

The Day of Pentecost

Devotional Reading: [Psalm 16](#)

Background Scripture: [Acts 2:1–42](#)

Acts 2:1–8, 14–24, 37–39

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “ ‘In the last days, God says,

**I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.**

**18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.**

**19 I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.**

**20 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.**

**21 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'**

22 “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 Peter replied, “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. 39 The promise is for you and your

children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Key Text

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.

—Acts 2:39

Jesus Calls Us

Unit 3: The Birth of the Church

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the ways the Holy Spirit was active on Pentecost.
2. Explain why the Day of Pentecost was ideal for the birth of the church.
3. Write a prayer for empowerment by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus more boldly.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. The Unholy Spirits Today

- B. Lesson Context: The Holy Spirit
- C. Lesson Context: The Jewish Calendar

I. The Spirit Comes (Acts 2:1–8)

- A. Day and Place (v. 1)
- B. Sound and Sight (vv. 2–4)
- C. Diversity and Unity (vv. 5–8)

Language of the Heart

II. The Apostle Preaches (Acts 2:14–24)

- A. Confrontation (vv. 14–15)
- B. Proclamation (vv. 16–21)
- C. Accreditation (vv. 22–24)

III. The Crowd Reacts (Acts 2:37–39)

- A. Realization and Question (v. 37)
- B. Imperatives and Promise (v. 38)
- C. Who and Where (v. 39)

With or Without the Promise?

Conclusion

- A. The Holy Spirit Today
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

apocalyptic uh-*pock*-uh-lip-tik.

Diaspora Dee-*as*-puh-ruh.

Sinai *Sigh*-nye or *Sigh*-nay-eye.

Introduction

A. The Unholy Spirits Today

The setting of one boy's encounter with an unholy spirit was the basement of a house owned by friends of his parents. Those present were only the preteen youth and his younger brother. The context was a combination of youthful curiosity, boredom, and a Ouija board discovered on a shelf. Setting the board up, the two boys wasted no time in asking "it" the inane and predictable questions.

To the boys' surprise, the board soon began responding as the triangular pointer upon which they had ever so lightly placed fingers became self-propelled. Each boy accused the other of moving it. But both instinctively knew that neither of them was moving the pointer.

Wondering how to prove or disprove the suspicion, the older boy quickly came up with an idea: the two of them would pose a question that neither of them knew the answer to but to which their mother (who was upstairs) did. The question agreed on was, "How old is Grandmother?" The board's response of "65" was quickly confirmed as correct after the boys raced upstairs to get their mother's answer. She wisely refused the boys' subsequent requests to have a Ouija board.

Similar means have long been used to contact the spirit world (example: [Deuteronomy 18:10–12](#)). Encounters of this sort are not to be sought and should be disturbing in any case (compare [Mark 5:1–20](#); [Acts 16:16–18](#); [19:13–16](#); etc.). But should encounters with the Holy Spirit be any less alarming in their own, holy way?

B. Lesson Context: The Holy Spirit

The descent of the Holy Spirit "like a dove" on Jesus at his baptism might suggest a picture of peace and acceptance ([Luke 3:22](#)). But the

work of the Holy Spirit was not always a pleasant experience for those affected, since Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:16). Imageries of fire in the Bible are associated with the destruction of God’s enemies (Ezekiel 22:17–22, 31; Hebrews 10:26–27; 2 Peter 3:7; etc.) and the testing or purification of his people (Zechariah 13:8–9; 1 Corinthians 3:12–13; 1 Peter 1:6–7). The depiction in Luke 3:16 speaks of the power to do both, especially in light of the “winnowing fork” imagery of Luke 3:17.

C. Lesson Context: The Jewish Calendar

The most important observance on Israel’s calendar was Passover. It was a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt, when God’s angel of death “passed over” Israelite households that had been marked with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12).

