Acts 2: Birthday of the Church

Significance of the Day of Pentecost [v.1]

The Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, was the most *momentous* day in church history – the day the church was born. This was accomplished by the coming of the Holy Spirit from heaven. Thus, ten days after a divine Person *ascended* to heaven (the Son), another divine Person *descended* (the Holy Spirit) to take up His residence on earth in the **church**. Believers were indwelt by the Spirit, and thereby formed into *one body*, united to its risen, glorified *Head* in heaven (Christ). Believers therefore ceased to be a mere group of individuals, being welded into one living organism. This is indicated by the emphatic use of the word "all" and "one accord" suggesting a oneness of *mind*, *purpose* and *impulse* (cf. Acts 1.14; 2.46; 4.24; 5.12). <u>Please note</u>:

- In the NT, the word 'church' is a translation of *ekklesia* a called out *gathering* or *assembly* of people. A local church therefore comprises a company of baptised believers gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, called out from the fellowship of the *world* into the fellowship of *God* and *His Son* through the **gospel**. The NT does <u>not</u> countenance any *unbaptised* or *un-gathered* believers. In NT language, the church is <u>not</u> a *building*, but a **people**. The Gospel Hall is our *place of gathering*, but <u>not</u> the church. The church must be a people rather than a building when it is described as having *emotions* (Acts 5.11), *legs* (Acts 9.31) and *ears* (Acts 11.22).
- The "baptism in the Spirit" of the day of Pentecost accomplished *two* great things. First, Christians became indivisibly <u>linked to one another</u> as members of a body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12.25-27; Romans 12.5). Second, Christians (as a body) were indivisibly <u>linked to Christ, the Head</u>, in heaven (cf. Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18). These two points have reciprocal practical implications. First, believers are no longer solo individuals but belong to a *society* of Christians and function alongside them. There must be mutual care, sympathy and joy (1 Corinthians 12.25-26). Furthermore, every member of the body is vital. Though the body can survive without some of its members, its function is *impaired* (less effective) without them. Second, as those linked to Christ, each member of the body is responsible to express the mind, will and character of the Head.

All that took place on this special day of Pentecost was long promised in the word of God:

- The **feasts** of Jehovah present the <u>prophecy</u> of Pentecost (Leviticus 23.15-21). The day of 'Pentecost' (firstfruits of wheat harvest) was so-called because it fell *fifty* days after the feast of *firstfruits* (barley harvest). At the feast of Pentecost, a "new grain (meal) offering" was brought which comprised *two* wave loaves of two tenth deals. All was a picture of the *new* work of God, in which Jew *and* Gentile would be brought together on equal ground in Christ in the church (Ephesians 2.15). Hence the language of Luke, "when the day of Pentecost was fully come", literally 'being fulfilled', which can mean simply 'to arrive', or refer to the completing of the interval of time between Passover and Pentecost. But the language also hints that the day long foreshadowed by the ancient feast was about to receive its complete fulfilment. Pentecost also points forward, in its far fulfilment, to the future joining again of *Ephraim* and *Judah* into one nation (Ezekiel 37.16-22).
- John the Baptist spoke of the Person of Pentecost. Matthew 3.11: I indeed baptize you with (in) water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I... he shall baptize you with (in) the Holy Ghost and with fire. In any baptism by immersion there is a person who baptises, a person being baptised and an element into which the person is submerged. On the day of Pentecost, individual members of the church were baptised in the Spirit, as sent by the Son (John 15.26; 16.7). The baptism in fire was not fulfilled at Pentecost. It is a baptism of judgment upon a "generation of vipers" and is separated by a period of 2,000 years from the baptism in the Spirit. Matthew 3.12: He shall thoroughly purge his threshing-floor (Israel), and shall gather his wheat (true believers) into the garner, but the chaff (unbelievers) he will burn with fire unquenchable.
- Christ Himself spoke of the <u>period</u> and <u>purpose</u> of Pentecost. Acts 1.5: For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be (still future) baptised with (in) the Holy Ghost not many (ten) days hence. The purpose of the baptism was to provide power for witness to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the true Messiah. This was a message the disciples would take, ultimately, to the "uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1.8, cf. 2 Timothy 1.7-8).

According to Jewish tradition, the day of Pentecost marked the day the Law was given at Sinai, being *fifty* days after Israel's deliverance from Egypt. On that occasion, the nation entered a covenant relationship of law – a "ministration of death" (2 Corinthians 3.7-9). It wasn't long before disobedience slew 3,000 (Exodus 32.28). But now, in connection with the new covenant, the "Spirit gives life" resulting in 3,000 souls being saved (Acts 2.41).

