

# Biblical Pentecost

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(footnotes: & bibliography separate)

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## Biblical Pentecost

Pentecost<sup>1</sup> was celebrated fifty days after Passover<sup>2</sup> on the Jewish calendar. It also marks the birth of the Christian Church. “When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place.” (Acts 2:1)

From the first day, as a community, the Body of Christ was fully engaged in a dynamic ministry and fellowship. And this all was from beginning to end a work of the Spirit (Acts 4:32-34 ).

It was the Spirit Who anointed Peter’s words that brought thousands to Christ (Acts 4:8 ). It was the Spirit Who embraced Stephen as he crossed the threshold into God’s presence (Acts 7:55 ). It was the Spirit that directed Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch while he puzzled over Isaiah’s prophecy of the Savior’s death (Acts 8:29 ). It was the Spirit that instructed Peter to visit Cornelius without questioning God, teaching him absolute trust (Acts 11:12 ). It was the Spirit that choose Barnabas to join Paul on that first missionary journey (Acts 13:2 ). It was the Spirit that forbade Paul from going east from Mysia and directed him to turn west bringing the Gospel first to Europe (Acts 16:6 ).

It is the Spirit that fills our lives with God’s love for souls (Romans 5:5 ). It is the Spirit that reassures and confirms God’s presence in our lives (Romans 8:16 ). It is the Spirit who shares eternal truth with us as God’s children (John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:13 ). It is the Spirit Who intercedes in prayer on our behalf when we cannot (Romans 8:27 ). It is the Spirit that has introduced heaven’s economy

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Pentecost” is a transliteration of the Greek word pentēkostē, which means “fiftieth.” It referred to the fiftieth day after the Passover festival when the Jews celebrated the Feast of Weeks—the annual harvest festival (see Lev. 23:15–21 and Deut. 16:9–12). This was the second of three festivals (the others being Passover and Tabernacles) that all Jewish males were required to attend in Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16). - taken from sermon notes, “Unstoppable Voice”

<sup>2</sup> The Feast of Weeks celebrated the end of the grain harvest. - Ryken. 633

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to us (“in our hearts as a down payment”) inspiring our hope on Christ’s return and emboldening our faith to serve Him (2 Corinthians 1:22). It is the Spirit that is working to change us to be more Christ-like (2 Corinthians 3:18 ). It is the Spirit which confirms the promise<sup>3</sup> of our salvation (as Thayer described this: “place[d] beyond doubt”)<sup>4</sup> (Ephesians 1:13) It is the Spirit that unites us preparing us for His heaven (Ephesians 2:22 ). Said simply: It is the Spirit that leads us as sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14 ).

### An Upper Room

What ever did happen in that upper room! One hundred and twenty—we can safely call them—“spirit-filled believers” met God there. There was the sound like a tornado and they were in its eye. But more accurately, we should be reminded reading about Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai in the wilderness, “the Lord came down on it in fire.... and the whole mountain shook violently.” (Exodus 19:18-19 ) The appearance of flickering flames,<sup>5</sup> around 120,<sup>6</sup> ignited the hearts, the vision, and the lives of those assembled in that room as the Holy Spirit filled them<sup>7</sup>

How should we understand the word “filled”? It is a simple past tense: completely filled—not beginning to be filled but—as Thayer explained, “diffused throughout [the]

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<sup>3</sup> Paul wrote, “The Spirit of promise” which is a genitive of apposition meaning the Spirit which was promised (cp. John 16:5) But we also see in Galatians 3:14 the phrase: “the promise of the Spirit” which could be either a subjective genitive (The promises which the Spirit affirms and guarantees) or an objective genitive (The Spirit is what was promised). This latter is similar to the genitive of apposition but with the emphasis on the Spirit rather than the promise. God fulfills His promises as we read in Ephesians but this promise was more—It was Himself, His Spirit, a relationship with Him that was given. “the promise in the gift of the Spirit through our faith.” [Lightfoot. Galatians. 140]

<sup>4</sup> Thayer. 609

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:3 “flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them.”