Within a few weeks of leaving Egypt, the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:1; 31:18; etc.). There they entered into a covenant with God, agreeing to be his people while the Lord promised to be their God. For centuries thereafter, the Old Testament covenant people celebrated their deliverance on Passover and followed it 50 days later by celebrating God’s giving of the law. Pentecost occurs seven weeks after the Passover Sabbath plus one day, which equals 50 days; it was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:9, 16). This celebration is also called “the Festival of Harvest,” “the Festival of Weeks,” and the “day of the firstfruits” (Exodus 23:16a; 34:22a; Numbers 28:26).

The Jews in the time of Jesus had a marvelous temple in Jerusalem (see Mark 13:1). The city’s economy centered on that structure, as the periodic influx of visiting Jews brought in money (compare John 2:14–15). We might say that the Jerusalem of the time had a tourist economy, and the height of the tourist season was the period from Passover

to Pentecost. Many visitors would stay for the entire 50-day period between those two observances.

I. The Spirit Comes

(Acts 2:1–8)

The apostles continued to wait in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). These were the 11 apostles from the original 12, Judas Iscariot having committed suicide (Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:18). The followers grew to number about 120 (1:12–15).

A. Day and Place (v. 1)

1a. When the day of Pentecost came,

The day of Pentecost marked the final full day of the Passover-to-Pentecost season (see [Lesson Context: The Jewish Calendar](#), above). Most who were visiting Jerusalem to attend these observances would begin returning home the next day.

1b. they were all together in one place.

The fact that those gathered were *all together* suggests a shared priority: that of intense, communal prayer (Acts 1:14). It had been 10 days since Jesus' departure, and the mood of those 120 was undoubtedly one of hopeful expectation. Seven weeks prior, the disciples had also been gathered together; but on that occasion they had gathered in fear (John 20:19). But being able to gather *in one place* was not to last long; soon enough, persecution would cause Jesus' followers to scatter (Acts 8:1).

B. Sound and Sight (vv. 2–4)

2. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from

heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

It is important to read carefully what happened at this point, and not to rely solely on what we assume took place. This miracle and those that follow have been carefully documented by Luke, based on eyewitness interviews ([Luke 1:2](#)).

First comes a very unusual auditory phenomenon. The phrase *from heaven* signifies that we are intended to understand it as being of divine origin. There is no portent of danger in the phrase *a sound like the blowing of a violent wind*. The text does not say that an actual wind was present, only the sound of wind.

3. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Second was a visual phenomenon: that of *fire*. Some have interpreted this as a river of fire coming out of the sky. The word translated *separated* is translated “divided” in other places ([Luke 11:17–18](#); [12:52–53](#)), and that is the sense here. We should be careful to note that the phrase *what seemed to be* indicates a figurative comparison, as the Greek word being translated indicates elsewhere (compare [Matthew 9:36](#); [Luke 22:44](#); [Acts 6:15](#)). This phenomenon did not injure as *came to rest on each of them*. Just as the sound of the wind had no moving air, these flames did not burn. Both were supernatural things from God.

4. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The sound and sight are followed by an act of empowerment as *the Holy Spirit* fills the followers of Jesus. The Spirit was active in Old Testament days, but only with a few of God’s people (examples: [Numbers 11:25–29](#); [1 Samuel 10:6, 10](#); [19:20, 23](#); [Nehemiah 9:30](#)). But now the promise of God is coming to fulfillment, the promise that he will pour

his *Spirit* on his people ([Isaiah 44:3–5](#); [32:15](#); [Ezekiel 36:27](#); [37:14](#); [Joel 2:28](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can believers discern the source of seemingly miraculous events?

Digging Deeper

How do [1 Corinthians 2:6–16](#); [Hebrews 5:11–14](#); and [1 John 4:1–6](#) inform your answer?

C. Diversity and Unity (vv. 5–8)

5–6. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

The setting was clearly multilingual. The common, trade language of the day was Greek (see [Acts 21:37](#)). Jews of the *Jerusalem* area would also speak Aramaic (see [Mark 5:41](#); [John 20:16](#)). The fact that the gathered Jews were *from every nation under heaven* certainly would have included those whose native tongue was Latin (compare [19:20](#)). Other languages are implied as well.

