

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking theme: Fulfilment

*Passage for weekly reading (week 31):*

*Acts 1 – 4*

### The First Outpouring

In reading the Book of Joshua and the Acts of the Apostles together, we cannot but be conscious that the one is the spiritual development and outcome of the other. Together they fulfil the covenant promise to Abraham at the beginning of salvation history. In giving His undertaking to Abraham, the Lord said two things:

- 1) that He would show him the land where he would be the forefather of a “great nation”, and
- 2) that He would bless all peoples on earth through him (Gen.12 v.’s1-3).

The account in the book of Joshua describes the taking of the land by Israel, whilst the story of the Acts describes the beginnings of the church. The Church of Jesus is the Father’s means of taking the message of salvation to the Gentiles, and the way in which all nations will be blessed in accordance with the Abrahamic promise. The physical people (the nation of Israel) took the physical land in Joshua’s day. Now, the spiritual people (the church of Jesus) preach the gospel of the kingdom (the spiritual kingdom). The gospel is totally international. To preach it “in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” (Matt.24 v.14) is the work of the church prior to Jesus’ return, and the Acts of the Apostles tells us how that preaching ministry began.....And what a beginning!

God is a God who is faithful to His promises. Joshua tells us twice that “**not one of those good promises failed – every one was fulfilled**” (Josh.21 v.45 and 23 v.14). Likewise, Luke emphasises that the disciples must wait in Jerusalem to receive “**the promise of the Father**”, a very specific promise to empower them to minister the gospel (Luke 24 v.’s 46-49). Remember that the writer of that Gospel, Luke, is the one who is now penning the record of Acts. His conclusion of the earlier account is now the starting point of the latter.

Acts ch.1 fills in some of the detail of the time between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the forty day period referred to in v.3. Notice that the topic of His conversation was “the kingdom of God”. (Not the church – it’s His church and He will build it – their work would be kingdom work!) This kingdom work could not commence until the Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples, who still imagined that their task would be to restore Israel in a national sense, under Jesus’ leadership (v.6). How limited was their vision! Our Lord makes it very clear that

their remit is world-wide in scope, and that they will be empowered and equipped for this....but wait! As soon as He has ascended, the angelic visitors remind them that Jesus will return, and that the specific location of that return will be the Mount of Olives, although “every eye” will see Him at that time (Rev.1 v.7). None will be ignorant of that glorious coming! (See also Isaiah 40 v.5 & Luke 21 v.’s 23-27).

On their return to Jerusalem, the 120 believers “joined together continually in prayer”. Peter discerns from the Psalms that it is necessary to replace Judas in the apostolic band (twelve being the number of government in Jewish numerology). Matthias is chosen prayerfully, by lot. This is the last occasion in the scriptures when such a method is used. After the Holy Spirit’s outpouring, it became redundant.

Since we know (a) that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Luke 24 v.1), and that the Feast of Weeks which became Pentecost in Israel’s festive calendar was 50 days after the “day after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23 v.15) - i.e.- Sunday, the Jewish Sabbath being Saturday, and that (b) Jesus appeared to His followers over a period of forty days in His resurrected form, it follows that they had a ten day wait before the day arrived.

The phenomena Luke describes which accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit in 2 v.’s 1-12 are spectacular and powerful. In particular, the speaking in other languages by those who had received the Spirit is best described as xenolalia, which is a form of glossolalia, or the gift of speaking in an unknown tongue. Xenolalia is a language unknown by the speaker, which he is given the supernatural ability to utter, but which is an actual language or dialect known to some amongst his listeners. He himself will not understand what he is saying, but there are those amongst his audience who will! Mark Stibbe describes this as “inspired witness”, which obviously did have a massive impact on this occasion. The other type of tongue (glossolalia), he describes as “inspired worship”, the type that Paul speaks of in 1 Cor.14 v.2, and which he calls “angelolalia” (the tongues of angels - 1 Cor.13 v.1). This latter form of tongues’ speaking is either for private devotions or must be interpreted if spoken publicly. (Ref. Mark Stibbe “Know your Spiritual Gifts”, p.156). It is a distinction worth bearing in mind.