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:15

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:4 “Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”

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soul”<sup>8</sup> Paul’s explanation applies here: they were in that room “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with [their] heart[s] to the Lord.” Here is the secret to the infilling: Wait on God and all the while sing His praises (Ephesians 5:19 ). This seems likely since later on the streets of Jerusalem, many witnessed the same: “We hear them declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own language.”<sup>9</sup> (Acts 2:11)

Devoted Jews “from every nation,”<sup>10</sup> from as far away as Persia to the northeast, Rome to the northwest, Libya in North Africa, from Iran and Iraq, and Turkey across the Great Sea<sup>11</sup> and from the Islands, and Arabia<sup>12</sup> they came to Jerusalem to celebrate an Old Testament Pentecost under an older covenant—now passing away.<sup>13</sup> This, they did not expect! As John explained, “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” (1 John 2:8)

Pentecost had been an Old Covenant idea, an Old Covenant festival. We might say to those 3,000 believers (Acts 2:41 ) who had crossed over from the Old Covenant to the New: “For you have not come to ...a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, ... Instead, you have come to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to ...a festive gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven...” (Hebrews 12:18, 22)

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<sup>8</sup> Thayer. 516

<sup>9</sup> πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν - How are we hearing [this] each in our own native language. cp. Thayer. 139

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:5 εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν

<sup>11</sup> The Mediterranean called the Great Sea (Numbers 34:6) or Western Sea (Joel 2:20) in Scripture.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:9-11a “Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts), Cretans and Arabs”

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 8:13 “By saying a new covenant, he has declared that the first is obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away.”

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Orating with an inspired anointing<sup>14</sup> (the crowd in ignorance interpreting what they observed as intoxication)<sup>15</sup> Peter explained the phenomenon as “that which was spoken through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16)<sup>16</sup> That prophetic utterance was soon to reverberate in over 3,000 receptive hearts drawn now by an overwhelming conviction that this was God; they were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) This, too, is the Spirit at work (John 16:8 ).

### Glossolalia

“And they “began to speak in different *tongues*, as the Spirit *enabled* them [to speak].”<sup>17</sup> (Acts 2:4) The word “tongues” is used in verse 11 also meaning “languages.”

This is the Classical Pentecostal<sup>18</sup> distinctive, but with an understanding that the language can be a heavenly language in prayer and praise to the Lord. As Paul explained, “If I pray in another tongue, my spirit prays” (1

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<sup>14</sup> ἀπεφθέγγετο - “spoke” Thayer tells us this word is “not a word of every-day speech. ..belonging to dignified and elevated discourse.. [Thayer. 69] cp. Paul before Agrippa. Acts 26:25

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:13 But some sneered and said, “They’re drunk on new wine.”

<sup>16</sup> Joel 2:28-29 After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions. I will even pour out my Spirit on the male and female slaves in those days.

<sup>17</sup> to speak is the same word used to describe Peter’s oration as if that of a prophet. Interesting, the Hebrew word for “prophet” comes from a word meaning to bubble up and forth. cp. 1 Samuel 10:10 “When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a group of prophets met him. Then the Spirit of God came powerfully on him, and he prophesied along with them.”

<sup>18</sup> These 4 are chief in the Classical Pentecost branch of the Christian Church and must be considered if any understanding is afforded the believers whose knowledge is scanty at best of the Pentecostal movement starting in Wales (1904) and finding its way across America to Azusa Street, L.A, California, U.S.A. (1906). From here sprung the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Holiness, the International Fellowship of Christian Churches, and the Foursquare Church.

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Corinthians 14:14) Paul was most grateful to worship the Lord and pray in a heavenly language.<sup>19</sup>

Craig Keener's exhaustive commentary on Acts identified 18 different instructions regarding the biblical use of "speaking in tongues."<sup>20</sup> Keener correctly affirmed, "Although Paul plays down tongues to counter the Corinthians overemphasis on the gift, his own perspective regarding them is positive: they are, after all, a divine benefaction (a charisma, a spiritual gift) from the Spirit, and Paul prays in tongues himself."<sup>21</sup> (1 Corinthians 14:18)

### *Submission*

But how can glossolalia be called an initial indication that a believer is Spirit-filled while it is true that the Holy Spirit has been involved in our christian experience since our salvation? "The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us." (1 John 3:24) "This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:13)

We misrepresent the ministry of the Holy Spirit when we pigeon hole, limit, the Spirit's work in us. God has commissioned Him to represent all that God wants to do in and through us in this life as believers. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into *all* ... truth. " (John 16:13)

No theology or denominational creed should diminish this all embracing work, but the question of our commitment to His ministry is one of surrender or yielding<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:18 "I thank God that I speak in other tongues more than all of you;" Godet, reads, "I give thanks for the fact that I speak in tongues" adding "I speak in tongues more than you all." [Godet, The First Epistle to the Corinthian, 285]

<sup>20</sup> Keener. Acts An Exegetical Commentary. Vol I. 814-5

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 814

<sup>22</sup> Lange on Ephesians vol XI, 171. Lange correctly notes here the "personality of the Holy Spirit" - μη θλιβε το πνευμα το αγιον το εν σοι

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to His leadership. "...don't grieve<sup>23</sup> God's Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 4:30) "The Holy Spirit, like God, is not apathetic, but capable of being affected." Lange reminds us.<sup>24</sup> Is this not the reason Paul spoke of a repeated or continuous re-infilling of (yielding to) the Spirit? (Ephesians 5:18 ). Glossolalia must be understood in this context.

