

Transformed by the Holy Spirit

Acts 2

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In the days of old, the peoples of the world often associated God with geography and location. There was the Sun God, the Moon God, the God of the mountains, and the God of the Sea. There were the gods of Egypt, the gods of the Philistines, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Canaanites.

It was into this theological climate that Yahweh God reached out to Abram. Yahweh was the sovereign God over the universe. He was not a god bound to a location. Instead He sought to be a God who was committed to a people.

We see the progression of God drawing ever nearer throughout the Old Testament.

God revealed Himself as an all-powerful God as He delivered the children of Abraham out of slavery through supernatural plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. He was the one true God who had taken interest in a specific people, but in many ways He was still unknown.

Through God's provision and His law that He gave to Moses, God continued to reveal more of Himself to His people, but even at this point they were not able to draw near.

Remember the story that recounts the holy mountain where Moses received the stone tablets on which the laws were written. God warned them that they would die if they even set foot on the mountain.

God was revealing Himself to the Israelites, but it was still only a knowing from a distance.

At this point God commanded them to build a tabernacle, a portable place of worship where God would dwell. It was to be moved wherever they moved. As they followed the presence of God in the pillar of clouds and the pillar of fire, and as they transported the tabernacle, they would be reminded of their Yahweh God who was not bound to a place, but who had bound Himself to a people.

As we continue reading through the Old Testament we see the portable tabernacle become the permanent temple in Jerusalem. God had come near, but still there was a distance. There was the court

of the Gentiles in the outer edges of the temple courts, the court of the women, which was a little nearer but still at a distance, and the court for Jewish men, which was closer. The area for the priests and Levites who administered sacrifices and other Jewish religious rituals of worship. But even the priests, who rotated their turns of ministering inside the temple, only entered once in their lifetime. Even the High priest, who entered into the Holy of Holies, behind the veil, once a year, realized the distance between a holy God and sinful mankind. Their fear of God was so great that they would tie a rope around the ankle of the High Priest when he went into the Holy of Holies, so that if he died when he entered into the presence of God, they could pull out his body.

All of these were small steps of God drawing nearer and nearer to His people. In the New Testament finally Jesus came. He is God in the flesh. In the words of Jesus, ***"If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father."*** He was the exact representation of the Father. He took on the form of man to become like us and willingly gave His life, dying in our place, to pay for our sin. Because of this, all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ are forgiven and reconciled, brought near to God.

Through Christ, we have been brought near to God, but it gets even better. In John 16:7 Jesus said, ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."***

It must have been incredible for the apostles to walk alongside Jesus, but something better was about to happen. Jesus walked with them, but once Jesus returned to heaven the Holy Spirit would come to live in them. This was the goal of all that had come before, finally culminated in Acts 2 at Pentecost.

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In the book of Luke we read of what Jesus did and what He taught, until His return to heaven. The book of Acts, Luke's second book, begins right where the book of Luke left off. Jesus had died, been raised from the dead, and had spent 40 days with His followers showing many proofs that He truly was alive. He also taught them, during this time, about the kingdom of God. Jesus instructed them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. He told them of how the Holy Spirit would come upon them, how they would be baptized by the Spirit, and how they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

So that's what they did. After Jesus ascended back to heaven on the Mount of Olives they took the short walk back to Jerusalem. They gathered in the upper room and waited. Acts 2:14 tells us how 120 followers of Christ gathered, ***"in one accord, devoting themselves to prayer."***

Jesus had been crucified during the Passover celebration. He had been raised from the dead and had spent 40 days with His followers before His ascension. Now the disciples were waiting and praying as the Jewish celebration, known as Pentecost, approached.

Pentecost is the Greek name of an Old Testament festival known as the "Feast of Weeks" (Leviticus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:9). It was a "week of weeks" or 7 weeks after Passover. Seven weeks add up to

49 days. The day after was “the Fiftieth” or Pentecost. The celebration commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai and was also a celebration of gratitude to God for the harvest.