The fact that *each one heard their own language being spoken* is thus the third miraculous phenomenon. The word translated *bewilderment* implies confusion combined with a strong emotional reaction (see [Acts 9:22](#); [19:32](#); [21:27, 31](#)).

7–8. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?”

The fact that those speaking were recognized as being *Galileans* is probably due to their accent (compare [Matthew 26:73](#)) and manner of dress. The multiplicity of native tongues that the crowd hears comes into sharper focus as provinces of origin are detailed in [Acts 2:9–11](#) (not in today’s text). We make sure not to miss the miracle here: those listening, who hailed from a dozen or more provinces, heard the message of the gospel in languages the speakers had not studied.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the statement that new Bible translations are not needed?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to partner with organizations that create Bible translations for unreached people groups?

Language of the Heart

“These people don’t need the Bible in their own language. That promotes tribalism.”

A district official spoke those words to us as we attended the wedding of a Bible translator in a small village. When the official found out that I helped facilitate Bible translation, he began to parrot his stance against local languages. He argued that everyone should use Swahili, the national language.

I asked what language group he came from, and he told me of his home in the north.

“Oh, did you know they just finished translating the Bible into your language?”

His face transformed from stern disapproval into one of surprised delight. “Really? They have the Bible in my language?!”

I’ve seen that delighted expression many times. When people hear their native language unexpectedly, they often radiate joy, even if the speaker knows only a phrase or two. How much more did the action of the Holy Spirit cause amazement on Pentecost!

Perhaps everyone you know speaks English but you’re still having problems connecting with them. The reason may be that you’re not tuned in to the “language” of their personality type, generational distinctives, etc. Try communicating with those factors in mind, and see what happens!

—N. G.

II. The Apostle Preaches

(Acts 2:14–24)

Even in the midst of miracles, there were always unbelievers and doubters (compare [Luke 11:15](#)). Likewise, some of those who experienced this particular miracle doubted. They even suggested that those speaking might be drunk ([Acts 2:13](#)).

A. Confrontation (vv. 14–15)

14–15. Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!

Peter quickly discredited the charge of insobriety. *Nine in the morning*

is a most unlikely time for drunkenness.

B. Proclamation (vv. 16–21)

16. “No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

Moving immediately from what the phenomenon was *not* to what it *was*, Peter pointed to *the prophet Joel*. By some estimates, Joel prophesied in the eighth century BC, but exact dates are unknown. What he predicted had been a long time in coming to pass, but come to pass it had!

17a. “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Two things stand out regarding Peter’s quote of [Joel 2:28–32](#). First is the announcement of the arrival of *the last days*, the final period of human history, as evidenced by the outpouring of God’s *Spirit*. We understand this to mean that what remain are the events of the end of time: the return of Christ and the final judgment.

What Do You Think?

In what ways should Peter’s conclusion change your priorities in life?

Digging Deeper

How do [1 Timothy 4:1](#); [2 Timothy 3:1–5](#); [Hebrews 1:1–2](#); [James 5:3](#); [1 Peter 1:5, 20](#); [2 Peter 3:3–7](#); [1 John 2:18](#); and [Jude 18–19](#) help frame your response?

17b–18. “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Second, the validation for Peter’s claim is the return of prophecy and

the various methods by which prophecies come about. The Jews had not experienced prophecy for generations. Joel's language points to the pouring out of the *Spirit*, evoking the image of a deluge that cannot be contained.

19–20. “I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

The imagery is also reflected in [Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Matthew 24:29–31; Mark 13:24–27; Luke 21:25–28; and Revelation 6:12–17](#). These passages help establish the meaning and significance of the apocalyptic depictions in the passage before us.

21. “‘And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Peter ended his quotation of the ancient prophet with a shortened version of what he (Peter) went on to give in fuller form in [Acts 2:38–39](#) (below).

