



Acts 2:1-13 | Miracles and the Church, Part 1

Recap of Chapter One

Chapter One focused on the eleven apostles (Judas having committed suicide). They gathered with Jesus for forty days after His resurrection and Jesus spoke to them *of the things concerning the kingdom of Heaven* (1:3). His final meeting with the eleven occurred just before His Ascension into Heaven, where He would sit, and is now seated, at the Father's right hand as prophesied in Psalm 110:1 (See also Acts 2:33; Hebrews 1:13).

Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father (1:4). This promise was the coming of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,26; 15:26). After Jesus ascended, the apostles went to an upper room and (directed by God through the giving forth of lots) chose Matthias to fill the position vacated by Judas (Psalm 109:8; John 17:12; Luke 22:30).

The Problems with Chapter Two

Now we come to chapter two, where the promise of the Holy Spirit is going to be fulfilled, and the Lord is going to begin something new. Chapter Two is one of the most volatile chapters in the Bible. It is an awesome chapter, but is a breeding ground for many false teachings and much confusion. It is man who has caused the confusion by the way and not God, for God is not the Author of confusion. *Two primary issues in Acts Chapter 2 are miracles and the beginning of the Church. Let's take the issue of the beginning of the Church first.*

The Beginning of the Church

Christians have different beliefs about when the Church began. The most common belief is that it started in Acts 2 at Pentecost. However, some disagree and think it began somewhere in the middle of the Book of Acts, but they can't say exactly when. Another view is that the Church started after the book of Acts was completed in Acts 28. There are a few other variations, but these are the main three beliefs.

Determining the actual beginning of the Church is challenging. One reason for the confusion is the English word "Church." It appears for the first time in Acts 2:47. In this verse, thousands of new believers in Jesus as the Messiah were praising God and gaining favor with people. The Lord added to the church daily those who should be saved. The Greek word translated as Church in English is *ekklesia*.

Many people believe Acts 2:47 refers to the Church as we understand it and are a part of. We all know that the Book of Acts was written in Greek by Dr. Luke. Throughout his book, with one exception, whenever the word

Church is seen, Luke uses the Greek word "ekklesia." Ekklesia means a gathering or assembly of people. We often associate the word church with our own place of worship. Both your church and mine are ekklesia, as they are assemblies of people. However, Acts 2:47 refers to something different.

The etymology of the word Church comes from an old English word, related to a Dutch word, based on the medieval Greek, word, which means *the Lord's house*. The word Church stuck and has been used for centuries. Translators would have served us better by using the word *assembly*, as in the Young's Literal Translation,

"And the Lord was adding those being saved every day to the assembly."

When we hear the word "church" today, we know it can refer to various churches that we may not align ourselves with, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or The Church of Scientology. Similarly, in the Book of Acts, the word "Church" is used in different ways.

What about Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18 where He said, *"I will build my church"*? In English, it is recorded that way, but what He said was, *"I will build my ekklesia."* Jesus promised to build His assembly, and we see the beginning of assembly in Acts chapter 2. An assembly is being built, but it is not a church where one gains entrance *"By grace through faith and not of works."* In Acts chapter 2, we will see salvation, but not salvation by grace through faith. And therein is the difference.

On the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, something was formed. But was it the Church? We will find out in our next class what this assembly is.

What About Miracles

Many Christians today incorporate miracles into their daily lives, inspired by the Book of Acts. I, for one, believe that God can certainly work miracles. But, in certain Christian communities, miracles are discussed casually, as if they are ordinary. However, the term "miracles" implies that they are not common. In contrast to popular belief, miracles are infrequent in the Bible. When they happen, they are truly extraordinary and hold immense power. Basically, a miracle is an extraordinary event that is inexplicable in terms of ordinary natural facts.¹

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this regarding the frequency of miracles,

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Word of God: Its Nature and Content*, ed. Christiane Jurik, 3rd Edition., Ariel's Come and See Series (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2019), 30–31

“We are often told in many circles that there are always miracles throughout the Bible and, therefore, there should always be miracles today; but that...is a fallacy.

Actually, throughout the entire history of the Bible, which covered nearly four thousand years, there were only three major periods of miracles. The first period was that of the Exodus and the Wilderness Wanderings, which lasted only forty years. The second is the period of Elijah and Elisha. The third period of miracles is that of the Messiah and the apostles. Generally speaking, miracles did not happen all the time. If miracles were common elements of the human experience, they would no longer be miraculous. The nature of miracles is the concept of the extraordinary, the concept of the unusual, something that does not occur on a regular basis.”²

Finally, Dr. Fruchtenbaum gives three specific reasons miracles occurred in Scripture.