Each year Pentecost happened at what we would refer to as the end of May or the beginning of June. At this time of year traveling conditions were at their best. This meant that large crowds of Jews from many different countries would make the journey for this special religious celebration. In addition, by Jewish law, every male Jew living within 30 kilometers of Jerusalem was required to attend the Pentecost celebration. On Pentecost it was also against the law to work. Because of all of these factors Jerusalem would have been very crowded, with many people in the streets, with Jews from many countries, during the Pentecost events that we find in Acts 2:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”¹³ But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The disciples had been praying and waiting for ten days. Not knowing what the future held, they just stayed faithful to the last things Christ had told them. *“Don’t leave Jerusalem. Wait for the Holy Spirit. Be my witnesses.”* And on the tenth day, the Father’s promise was fulfilled.

Many times in the Old Testament we read how the Holy Spirit would come upon a person for a specific reason and then the Holy Spirit would depart from him or her once the purpose had passed. The prophet Ezekiel wrote of something different that would one day occur between the Holy Spirit and God’s people:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

This is what we see occurring in Acts 2. As Christ had proclaimed in John 16:7, *“It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”*

As Christ had commanded, *“wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me . . . for you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit . . . and will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”* Acts 1:4,5,8.

At Pentecost, in Acts 2, we see the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came powerfully as a sound of a violent wind and what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came upon each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. There was no mistaking that the Spirit of God had come. We don't know exactly what it was like, but it must have been incredible.

In response the disciples seemed to flood out into the crowded streets. They began to preach and those in the crowd from many different countries heard them in their own languages. Something supernatural was taking place that demanded an explanation. It could either be from God or from Satan, but the ones who were speaking in different languages were declaring the wonders of God, so surely it could not be from Satan. It must be God. They were amazed and intrigued, but others chose to be cynical.

The works of the Spirit and the speaking in different languages caused curiosity and brought attention to the Spirit's coming. It gathered a crowd and stirred interest. Once the crowd had gathered, Peter, *“standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them.”*

He first discounted the belief of some in the crowd that the disciples were drunk. Peter argued that drunkenness was not possible because it is only 9:00 AM. Some might say that this is a weak argument because there are alcoholics that drink that early in the morning, but those in the Jewish culture did not. The time before 9:00 AM was for morning devotions. They did not eat or drink before 9:00 AM, especially on a Sabbath or on a Jewish holiday like Pentecost. This practice would have been so known as the cultural norm that, as soon as Peter brought attention to this, the cynics would have submitted to Peter's reasoning.

Now this was a spur of the moment, spontaneous sermon to an international Jewish crowd. His hearers, who were in the city for Pentecost, had a good understanding of the Old Testament. Because of this Peter started from Old Testament prophecies pointing out that day's events as fulfillment of scripture about the Holy Spirit. It was the fulfillment of the scriptures which they already claimed to believe. We see in this unprepared sermon how well Jesus must have prepared His disciples. Peter knew both the truth and the spirit of the scriptures. Yes, he had memorized the scriptures, but Peter could also clearly bring together the larger truths of scripture and the gospel and present them in a way that pointed his listeners clearly from the Old Testament to Christ.

Peter first pointed them to the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

These descriptions are likely a combination of the Old Testament symbolism, events surrounding Christ's death, and future events in the last days.

Christ's crucifixion was planned by the Father. Jesus' death was much more than spontaneous mob violence and a combination of many individual's choices and freewill that just happened to coincide in the right way on the same day. Jesus' crucifixion happened according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. As Peter would later write, *"with the precious blood of Jesus Christ who was chosen before the creation of the world"* (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Our sovereign God set an intricate plan in place that is evidenced from Genesis, through Moses, through the Passover lamb, the sacrificial system, the writings of King David, the prophets, and the many details that were set in place, so that in the *"fullness of time God sent His son"* to be the Savior of the World (Galatians 4:4).

We follow a God who has intentionally set a plan in place to redeem us to Himself. It is this God who holds us in the palm of His hand, even down to the daily details of our lives. We are not alone. We should not worry like those who have no God. We have been drawn near by the Sovereign God of all creation.