Tongues is a private gift given to Spirit-filled believers to allow them to release deep passions of joy and burdens the Lord shares. Tongues replaces our native language because our native tongue does not suffice to express the heart. There are three words translated "unspeakable" in the Authorized Version of our Bible which should catch our attention:

- ◆ An unspeakable gift is *indescribable*. "Thanks [be] unto God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Corinthians 9:15)
- ◆ Unspeakable words are words too *sacred* to be spoken. "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak (2 Corinthians 12:4 ).
- ◆ Joy unspeakable is joy for which *words are inadequate*. "Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. An unspeakable gift is indescribable." Rejoicing with inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8 ).

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ΚΑΤΟΙΚΟΥ... My translation: "Do not resist the Holy Spirit Who lives within you."

<sup>23</sup> The verb forbids injuring, disturbing, rendering sorrowful, pointing thus to an intimate fellowship. [Lange on Ephesians vol XI, 171] Shepherd of Hermas, 47:8 Thus both are saddening to the Holy Spirit, the doubtful mind and the angry temper. 47:9 Put away therefore from thyself sadness, and afflict not the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in thee, lest haply He intercede with God [against thee], and depart from thee [The Shepherd of Hermas APOSTOLIC FATHERS (trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot)]

<sup>24</sup> Lange on Ephesians vol XI, 171

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Glossolalia, we might say, expresses praise and worship for the Lord's ears alone (sacred) in terms that are indescribable and inadequately spoken in one's native tongue. The Spirit's work in the soul at times is too glorious for an adequate understanding in our language. Tongues is one of those experiences that allows a believer to enter emotionally as well as spiritually into the presence of God's Spirit and there to express their heart's longing while in prayer or worship.<sup>25</sup> Jesus taught, "The mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart." (Matthew 12:34)

Keener, speaking of modern uses of glossolalia, cautioned, however, this caveat, "It is not clear that this [modern tongue-speech] represents what Paul understood by the phenomenon (or how ...modern tongues speakers experience some ..forms of ...glossolalia)."<sup>26</sup> Many devout believers shy away from this beautiful opportunity because some pentecostal believers, in error, interpret their experience as a special gift rather than a moment of yielding in communion with the Lord. They mistakenly see this as the pinnacle of spiritual knowledge, which it is not.

### *Prayer*

"Pray at all times in the Spirit." (Ephesians 6:18) Give prominence to prayer. Persevering is primarily praying in all circumstances, at every opportunity. It is "the Holy Spirit in whose blessed and indwelling influence, and by whose merciful aid, we are enabled to pray (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6), and who Himself intercedes for us." (Romans 8:26)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> There are variations on this idea that I don't endorse; for example, praying in tongues on a whim. For me, tongues is one response to the Spirit's work in and through the believer.

<sup>26</sup> Keener. Acts An Exegetical Commentary. Vol I. 816

<sup>27</sup> Lange Vol XI Ephesians. 225

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True intercessory prayer always includes the Spirit whether with or without glossolalia and at times He alone must carry the torch (Romans 8:26 ).

### Evidence

But is tongues *the* evidence or is tongues *in* evidence of the infilling of the Spirit? Classical Pentecostals believe that everyone who is filled with the Spirit will speak in tongues. Charismatics born out of the revivals of the 1970's are more likely to call tongues one of a number of experiences that are in evidence of the Spirit's move within the soul. Classical Pentecostalism encourages believers to seek the infilling of the Spirit *with tongues*.

It is reasonable to say that during the Early days of the Church, glossolalia became a clear sign from God that the person glorifying God thru this language was a Christian. The gift of the Holy Spirit, as it was known, was the Spirit's way of including them among the believers even if, as in the case with Cornelius' household, they were not formerly of Jewish persuasion. "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God." (Acts 10:45-46)

But is the "gift of the Spirit" the same as saying they are saved or does it indicate their being Spirit filled? ...Or is there a difference? Classical Pentecostals maintain that the infilling of the Spirit was a second or subsequent work of divine grace, and here is where the grammar comes in. (Hold onto your seats!)