1. They affirmed a new revelation from God. The signs, wonders, and miracles of the apostles, for example. They did them to authenticate their ministry (2 Corinthians 12:12).
2. Doctrine and miracles must be in unity with each other. Doctrine can stand alone, but miracles cannot because Satan can also perform miracles. Supernatural events alone do not guarantee that they are from God. Miracles need to align with Scripture for authentication. Miracles do not prove doctrine; rather, doctrine authenticates the miracle.
3. They manifested the power of God.

So much of the misinterpretation of Acts Chapter 2 could be avoided if the reader would only apply tried-and-true rules of interpretation. Here are three:

1. When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.
2. *Do not make a doctrine out of a historical narrative.*
3. *Apply a literal reading to the passage unless the context shows otherwise.*

That brings us to Acts chapter 2. Let’s begin with verse one.

Acts 2:1-13 | Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

Verse 1 —

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come. Pentecost was one of the many feasts outlined in the Jewish Law. Pentecost refers to (*pente*) the fiftieth day or fifty days after the prior feast, which was First Fruits.

² *ibid.*

Fully means *to complete entirely. That is the fiftieth day.* The day was **fully come** after seven sabbaths had passed. Hence, the **day of Pentecost was fully come.**

Jesus ascended after forty days of teaching the apostles things about the kingdom of God (1:3). The apostles had been waiting ten days for the *promise of the Father* (1:4). **They were all with one accord in one place** (see verse 2). Notice the pronouns. The pronouns, **They** and **all**, does the pronoun **they** refer to all 120 in 1:15 or only the 12 apostles in 1:26? It may not make a difference, but then again, it might. When reading Scripture we skip words, thinking them inconsequential, but all Scripture is inspired by God, so we should strive to find out who the Scripture is referring to. My thinking at this point is that this is describing only the Apostles. We should seek accuracy, but not be dogmatic here.

Some amount of time has passed between chapter one and chapter two; at least ten days. Also, we will notice in verse 2 that the apostles no longer appear to be in the upper room where the 120 had gathered, but are now in a house (see verse 2). Whoever **“they were all with one accord”** refers to, they were still together, obediently waiting, just as Jesus had commanded them (1:4). That they were of **One accord** shows they had one passion; they were in unison.

Verse 2 —

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven. The word **heaven** is translated as *sky* or *air* in some passages. The sound was **like a mighty rushing wind**. This was something other than the normal wind, but it sounded *like* a tremendous wind. Wind in Scripture is a common indicator of the power of God and it evokes the idea of life-giving breath, or his Spirit. Consider the incredible passage in Ezekiel 37:1-12 that describes the nation of Israel coming back to life. This could be a precursor to what will happen when Israel truly comes back to life at the end of the Tribulation.

This **sound** came from above, i.e., **heaven. It filled the house.** Not necessarily the *upper room*, but a **house**. It is curious that the author, Luke, says house and not upper room. The Greek word for house is *oikos*. The upper room could have been an upper chamber of the **house**, therefore maybe more than the twelve apostles are gathered. Or, it could be only the apostles who are present in this house.

Verse 3 —

This *wind* was more than sound, it had shape, and it took the form of **cloven tongues like as of fire**. It was not **fire** but **like as of fire**, without heat, but what looked like flames shaped as divided tongues and these flames **sat upon each of them**. Artists depict flames above the apostles' heads, but the text suggests the tongues covered them, maybe even completely. Or, since **it sat upon each of them** is singular, perhaps this fire moved

through the room and settled on each of the apostles. The evidence of whatever was happening becomes clear in verse 4.

Verse 4 —

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. What it means to be *filled with the Holy Ghost* is not clear. There is speculation about what it means, but it is difficult to fully understand it. Charismatics believe that speaking in tongues is a sign of being filled with the Holy Ghost. They would say if you have not spoken in tongues, you are not filled with the Holy Spirit. As we will see, speaking in other tongues was one result of these men being filled with the Holy Ghost. The meaning is unclear. We clearly cannot make a doctrine out of what was happening.

Here is what we know: That the apostles would be filled with the Holy Ghost is what Jesus prophesied in 1:8. This filling would provide them with the power to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. One result of this filling and a means by which they would have the power to witness was they **began to speak with other tongues**. **Other** is the Greek word, *hetero*. It is often translated as *another*.

