

[Acts 3](#)



Leaders Note

Acts 2: 1-36 – Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit

Thought

Acts 2 is Babel reversed. At Babel one common speech was confused, all work halted, and the nations scattered (see Genesis 11). On Pentecost in Acts 2, the nations are gathered, a new work begun, and, significantly, rather than homogenizing the diverse languages of all these ethnic groups, obliterating their distinctiveness and unique rhythms, the Spirit empowers God's people to speak "the wonderful works of God" to the beat, rhythm and vibe of each cultural group assembled — clueing us in that Spirit-filled adventure is not getting the world to speak our language, but crossing whatever barriers we face and speaking theirs.

Context

Pentecost: "Pentecost" is Greek for "fiftieth," because this Jewish feast occurred on the fiftieth day following the Passover celebration. The common name in the Old Testament for this celebration is "feast of weeks" (Hebrew: Shavu'ot = weeks) because they counted seven weeks and one day from Passover. Shavu'ot was essentially a harvest festival. Taking place usually in June on our calendar, it happened just as the wheat crop was being harvested. It was a time of freewill offering, of rest, and of celebration with "you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless, and the widows living among you" (see Deuteronomy 16:9-12 and Leviticus 23:15-22). Shavu'ot was also, from ancient times, the time when Israel celebrated the giving of the law through Moses. It was on this day, they believed, that Moses came down from the mountain, the Ten Commandments in hand. And so in the synagogues on Pentecost the readings were Exodus 19-20 and two other passages celebrating theophanies (powerful God-appearances) — Ezekiel 1-2 and Habakkuk 3. Also read at this festival is the book of Ruth, because of its themes of harvest as well as the inclusion of a Gentile woman among God's people Israel. It's also important to note that Pentecost marked the traditional day of King David's death — which may clue us in to why Peter makes his case for Jesus' resurrection the way he does.

Jews by birth and proselytes: The crowd of pilgrims in Jerusalem consisted of people from quite literally every point of the compass. But it's important to remember that these are Jewish pilgrims from all nations as well as proselytes (Gentiles who had undergone full conversion to Judaism, including circumcision), not unconverted Gentiles. As we will see as the story of Acts unfolds, the epiphany that Jesus is for everyone even to the uttermost parts of the earth had yet to take place in the hearts of these early missionary/ believers.

It's only nine in the morning! On a festival day such as Pentecost, people normally would not break their fast until at least 10 AM, so it is extremely unlikely that a group of people would be drunk at this hour.

Seated at the right hand of God: The right hand was a symbol of one's strength and power. With the right hand, a king either bestowed grace or pronounced judgment. It symbolized an individual's authority; it was the instrument of carrying out his intentions. Why the right hand over the left? Two reasons suggest themselves: 1) The left hand was universally used for sanitation purposes and therefore was regarded less than its counterpart (although highly necessary); 2) Since most people were right-handed, the right hand was thought to have innately superior strength and ability.



Learning Session

Introduce today's passage by filling your folk in on some of the contextual information above. After this get everyone to read the passage to themselves quietly (it's a long one, so doing it aloud may take some time). Start by asking folk to share a time when they were totally surprised (pleasant or unpleasant) by something God did in their lives. Then divide into discussion groups to address the following questions:

- How would you have felt had you been in the upper room? And if you were outside?
- How would you describe your personal encounter(s) with the Holy Spirit up to this point in your life: a) blown away b) breezy c) doldrums d) other. Why?
- What was the most recent opportunity you had to verbally share the story of Jesus with someone?
- Where in your life are you sensing a need for "bold urgency"?

Gather together to get some feedback after about 15 minutes. You'll notice I have used the word encounter rather than experience. My main reason for this is that experience seems to be more about us, encounter is more about relationship and is a word that is less about us. God's Spirit moves in us to change us, it's not about us experiencing strange things. Stress that we all encounter God in different ways. Some of us fall; some of us shake, weep or even laugh. Others (like me) tend to just sense a strong peace about them. Dramatic experience is not the aim, being close to God is. We should expect to encounter God in some way, but allow Him to do it on His terms, don't dictate tongues of fire or levitation to Him. If He just wants to pour peace on you, be extremely grateful.

Pray for each other and ask God to pour His Holy Spirit upon your group.

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