Sound and **Symbols** of the Coming of the Spirit [vv.2-4]

The "sound from heaven" declares the Person of the Spirit to be heavenly in origin. His coming and presence also declare the exaltation of Christ. *John 7.39: The Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.* There was <u>no</u> wind, but a "sound" (roar) from heaven "as of" or 'like that' of a violent, mighty wind. The symbol of wind speaks of an unseen yet powerful force. The "cloven tongues like as of fire" were <u>not forked</u> tongues, but a <u>single</u> tongue being fire-like in appearance. This seemed to separate into many individual tongues which "sat upon each of them". In scripture, fire is a symbol of the <u>presence</u> and <u>purity</u> of deity, whilst the tongues no doubt indicate <u>witness</u> and <u>testimony</u>. The symbols are explained by the Lord in Acts 1.8: <u>But ye shall receive power</u> (wind), after that the <u>Holy Ghost</u> (fire) is come upon you: and ye shall be <u>witnesses</u> (tongues) unto me. Not only did the Spirit fill the house where they were sitting (baptism), He also "filled" each individual. Whilst 'filling' can refer to <u>initial indwelling</u>, this language normally describes <u>empowerment</u> for <u>service</u> (Acts 4.8, 31). To be "filled" with the Spirit is to be <u>fully controlled</u> by Him – under His influence. Whilst <u>baptism</u> in the Spirit is unique, being <u>filled</u> with the Spirit is a repeatable experience (Ephesians 5.18). Filling of the Spirit does not describe more of the Spirit being received, but His having greater control of us. His full influence in our lives is undoubtedly hindered when we "grieve" Him (Ephesians 4.29-31).

The **baptism in the Spirit** was a unique event, never to be repeated. So-called Pentecostal believers teach it is an individual experience to be sought or waited for *after* conversion and only the most spiritual of believers will achieve the privilege. But this is <u>not</u> the teaching of the apostle Paul! *1 Corinthians 12.13: For by (in) one Spirit were we all (once for all) baptized into one body (corporate), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and all one Spirit were given to drink (individual). Even the carnal believers of Corinth had experienced baptism in the Spirit! The language is careful to show the events of Pentecost as a <u>once for all, historic and corporate event, the blessing and result of which was reckoned to every believer at conversion</u>. Calvary is similar. Though the cross was a once for all event, never to be repeated, the benefits of the work of Christ are reckoned to the believer at conversion. Though the historic event took place long before we were born, we were yet reckoned, in the mind of God, to have been present (cf. Galatians 2.20; Colossians 3.1).*

This is further illustrated in the context of Paul's teaching in First Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 10.1-4, Paul speaks of Israel's *corporate* baptism unto Moses in the crossing of the Red Sea. All the "fathers" were baptised as representatives of the nation. It was immersion in the sense that the walls of the Red Sea were either side of them, and the cloud overshadowed them. This *identified* and *separated* the nation unto Moses as their head. Any individuals who were later born in the wilderness did not need to go back to the Red Sea and be baptised unto Moses again! Their being *born* into the nation brought them into the *good* of that nation's corporate experience at the Sea.

Sign of the Gift of Tongues [vv.5-13]

An evidence of the filling of the Spirit was the ability to speak "with other tongues" (v.4). This was the miracle of speaking in different languages never before learned. This was not an *ecstatic* or *meaningless babble* but clear communication of the "wonderful (mighty) works of God" (v.11) in known dialects, i.e. both *national* and *regional* languages. And yet these men were "Galileans" (v.7) – supposedly ignorant and uneducated! Speaking in tongues was a sign gift for the foundation stage of the church building, <u>not</u> a gift which pertains today. Tongues were:

- Confirmatory. A clear sign to the Jew that God was at work (1 Corinthians 1.22; 14.22). Whenever God introduces something *new*, He attests it in a *miraculous* manner. The day of Pentecost was the introduction of a new programme which would embrace *all* nations, not merely one. Therefore, the apostles spoke in a multitude of tongues, for, the message of the gospel would be sounded out to every nation under heaven (v.5, 21). Luke lists *fifteen* countries (from east to west) which broadly represent the extent of the Jewish dispersion at that time. This was truly a reversal of Babel.
- Condemnatory. See 1 Corinthians 14.21 (cf. Isaiah 28.11-12). When Israel was sent into Assyrian captivity under divine judgment, they were mocked by men of a foreign tongue. Hence the sign of tongues should have warned the Jews of impending judgment. They had rejected the testimony of the Father (through the prophets), the Son (manifest in the flesh), and now they had the opportunity to listen to the witness of the Spirit. Sadly, the devastation of AD70 shows the majority refused.