C. Accreditation (vv. 22–24)

22. “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

Everyone present surely was aware of *Jesus of Nazareth* and his reputation as a miracle worker (compare [Acts 26:26](#)). Since working a miracle was a demonstration of divine power, Peter demanded acknowledgment that God was the source of such supernatural activity. The three Greek words translated *miracles, wonders, and signs* point to a larger reality—*God* himself. The same Greek words occur together in [Acts 6:8; Romans](#)

15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; and Hebrews 2:4.

23. “This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

The crowd was also aware of the shameful death of Jesus seven weeks earlier *with the help of wicked men* (compare [Luke 24:18–20](#)). Peter saw no reason in this to doubt the plan of God, especially given what happened after the crucifixion.

24. “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

God’s plan did not terminate with Jesus’ death, since *God* had *raised* him to live again. Surely many in the crowd had heard rumors about the appearances of the risen Lord!

III. The Crowd Reacts

([Acts 2:37–39](#))

Peter offered further proof “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” ([Acts 2:36](#)). This drew a notable reaction.

A. Realization and Question (v. 37)

37. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

We perceive the crowd as having believed Peter, accepting his interpretation of events as true. This terrified them. Thus their plea, *what shall we do?*

What Do You Think?

How can believers present the gospel in a way that will pierce hearts of unbelief?

Digging Deeper

How can a believer's actions and attitudes cause unbelievers to show aversion to the gospel?

B. Imperatives and Promise (v. 38)

38a. Peter replied, “Repent

To *repent* is to turn away from sin and toward God in heart, mind, and lifestyle (compare [Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30; Acts 3:19; 26:20](#)). Throughout history there have been moments in which people were faced with the stark choice of either walking away from God or toward him ([Joshua 24:14–15; 2 Chronicles 7:14](#); etc.). A hard-hearted, prideful individual will not admit wrongdoing. But through repentance, that person can find peace with God.

38b. “and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul later explained that to *be baptized* was to be “buried with [Jesus] ... into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life” ([Romans 6:4](#); see also [Colossians 2:12](#)). He further noted that “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” ([Galatians 3:27](#)).

There is nothing magical about the waters of baptism; rather, baptism is God's chosen time when regeneration and renewal happen ([Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21](#)). As such, baptism is not a human work of merit (com-

pare [Ephesians 2:8–9](#)); rather, it is a work of God.

38c. “for the forgiveness of your sins.

The most important thing for anyone upon reaching the age of awareness of having sinned against God is to have those sins forgiven. The wonderful thing is that God is willing to forgive us *and* to help us resist future sin. The former (known as “justification”) happens through Christ; the latter (known as “sanctification”) happens through the Holy Spirit (see [1 Corinthians 6:11](#); also see next).

38d. “And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

With *the gift of the Holy Spirit*, Christians have the power to put off the works of the flesh and to bear the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22–25](#)). Peter’s sermon thus foreshadowed the church’s submission to the leading of the Spirit.

C. Who and Where (v. 39)

39. “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Those who heard this sermon likely understood *all who are far off* to refer to Jews who did not live in Israel. This reality was called the Diaspora (the dispersion of Jews beyond Israel). That dispersion was not limited to the exiles recorded in [2 Kings 17:6](#) and [25:21](#). The reality of the Diaspora in the first century AD was that Jews were living all over the Roman Empire (see [Acts 2:9–11](#); [James 1:1](#)).

Chapters [8](#) and [10](#) of Acts record confusion and questioning about the scope of God’s *call*. Christians of Jewish background initially believed that Jesus had come to redeem only Israel (compare [Luke 24:21](#); [Acts 11:18](#)). But the book of Acts witnesses to the Spirit’s leading of messengers to take the gospel to Gentiles as well.

What Do You Think?

How can you share the gospel to all people, even those who live far away?

Digging Deeper

How will you deal with perceived limitations that might add difficulty to sharing the gospel?

With or Without the Promise?

The elderly man waded out into the river that was near a remote African village. I watched as a younger man lowered him under the water in baptism and lifted him up. And as I stood next to a missionary, I heard him ask the soaking-wet man something in the local language.