### *Second Definite Work of Grace*

The idea that the infilling of the Spirit is not the same as salvation, per se (though it could happen *at* salvation) is based on an understanding of Paul's question to the

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Ephesians “Did you receive the Holy Spirit *when*<sup>28</sup> you believed?” (Acts 19:2a) Is the infilling a second definite work of grace?<sup>29</sup>

That word “when” is what has divided Protestant believers in 2 camps:

- ◆ The Pentecostals interpret this to mean *after*: Did you receive the Holy Spirit *after*<sup>30</sup> you believed? This suggests that the infilling of the Spirit was a second work of grace after they had been saved.
- ◆ The non-pentecostals translate the word to mean *when*: Did you receive the Holy Spirit *when*<sup>31</sup> you believed? This suggests that the infilling Spirit (the Holy Spirit entering their lives) was *the same* as their accepting Christ as Savior.

Goodwin concedes the conflict of meaning.<sup>32</sup> It could be either.<sup>33</sup> But, as Burton noted: most New Testament

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<sup>28</sup> When you believed is an aorist predicate participle: ΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝΤΕΣ. In the Dana-Mantey Greek grammar used in Baptist universities, this verb action is considered to be coincident with that of the main verb. Pentecostal schools use J. Gresham Machen’s Greek grammar where it is interpreted to be subsequent to the main verb.

<sup>29</sup> The Assemblies of God share on their website, “This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth.” [<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#7>]

<sup>30</sup> “the aorist participle denotes action prior to the action denoted by the leading verb.” [Machen 117] “The aorist participle generally represents an action as past with reference to the time of its leading verb.” [Goodwin. 48 #143]

<sup>31</sup> “The aorist participle, for example, usually denotes antecedent time to that of the controlling verb. But if the main verb is also aorist [as here], this participle may indicate contemporaneous time.” [Wallace. 267]

<sup>32</sup> “The aorist participle can coincide in its time only with forms which have a similar aoristic or complexive meaning, while in other cases the verb and participle are distinct in time.” [Goodwin. 50 #146]

<sup>33</sup> A. T. Robertson [1112] citing a number of scholars concedes, “it is probable that the original use of the aorist participle was that of

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examples are clearly antecedent [after].<sup>34</sup> Here are some examples:

Is it important to hear the explanation offered by the Ephesian “converts” who only knew repentance after John-the-Baptist’s ministry : “‘No,’ they told him, ‘we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 19:2b) What did they mean?

- ◆ They repented of their sins and through John’s baptism followed him, but didn’t realize that Jesus’s death and resurrection offered them salvation? Or
- ◆ They did know about Jesus and through baptism followed Christ, not John, but hadn’t heard about the work of the Spirit in them?

### *Cessationism*<sup>35</sup>

“...as for tongues, they will cease;” (I Corinthians 13:8) But when? “The apostle’s answer,” says Godet, “... makes the abolition of prophecy, as well as that of tongues and knowledge, coincident with the advent of the perfect state; ...with Christ’s glorious coming.”<sup>36</sup> A dear friend while in Seminary researched in an unpublished thesis the history of biblical pentecost from the early church to the present day. He accurately documents that biblical pentecostalism has continuity throughout church history.

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simultaneous action. From this was developed quite naturally, by the nature of the various cases, the antecedent notion.”

<sup>34</sup> Burton [61] notes that “the antecedent use furnishes the largest number of instances, but that fact does not prove priority.”

<sup>35</sup> Cessationism is a Protestant doctrine that spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing ceased with the Apostolic Age.

<sup>36</sup> Godet. The First Epistle to the Corinthian, 250

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### Final Remarks

A biblical perspective on the pentecostal experience is a record of the Spirit's ministry in and thru His Church. Make no mistake about what we are saying here that as the Gospel transcends culture, it is applicable to all cultures, all situations, and all lives. Transcending culture means that the Church has been empowered by God to bring the message of the Savior's death and resurrection to any culture at any time but only as the Holy Spirit leads it. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The Christian Church will never outgrow its need for the Spirit's leading.

Thus, Father Vincent Donovan could share Christ's love with the Massai people in Tanzania even though he had to "modify" church ritual in order to share the message of Christ.<sup>37</sup> That is why Don Richardson could practically rewrite the story of the crucifixion in his message of the "Peace Child" to the Sawis of the, then, Netherlands New Guinea.<sup>38</sup> "Go, therefore, and make disciples of every race and tribe..." (Matthew 28:19)<sup>39</sup>

We must let that missionary side of our love realize more its potential in the hand of God. Christian apologist J. F. Baldwin recognizes the importance of heroic, Spirit-filled living, as the most powerful argument beckoning nonbelievers to the faith: "We may certainly teach people about God's grace by telling them the story of Pilgrim's Progress; we teach it better when we tell them the true story of John Newton [former slave trader who authored the song

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<sup>37</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978

<sup>38</sup> Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Bethany House Publishers; Reprint edition), 2005

<sup>39</sup> πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη...

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Amazing Grace]; and we teach it best when we demonstrate it with our lives."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ken Daniels.. 101

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