

# The Day of Pentecost

## (Acts 1:1-11)

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St. Francis

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### Introduction

During his famous crusade in Los Angeles, Billy Graham demonstrated some of his keen wisdom at a press conference. A young reporter said, "Mr. Graham, one minister told me that he thinks you have set the Church back fifty years, maybe one hundred years. What do you have to say about that?" Dr. Graham paused to contemplate the question, then replied, "Well, I would ask the Lord to forgive me. When I came here, my prayer was that He would set the Church back two thousand years."

We must return to the ancient Church, for there we have the power of the Gospel.

True church growth occurs when we return to the passion and power of Pentecost and that means that we exalt Christ, not ourselves. Christianity is not about us; worship is not about us; salvation is only secondarily about us; in each case, it is about Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> I use underlining, bold, and colors to help me preach. In other words, I do not make a separate copy of the sermon just for reading.

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Moreover, we must recognize that the **Holy Spirit** “comes” not in the sense that He was not here on the earth but that He comes in a **new ministry**. He cannot be other than omnipresent. And even this new ministry is not new in the sense that it was not foretold in the Old Testament, but new in the sense of fulfillment of the Old Testament. **Peter quotes Joel** and says that the pouring out of the Spirit was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.

### I. Pentecost Fulfills the Old Covenant

Consider where we are redemptively/historically: Israel’s ecclesiastical year began with Passover, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost. **Passover** was the commemoration of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt by the blood of the lamb, which was God’s acceptance of them (justification). **The Feast of Unleavened Bread** was the eating of pure bread, which spoke of a holy life lived for Yahweh, which was given at the beginning of the harvest season. **The Feast of Weeks** was basically seven weeks of celebration of God’s bounty. The early Church did not allow fasting during this 50 day period. **The Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost** was the gift to God of the end of the harvest, the culmination of the seven week celebration, and the anticipation of more to come.

**Pentecost** fell on a Sunday, having begun on a Sabbath or Saturday, counting seven sevens, and then adding one. The symbolism of the numbers is significant: seven complete times followed by one day, which is completion and a new creation! This was the celebration of a good harvest, which was the

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blessing of God. How appropriate that Christ should reap a “**firstfruits**” harvest of souls on this day, making 3,000 people into the bread of His harvest as the beginning of a long harvest that has continued now for 2,000 years!

The birth of the Church on Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit surely demonstrates that the Church is the fulfillment of the Old Testament festival, the Church becoming the new Israel. This is not replacement theology, as some wrongly say, but fulfillment theology that the Church has held all down through the centuries. Israel was supposed to celebrate a “firstfruits” harvest festival in anticipation of more to come, and here the Church is that “more.” The bud now becomes the blossom, the flower.

It is not too much to say that Luke is presenting us here with the idea that the Church is the completion and perfection of Judaism, that idea that there is one God, one people of God, one Bible, though two testaments. To separate the Church from Israel is to make the Old Testament and its types, shadows, prophecies to be virtually irrelevant to the Church and thus to lose one of the great defenses for the truth of Christianity: the fulfillment of what God had declared in the Old Testament, not simply in the person of Christ, but also in the people of God, so that the Old Testament anticipates the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the people of Christ. There is ONENESS here, not twoness. There is one Lord, one faith, one circumcision/baptism. As St. Augustine said:

Who would not prefer this joy of the divine mysteries, when they shine with the light of holy teaching, to all the empires of the world. . . . Is it not as if, like the two seraphim, they answer one another in sing-

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ing the praises of God: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the God of hosts!” So the two Testaments in faithful harmony together sing the holy truth.<sup>2</sup>

**Thus Pentecost here in Acts 2 is applied not only to the exalted Lord and His Holy Spirit, but also to the people of God**, the Gospel now going to all the world, for Peter quotes Joel and applies it to the Church as now fulfilled! “THIS IS WHAT WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL,” namely, He will pour our His Spirit on **ALL** flesh—not just Jews and not just Gentiles, but both as one!

## II. Pentecost Begins the New Covenant

(1) Sunday was also the day of the resurrection of Christ, “the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), and the 3,000 are the “firstfruits” of those who will be His at His Second Coming (1 Cor 15:23). There are billions more to come! Pentecost is the anticipation of the conversion of billions of Gentiles in fulfillment not only of Joel but also the covenant made with Abraham that his blessing would be to all people.

(2) Pentecost is the power of the Holy Spirit to convert the world. The Holy Spirit, according to **John 16** that we saw recently, convicts the world of **sin, righteousness, and judgment**: the sin of not believing in Jesus (which is what we see Peter preaching), righteousness because He goes to the Father (which is what we have here!), and judgment because Satan—

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<sup>2</sup> Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, p. 332.

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and by implication the whole world—is judged (which is what we see here!).

(4) We have on this Day of Pentecost **a reversal of the tower of Babel** with its curse of many languages. At Babel we have many people and one language rebelling against God so He judges them by giving them many languages, causing alienation. Here at Pentecost we have many languages and peoples made into one people and one language by the one Gospel, the opposite of judgment. **AGAIN, THIS IS FULFILLMENT THEOLOGY, not replacement theology, indicating that God is indeed the author of this one Book!** How is it possible to have such incredible fulfillment except that there is a God who has controlled the events of history, which means **HIS STORY**.

