

Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

Lesson Three | Pentecost (part 1)

Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

Context

Jesus likely died on the Passover on Friday, April 3, AD 33, and resurrected on the Feast of the Sheaf of First Fruits on Sunday, April 5. Jesus then made post-resurrection appearances for 40 days (Acts 1:3). He instructed his disciples to remain in Jerusalem waiting for the fulfillment of the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit. That fulfillment came on the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost, meaning fifty), on Sunday, May 24, AD 33.

Bible Study Tip

Ask questions of the text—when, who, why, how, prescriptive or descriptive.

The Promise of the Father

1. Acts 2:1 says, “When the Day of Pentecost had **fully come...**” (NKJV). The idea is to fulfill completely, but why did God wait for Pentecost to send the Holy Spirit?
2. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is described in the Old Testament (Lev. 23:15-21; Exod. 23:15, 34:22; Numbers 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12). The feast lasted one day and occurred on the Sunday fifty days after the Sheaf of First Fruits (also a Sunday). The Sheaf of First Fruits marked the beginning of the two-month spring harvest cycle—and the resurrected Jesus fulfilled this feast as the first fruit (1 Cor. 15:20). On Pentecost, two loaves of wheat bread from the harvest were waived in thanksgiving before the Lord and two lamb offerings were made. The day was treated as a sabbath and a holy convocation and it was a day of rejoicing.
3. The significance of the Acts 2 events happening on Pentecost is the unification of Jews and Gentiles in Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 2:14-22) This portends a harvest of people from every tribe, tongue and nation.
4. The disciples spoke in different languages (Acts 2:4) so they could be understood by those who traveled from abroad to be at the feast. Is there a parallel to the Tower of Babel episode from Genesis 11?
5. What is the gift of “tongues”? What was its purpose? And why is it called “tongues”? Is it the ability to speak a special language known only to God?
6. Why does Luke focus so much attention (see Acts 2:7-12) on where the people came from?
7. When some observed what was happening and suggested the disciples were drunk (Acts 2:13), Peter denied they were drunk (2:14-15) and appealed to a passage from Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21).
8. What is the proper interpretation of Joel 2:28-32 in its original context? When we see the New Testament quote the Old, we should start by going back to the Old Testament passage and examining it in its original context.
9. Did all of the events listed in Joel 2:28-32 happen on Pentecost?
10. Was Peter saying that Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled on Pentecost, or something else?
11. Are the events in Acts 2:1-21 descriptive or prescriptive?