Peter continued explaining how Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the promised Messiah. Peter spoke of prophecies which were being fulfilled before their very eyes. Scriptures had declared and now the life of Jesus and the recent occurrences had confirmed. Peter then concluded:

" ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

This was in keeping with the words of (500 BC) Zechariah 12:10, ***“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”***

Can you imagine what it must have been like that night, when all the disciples got together again? The testimonies. The tears of joy. The renewed sense of awe in their Savior. God had moved in their hearts to pray. They had obeyed and God had worked in unbelievable ways. In the same city that had screamed at the top of their lungs ***“Crucify Him!”*** there now stood 3,000 believers in Jesus Christ.

Out of all the people that God could have reached out to first with the power of the Gospel and the presence of the Holy Spirit, He chose those who crucified His Son. Isn't that remarkable that God gave “good” to those who had given Him “evil”? That He chose to grant life to those who had brought death? That He decided to grant faith to those who had hardened their hearts to unbelief? May it strengthen our confidence that if we will repent and believe, that He will forgive and draw us in to His embrace.

It is interesting to note that the conviction of sin and repentance did not come immediately after the violent wind, the tongues of fire, or even the speaking in tongues. It came after Peter preached of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:14 highlights the role of preaching Christ in these words, ***“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”***

The truth of God accompanied by the Spirit of God (John 16:8) brought repentance. Peter preached the truth and through it the Spirit convicted the Jews of their sin.

This story is a story of transformation. 3,000 non-believers were convicted of sin, repented and put their faith in Christ.

With the coming of the Spirit, Peter was transformed. This was the same Peter who was often impulsive, who was bad tempered, who talked too much, who had cut off the servant's ear when Jesus was arrested, who had denied Christ, and yet here he was preaching to the masses and 3,000 people believed in Jesus Christ. That is truly the testimony of the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The God who gives us second chances and gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into the people we are intended to be in Christ.

These new believers did not just claim the name of Christ, the confirmation of their salvation is seen in the fruit of their repentance and the transformation of their lives, in Acts 2:42-47. The entire congregation was transformed:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were

being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Holy Spirit had come to dwell in the hearts of those who believed, and now the Gospel of Jesus Christ showed its fruit in their love for God and their commitment to each other. The Holy Spirit so changed them that even in the midst of their diversity and their recent introduction to the faith, it already resulted in love, generosity and a sense of family between the believers.

This is what can happen when God comes near. He transforms both individuals and entire churches. The “one another’s” of scripture become the way of life. Unity replaces division. Service replaces selfishness. Love replaces legalism.

It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit, throughout scripture and church history, does not always use the smartest, or strongest, or prettiest, but oftentimes He used the most available. Are you available? As the apostle Paul wrote:

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

God used a carpenter, a fisherman, a tax collector, a fig-picker, a criminal, a prostitute, a widow and many other ordinary people for extraordinary purposes.

Are you available for the Holy Spirit to work in your life? It starts with submission. It is like the clay in the Potter’s hands. As the clay submits to the potter’s workings the clay is made into a vessel of purpose. It is not always an easy process, but in time the clay becomes a masterpiece.

The more we say “yes” to the Spirit, the more familiar we become with His voice. How to recognize His voice. How He speaks. The character traits of the things He says. We become more convinced of His leadings. As listening, submitting and obeying become our way of life, our heart grows accustomed to an automatic “yes”. This is the goal as Christ is our Lord and we walk more fully in the Spirit.

Will we receive the conviction of sin from the Holy Spirit? Will we be teachable as the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth? Will we allow the Holy Spirit to be our strength when we are weak? Will we use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us? Will we listen for the Spirit’s voice as we seek wisdom? Will we trust in the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us to the Father? Will we depend on the Holy Spirit’s power?

Will we believe and obey? The apostles waited, prayed and witnessed, and the Holy Spirit worked in a mighty way. May we as individuals and as a church commit to submitting to the Holy Spirit. It is He who lives in us and has drawn near.