Indeed, here we have one loaf made from many people offered as a wave offering to the Lord, as the firstfruits of a larger harvest to come. In the Gospel the curse is lifted, national boundaries are lowered, and racial tensions melt away. **THIS IS THE POINT!** Pentecost with the conversion of the 3,000 from many nations is a miniature view of the restored world under His sovereign majesty, King Jesus. Indeed, we read here in Acts 2 that there were converted not only Jews but “devout men from every nation under heaven.” That included “both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs”! A “proselyte” was a Gentile who had fully converted to Judaism, whereas a “God-fearer” was not a full convert.

(4) Furthermore, we have Word and sacrament instituted in this first apostolic sermon. With the preaching of the Gospel (Word), Peter institutes the sacrament of baptism,

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closely associating baptism with the receiving of the Holy Spirit. And the **Lord's Supper** is also here with the "breaking of bread" (v. 42). Thus we have here the **reorganization** of the Church that includes both Jews and Gentiles in fulfillment of Joel and the Messianic office. We have the **new covenant** as the fulfillment of the old covenant, a new people of God in fulfillment that in Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed, not just Israel. We have **new sacraments** to replace Pentecost, such as baptism and Holy Communion, eliminating any blood, now easily inclusive of Gentiles. We have the continuing of the **children** in this covenant when Peter says the promise is for you and for your children (v. 39). We have what Peter calls the "**promise**," which was what God said would happen in the Old Testament, and now fulfilled in the Church!

Indeed, Pentecost here in Acts 2 concludes the Old Testament trilogy: Passover, feast of weeks, and now the day of Pentecost itself.

(5) We have Peter preaching **Jesus as both Lord and Christ**, which means not only is He the fulfillment of the Old Testament (Christ) but also the Lord of all. Roman emperors supposedly ascended to heaven after their deaths to become gods, but Jesus is Lord of all, the one Lord of the one faith with the one circumcision/baptism.

In Acts we see Christ ruling not only Israel but also the Roman empire for the good of the Gospel and of the Church.

Now the ascended Lord Jesus is going forth conquering and to conquer with the two edged sword from His mouth – and from ours – which is the Gospel! Acts is the game plan

for this, the *transition* from one nation to all nations, from Jerusalem to Rome.

### III. Pentecost Proclaims the Victory of the Church

(1) The **Kingdom** has come, the one prophesied in Daniel 2, the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, the One who was given a kingdom by the Ancient of Days. It had come with His incarnation, but even more so with His death, resurrection, Ascension, and now Session at the Father's right hand as our High Priest and as the King of the ages.

The gates of hell cannot prevail against His Church kingdom—against us; we will prevail. There is no force that can conquer the Church, for it is the people of God, marching by the Spirit of the ascended Lord. So Acts gives us His continuing story – and ours.

We have here the beginning of the New Creation as the kingdom spreads throughout the world. We are the community who marches over the earth proclaiming Jesus as the King of the new kingdom, the Church.

He shall reign until all His enemies are His footstool (Acts 2:35 from Ps 110; see also 1 Cor 15:25-26; Eph 1:22; Heb 10:13), and we are part of this conquering nation.

(2) Now at Pentecost here in Acts 2 we have a new beginning also, the beginning of the **fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant** that he would be a blessing to all nations (plural), not just to one nation. The early fathers fought many battles

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defending the truth that the Church was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Israel:

**Passover:** death of Christ and the **new covenant** in His blood as applied to the Church. WE CANNOT SEPARATE Christ FROM HIS ONE PEOPLE: ISRAEL/CHURCH.

**Sacrifices/tabernacle/temple:** person and work of Christ and now applied to His Church.

**Seed of the woman/seed of Abraham:** Christ and us:

**Christ:** "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed, who is Christ'" (Gal 3:16).

**Us:** "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29).

**Land:** from Palestine to the whole world, **from** Jerusalem, Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the world. Now Abraham will be the heir of the world, not just Palestine (Rom 4:13); "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5), and since "all authority has been given to Christ in heaven and on earth," thus He commands the disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18-20). Indeed, Acts moves from Jerusalem to Rome, from one small kingdom to the center of all kingdoms of that day.

We see the agreement of the Old Testament with the New Testament, the bud to flower, not two Bibles but one Bible with type to antitype, picture to substance, the seed of the woman has now conquered the seed of the serpent, Israel was to be a blessing to all the earth. Now the Church is that blessing.

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**Acts begins** with Christ's Ascension in Israel outside Jerusalem with eleven Jewish Apostles, and **it ends** with Paul in Rome with tens of thousands of Gentile converts, having been to many parts of the Gentile world on his missionary journeys.

### Conclusion

So what is Pentecost?

It is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks with its firstfruits harvest.

Pentecost is the beginning of the New Covenant with the power of the Holy Spirit to convert people, 3,000 being the "down payment" of billions more to come, with the beginning of the sacraments, with Jesus being proclaimed Lord.

Pentecost is the victory of the Church with the coming of the kingdom as prophesied by Daniel, with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to conquer the world, not just one strip of land. Thus, it is the reversal of Babel, the blessing of the Gospel to reconcile people with God and with one another from every nation.

It is a non-repeatable event, the birthday of the Church, the beginning of the "last days," the conquering of the world, though not totally, by the Gospel. **PENTECOST IS US!  
AMEN.**