Whilst the amazing linguistic gift did render many in the gathered crowd quite awestruck, it obviously was a cause for some sarcastic humour from others. Reactions will always vary, especially to the unusual! Peter addresses the cynics, and draws on the prophecy of Joel to begin his famous address. Two things are particularly significant from the Joel passage.

1) That the outpouring of the Spirit that day marks the beginning of “the last days” (v.17). We are therefore still in the last days.

2) The heavenly wonders Joel speaks of, particularly the darkening of the sun and moon (v.20), have still not occurred. They will not do so until Jesus returns (Matt. 24 v.'s 29-31). We are still therefore in the period of time envisaged by this prophecy. During this time, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (v.21). Now is the day of salvation! (2 Cor.6 v.2)

So Peter goes on to preach salvation, drawing on the psalms to do it. Those in the crowd, having heard the word (i.e.- understood and responded to it), are “cut to the heart”, and ask the question that every evangelist loves to hear – ...“**what shall we do?**” Peter’s reply is of great significance, and gives the essential elements of the new birth in Christ:

- 1) **Repent and be baptised**
- 2) **Be forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ** (i.e.- believe Him)
- 3) **Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit** (i.e.- the Father’s promise, now made good)

If Acts 2 v.38 is of great importance, then equally so is Acts 2 v.42. The new believers had to go on in their faith. They did so by “devoting” themselves to:

- 1) **the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship**, and
- 2) **the breaking of bread and prayer**

The apostles’ teaching was the whole of the O.T. scripture brought to life by their experience of the risen Christ and the inspiration of the newly outpoured Spirit. The breaking of bread could refer to meals eaten communally in homes, but also to the obedience of Jesus’ command to remember Him, and to share in Him repeatedly through bread and wine. An environment was therefore created and sustained in which the Lord would be pleased to move, frequently and powerfully. He did!

The instantaneous healing of the crippled beggar recorded in 3 v.'s 1-10 increases the notoriety of the church from the religious leaders’ viewpoint, but draws the crowds in ever greater numbers. This leads to Peter’s second evangelistic address at Solomon’s Colonnade. His words, as before, were Jesus-glorifying, straight-to-the-point and totally unsentimental. He gives his audience the same prescription for forgiveness, and then anticipates the coming again of the Lord, for whom we must be listening, quoting Moses in Deut.18 v.'s 18&19. Those who come to believing faith are therefore “heirs of the prophets”, who foresaw the events of these days, and had divine revelation as to how the nations would be blessed in accordance with God’s promise to Abraham.

Enter the Sadducees (who have no belief in an afterlife), and who arrest the two apostles. When questioned the next day, Peter, “**filled with the Holy Spirit**” (v.8), is as bold before his captors as he had been before the crowds. All they could do was to threaten the men of God, but their attempts to silence them were futile.

On releasing Peter and John, the prayer that was prayed by the fellowship on their return was exuberant and powerful, so much so that the very building was shaken. Signs and wonders are already happening, but there is a desire for much more! And, we are told, “much grace” (“great grace”-K.J.V.) was upon them all. The more the opposition, the greater the grace!

***Food for thought / discussion / prayer***

1) Acts 2 v.'s 38 and 42 give the essentials of (a) the new birth and (b) continuing in the life of faith. Is it possible that the manifestations of God's presence that v.'s 43-47 record could occur in church life today if the devotional life of members were comparable to these believers?

2) Like the Joel prophecy used by Peter in ch.2, his second address in ch.3 makes reference to the second coming of our Lord. The church is the means of fulfilling the covenant promise to Abraham in blessing all peoples on earth, prior to Jesus' return. For this, we need a resurgent and confident church, aflame with God's Spirit as at this Pentecostal birthday. Keep praying! (The believers' prayer in 4 v.'s 24-30 is a good model, in the courage of its convictions and its desire for the miraculous. Be inspired by it. Let's adapt it for use in our situation!)

**Next week's passage:** Acts 5 – 8