The missionary translated the interchange for me: “I asked him why he waited until he was so old before he was baptized. He replied, ‘Because no one ever told me.’”

Peter’s announced and permanent solution to sin and all unholiness—whether from unclean spirits ([Acts 8:7](#); etc.) or personal choices—is the “gift of the Holy Spirit.” That gift has been promised to those who repent and are baptized. Are you living *with* or *without* that promise right now?

—N. G.

Visual for [Lessons 9 & 10](#). *Keep this map posted throughout the quarter to give learners a geographic perspective.*

Conclusion

A. The Holy Spirit Today

[Acts 2](#) presents something fundamental: the Holy Spirit has come, and he has come with power. The long waiting period is over. We are in the last days, the era of Holy Spirit-empowered ministry. There is power in the gospel. When this message is preached faithfully, God's Spirit is active in the reception of it. This is true whether preaching from a pulpit

or sharing with a friend. Whenever the gospel is communicated, God's Spirit is working with us to convict the hearer of his truth and bring that person to faith in Christ. How do you live out this reality?

B. Prayer

God, may we never doubt the power of your Holy Spirit to change everything according to your will. May your Spirit work powerfully in our lives, as Jesus promised. We pray in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live the reality of the era of the Holy Spirit.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write *POWER* on the board as learners arrive. Have them pair up and share with each other the most notable display of physical power that they have experienced. After three minutes, invite volunteers to share their experiences. Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Today we will consider a demonstration of power unlike anything you have experienced. As we study this Scripture, let's consider how followers of Jesus

would have felt during this display of power.”

Into the Word

Before class, recruit a class member to prepare a five-minute presentation on the Day of Pentecost, using material from the Lesson Context and other resources. The presentation should include information about the history of the day’s observance, its significance to first-century Jews, and why it was an appropriate backdrop for the events in today’s Scripture.

After the presentation, divide the class into groups of three. Distribute a handout (you prepare) to each group that contains the following sentences:

- 1—Jesus’ followers were scattered throughout Jerusalem, and they came together only after the Day of Pentecost.
- 2—A tremendous windstorm, like a tornado, got the attention of everyone in the house.
- 3—People’s eyes gleamed like a flame.
- 4—The disciples spoke in unfamiliar languages and interpreted their speech for the crowd.
- 5—Everyone was assumed to be of a sober mind.
- 6—Peter quoted Jesus regarding the last days.
- 7—Peter preached the importance of making sacrifices at the temple for the forgiveness of sins.

Instruct groups to mark whether each sentence is true or false. Then have groups check their answers by reading [Acts 2:1–8, 14–24, 37–39](#). False statements should be rewritten to make them correct. (Note to teacher: Each sentence is false.)

Option. Distribute copies of the “Baptism in Scripture” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read today’s Scripture passage aloud, pausing after each verse. Ask learners to raise their hands after each verse that includes a reference to the person or work of the Holy Spirit. Write these verse numbers on the board. Through whole-class discussion, review these verses and create a list of the ways that the Holy Spirit was active on the Day of Pentecost.

Into Life

Ask, “How is the Holy Spirit’s influence evident throughout today’s Scripture?” Then write the following continuum on the board:

The Holy Spirit’s Influence

0	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Never</i>		<i>Seldom</i>		<i>Daily</i>	

Each learner should share with their partner the extent of the Holy Spirit’s influence over their lives by placing themselves somewhere on the continuum. Then have pairs answer the following questions: 1—What factors influence where you place yourselves on the continuum? 2—How can you be more attentive to the influence of the Holy Spirit?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Power, Power!” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity in pairs before discussing answers in whole-class discussion.

After calling time for either activity, distribute index cards and pens

to each learner. Ask learners to write a prayer based on the following prompt:

Lord, help me be attentive to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Empower me through the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus boldly this week as I ...

Encourage learners to place the cards in a location where they will notice the prayers throughout the week.