The word **Tongues** is translated from the Greek word *glossa*, which has to do with the organ in our mouth, the actual tongue. The apostles were speaking in *another tongue* other than their mother tongue (*mother tongue is a phrase often used*). This supernatural ability was given to them **as the Spirit gave them utterance**. They did not ask for this experience. They did not pray for it. They did not expect it. It was all the Spirit's work.

In First Corinthians, 12:4-11, the Spirit gave everyone in the Corinthian church a spiritual manifestation, as He willed. The writer of Hebrews (2:4) attests to God bearing witness to salvation *by signs and wonders and various miracles distributed by the Holy Ghost, according to his own will*.

Whatever is taking place in this house is all the Lord's work. The apostles are merely the instruments God will use for His glory.

Verse 5 —

There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews. In the city of Jerusalem were Jews who had moved to that city from other nations. The word **dwelling** differs from the word *sojourner*. While it is possible that these were visitors to Jerusalem who had come for the Feast of Pentecost, it is also possible (and I think more likely) these Jews may have been those who lived in Jerusalem. They were **devout men, out of every nation**. They believed the Messiah would come back, as prophesied in Daniel 9:24. A good example of this is found in the gospel of Luke, where Simeon was in Jerusalem who was *devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel* (Luke 2:25. See also Isaiah 40:1-5).

The problem with these devout men in verse 5 was that their Messiah had already come, and they missed Him —they killed Him. But in His grace, God is about to give these men another opportunity to believe.

It is important to understand that God's grace has always been given throughout Scripture. God's grace was not new. Throughout the Old Testament, God dispensed grace at will to various people. What will become evident later in Acts is that God would bring in a new dispensation of grace which would be poured out freely for all men. This grace we see early in Acts is not the dispensation of grace, since the salvation these Jews will receive requires action (works). We will develop this further in our next class.

Verse 6 —

Was noised abroad, not abroad like *across the ocean*, but like a rumor that spreads. **Noised abroad** is one Greek word, *phōnē*. As the apostles spoke in *other tongues*, the sound spread throughout the city. **The multitude came together, and were confounded...heard them speak in his own language.**

Verse 7 —

Are not all these which speak Galileans? Galileans had a particular dialect that identified them as being from the region of Galilee (Mark 14:70). Most Galileans were regarded with contempt by those living in Jerusalem (John 1:46; 7:52). Earlier in the gospels, the Pharisees would not bring themselves to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. Their prejudices caused them to reject any notion of the Messiah coming out of Galilee (while Jesus was born in Bethlehem; He grew up in Nazareth, in Galilee. They stated erroneously, "*Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*" And yet, the prophet Jonah came from Galilee (2 Kings 14:25). Ironically, when the Jews asked Jesus for a sign of whether He was the Messiah, Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39,40). A lot is going on here with prejudices and the blindness that comes from those kinds of pre-judgments. Sadly, in this case, bigotry would lead to eternal damnation.

These men living in Jerusalem were shocked by what they were hearing from these country bumpkins.

Verse 8 —

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? The word translated as **tongue** here is a different Greek word than the word *Glossa*, which we saw above. Here it is the word *dialektos*. We get our word *dialect*, which is a form of language peculiar to a specific region or social group, not necessarily an accent, but the way words are pronounced. We should take this verse at its most common sense meaning; Clearly, what is happening is not some heavenly or spiritual language, but actual languages are being spoken with the correct dialect.

Verse 9-11—

The nations represented are listed. Along with those men who *dwelt* in the city were **strangers of Rome...and proselytes**. Many lived there, but some were foreigners or people just passing through. **Proselytes** were pagan Gentiles who converted to the rules and regulations of Judaism (Mt. 23:15). The apostles spoke to the people in their own language and told them about the wonderful works of God, which may have included the virgin birth, Jesus' miracles, His death, and His resurrection/ascension.

Verse 12 —

Amazed, and were in doubt. They were astonished and perplexed by how this could be happening, not only by the language but also by what they were hearing about the *wonderful works of God*.

Verse 13 —

Others mocking. Amazement, doubt, mocking. These are typical responses. Later in Acts, we see it clearly as Paul teaches in the city of Athens (Acts 17:32-34). **These men are full of new wine** (Greek *gleukos*). There is great debate on what is meant by **new wine**, but I don't think we have to figure out what is meant. The people thought the apostles were drunk.

And we will have to wait until next time to see if they were sober or drunk.