers. Too frequently things that defile have gotten back into the church today. Will we not take away everything that tends to quench the cleansing power of the Spirit that we may be fit instruments for His service?

When the disciples of Christ were full of faith, pure, obedient, and courageous, the Spirit was with them not merely at Jerusalem, but at Antioch and Philippi and Corinth and Ephesus and Rome. He is with His disciples the world over, working in mighty power today, wherever they are willing to trust Him and are on fire with His love for a lost world.

Why do we not see more effects of that fire? Sometimes we are tempted to believe that the Spirit is not present in the world with the same power as formerly. That is not true, but the reason why we do not see more of the effects of His power is that the church is cold and indifferent. What the church needs more than anything else is the fervor which the early church had. The world's idea of a proper religion is a moral coldness, and too frequently we have taken that ideal as ours. We neglect to stir up the gift that is in us. For a Christian to be cold is a sin. If men find fault with you because you are too “hot-hearted,” as the Chinese say, you may set it down to the world's idea of religion; and if they do not find such fault with you it is probable that you have never been sufficiently enthusiastic to deserve such a reproach.

Where is the flame which Christ died to kindle? Did it burn up at Pentecost and then die down to cold gray ashes during these recent years? Ah no! The reproach must be upon us, not upon the Spirit. Our worldliness, our indifference to His Word, our concentration upon pleasure, our selfishness, our delight in worldly plaudits have done much to quench the Spirit. Face the question honestly with your soul! Ask yourself, is it not so that the love of Christ which ought to blaze up in our lives and lighten a great area around us, is only like a dim candle and that hidden under a bushel? Is the Holy Spirit given to us that we may sleep, while in some magic way the world repents? No! The Holy Spirit will only be given to us if He, shining through us, may burn and flame and leap up to lighten the world.

The day in which Jesus was straitened is past. Since Pentecost there has never been any shortness of fire. If you will come with me for a moment you may see its trail down through the ages.

We see that fire pass over from Jerusalem to Antioch, the city which not only sent out Paul and Barnabas to the western Gentile world, but within two-and-a-half centuries, sent out missionaries to Persia and India and even distant China.

We see that fire, as we pass on to the fourth century, coming upon a former captive, Ulfilas, and bringing the nation of the Goths to accept the Christian religion.

We see that fire, in the fifth century, coming upon Patrick, once a slave, and sending him through Ireland amidst pagan Druids, preaching with such flaming zeal that the hearts of peasants and nobles were won to Christ and hundreds of Christian churches established (*** It is indeed unfortunate that day set aside for the remembrance of this man, which falls on March 17th, is now a heathen excuse for wanton drunkenness - for Saint Patrick was a Bible-preaching Man of God!***)

We see that fire blazing forth upon Columbia in the sixth century and not only evangelizing the north of Scotland and the adjacent islands, but making it the center of evangelistic influence for much of the world.

We see that flame burning up in Peter Waldo, in the twelfth century, and sustaining him and his followers as they fled to the mountains of Italy, from where, in spite of persecutions, the fire leaping up from the Alpine valleys lighted up Europe during the dark ages.

We see that fire falling upon John Knox, during the sixteenth century, and lighting such a fire in Scotland that it startled the world. The Spirit gave him such courage in days of danger that he would not bend before king or pope. So untiring was his zeal that when he was too old to walk, his friends helped him into the pulpit, and even in his weakness he preached with an amazing fervor. When on his deathbed, the Spirit lightened his pathway into glory.

What other than the fire of the Spirit was it which came upon Count Zinzendorf in the eighteenth century, leading him and his wife, first to harbor the Moravians, then to give up rank and devote all their property to the service of Christ? That flame is still burning in the Moravian church which has hundreds of missionaries and thousands of native helpers on the field today.

Was it not that fire which fell upon Adoniram Judson and transformed him from a skeptical actor to a devoted missionary. So wonderfully did the Spirit sustain him that in the darkest hour he was led to say that the outlook was as bright as the promises of God. So remarkable did the Spirit work through, that when he died, God had given to him and his helpers seven thousand converted heathen in Burma, and sixty-three established churches.

Was it not that same fire which fell upon Korea in the last half century, where in the year 1890 there were but one hundred converts, seventeen years later there were thirty thousand converts, one thousand self-supporting churches and one hundred and twenty thousand adherents to the Christian church?

What other than that fire came upon Mary Slessor, a naturally timid girl, enabling her to go alone and unafraid among wild heathen tribes of Africa and to tame and evangelize three pagan tribes in succession? The story of her life causes one to marvel at the mighty power of the Spirit of God as He is still present and working in the world.

Oh then, do not lose sight of the great cloud of witnesses whose testimony assures us of the continued presence of the Spirit who enthused and guided and strengthened them! Above all do not allow the decorous coldness of the church today to shame you into a fear of showing a like spirit! If Christ's Spirit does not work in power it is because of our lack of faith and love and zeal for the Lord. May we yield ourselves to Him, that we may be used of Him and for Him, as we agonize to bring the world to His feet!

QUESTIONS

(Acts 2:1-13)

1. What does Pentecost mean?
2. What evidence is there that the disciples were expecting the outpouring of the Spirit?
3. Why was this an opportune time?
4. What were the visible evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit?
5. what immediate effect did the Spirit have upon the disciples?
6. May we expect the gift of tongues today?
7. What are some of the permanent effects of the presence of the Holy Spirit?
8. Is great education an essential to power?
9. May anything else be substituted for the power of the Holy Spirit?
10. What is the world likely to say when men are filled with the Spirit?
11. May we expect the criticism of the world to be silenced and men convinced if we speak by the power of the Holy Spirit?
12. How do the difficulties today compare with the day of Pentecost?
13. Are men of any nation too difficult for the Spirit to convince?
14. Give some of the evidences of the working of the Holy Spirit through the centuries?
15. Is superhuman power required to change human nature?
16. What does the Holy Spirit do for men after regenerating them?
17. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit appearing as fire?
18. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit appearing as tongues of fire?
19. How may disciples quench the Spirit?
20. When may disciples expect the infilling of the Spirit?

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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