

## **Book of Acts: In the Last Days**

**Acts 2:13-18**

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

Last week, we looked at the promised gift of the Spirit, which fulfilled John the Baptist's prophecy of One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Attended with supernatural signs, Pentecost is the beginning the undoing of Babel, the restoration of Israel spoken of in the prophets, and, eventually, the summoning of the divided nations to unity. Put differently, Pentecost is the beginning of the descent of the cosmic temple that will come down out of heaven, from God, at the end of the age. It is the beginning of consummate dwelling place of God, being with man. It is the Holy Trinity coming to dwell, in heightened fulness, in his house, his temple, the church. It is a once-for-all, foundational event in the life of the church. But its implications, as we will begin to see today, reverberate all the way down through the history of the church, even to the coming Day of the Lord.

You'll recall that upon the coming of the Spirit, and hearing the mighty works of God in their own tongues, there was amazement and perplexity, with the assembled crowd, saying to one another: What does this mean? And there were others, mocking, who said "they were full of new wine!"

This sets the stage for our text, which is (the opening portion of) the first apostolic sermon ever, the first public preaching after the ascension of Christ, and thus, the first Christian sermon. Remember that Luke tells us, in the first verse of Acts, that his (first volume) gospel was about what Jesus began to do AND to TEACH. Thus, Acts Luke's second volume), is about what Jesus, now Ascended, is continuing to do and to teach. And that teaching, comes through the mouths of the apostles, in large part through their public speeches/sermons throughout the book.

Now, these speeches are clearly not all of what was said on a given occasion. For example, at the end of this first proclamation of Peter, down in v.40, we are told: and with MANY other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them. These speeches are Luke's reliable and inspired summaries of the events, which he would have learned either from the speakers themselves, or from eyewitnesses, or from his own presence at some of these addresses.

Now, the importance of this public preaching and teaching witness should not be underestimated. There are 19 significant Christian addresses in the Book of Acts, and they take up about 25% of the text of the book. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the preached Word of God. And this morning, then, we have the privilege of being at the fountainhead, the origin, of the apostolic proclamation. With that we will make 2 points. The Last Days, and The Spirit.

## **I. The Last Days**

First, then, the last days. Peter, v.14 says, standing with the eleven, as their spokesman, lifts up his voice and addresses the assembled crowd. The verb for “addressing” the crowd is the same verb used earlier of the disciples being “given utterance” or “enabled” by the Holy Spirit, to speak in other tongues. This strongly suggests that Peter himself now speaks by the inspiration of the Spirit. He begins: Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem. We should not glide over this, its significant for a number of reasons.

First, he is speaking to Jews. Those of Judea (local Jews), and those who dwell (temporarily, for the sake of the feast of Pentecost), in Jerusalem. That is, Jews from Israel, and Jews, as we saw last week, “from every nation under heaven.” So Jewish residents and Jewish pilgrims. The gift of the Spirit, like the gospel preaching that is about to ensue, is to the Jew first, then to the Greek or Gentile. They are root, we Gentiles are the branches.

The whole program of the Book of Acts, outlined in chapter 1, verse 8, begins by witnessing in Jerusalem and Judea – and then to the ends of the earth. And we see that here. Thus, after brushing aside the ludicrous suggestion that these people are drunk, Peter says in v.16: This (the Pentecost event) is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. The first words of all Christian preaching are a citation from the (minor) prophets. Straight to the Word of God. Who would have thought that Joel chapter 2 would be a decisive text in the history of redemption?

Well, Peter does, he sees its relevance almost instantly, under the anointing of the Spirit. And he proceeds to cite the prophet at length. Verse 17: And in the last days it shall be, God declares. The gift of the Spirit means the last days, the end of the age, and thus the end of the world, are at hand. The last days are not about trying to discern geopolitical events, or connect the dots of the news to Bible prophecy, or predict the coming of Christ. The last days began when Christ appeared, and they will end when he appears again.

We have been in the last days for two thousand years. We need to learn to think theologically and not chronologically. Hebrews chapter 1 says: God spoke in many ways in the past to our fathers, but in these last days he has spoken to us in his Son. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 10, that the end of the ages have fallen upon the Christian church. James accuses the rich of laying up treasure in the

last days. Paul says that in the last days there will be much trouble, and men will go from bad to worse. Peter says that scoffers will come in the last days scoffing – asking where is the promise of his coming?

This is why the New Testament repeatedly tells us the end of all things is at hand, the judge is at the door, the Lord is near. The resurrection of the dead is underway since Christ, the firstfruits, is raised. The final judgment is beginning with the house of God.

(first word is an Eschatological word, 2 Tim 4: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season and out of season)

Christ is the last Adam, literally, the eschatos Adam. He brings the end into our time, and the Spirit is poured in the last days, for the Spirit is the power of the age to come. The new world and the new age (the new creation) are breaking in, the old age, the old world, are passing away, and the period of that overlap --- that is the period of the church's historical life – that period is the last days. And the Old Testament prophets foresaw (for example, in Hosea), that in the latter days, Israel, scattered among the nations, would be restored to its land, brought together in unity, under the Davidic King.

And eventually, they would be joined by Gentiles from among those same nations, who would be included in the fulfillment of the covenant promises, grafted onto the vine, the rich root of a renewed, and as Ezekiel would put it, a resurrected Israel. In the last days, Isaiah and Micah say, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be lifted up, as chief among the mountains, and the nations will stream to it, and be instructed by the law of the Lord. Those days, the days of the Messianic age, the days of the age to come, the days of the end of all things, those days are at hand, and they are signaled by the gift of the Spirit.

The prophets tended to see one Messianic dawning, one comprehensive coming in the last days. But, as it turns out, in Christ, that coming happens in two phases or movements, his first and his second Advent, which bracket this time, the time of the last days. The last days, and thus the end of the age, have arrived, and Jesus will be with us to the end of the age. How will he be with us?

## **II. The Spirit**

That brings us to our second point, the Spirit. Joel predicted that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. The language of “pouring out” speaks of an abundance, a profusion, a downpour of divine generosity. A New Covenant gift of the Spirit, which does not deny that the Spirit was at work before this, but which is greater in glory, in fulness, in power and extent, than anything

experienced under the old covenant. The ministry of the Spirit, Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 3, far exceeds the glory of the ministry of Moses. Notice, then, a few things about this definitive, eschatological gift of the Spirit. It is lavished, poured out on all flesh. "All" here does not literally mean "all." It means Jews and Gentiles. Here its Jews from among the nations, soon it will be given to Gentiles from among the nations.

The gift of the Spirit is catholic, universal, no longer restricted to some people in one nation as before. And this means that all of God's people have been baptized in the Spirit. We have all drunk of one Spirit, Paul says. There is no such thing as a distinct second blessing of Spirit baptism after conversion. All Christians have received the Pentecostal Spirit. And, in the New Covenant, ultimately, they shall all know God and be taught of God. The Spirit is given, the text says, to God's people regardless of sex. To men and to women alike. I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. That is, they will publicly speak forth Spirit-inspired declarations of the wonders of God. Even as Peter is prophesying here. Sons and daughters, for there were women present in the upper room when the Spirit fell.

The point here is NOT that every last person will be a prophet, but that prophesying will be pervasive among men and women. In the Old Testament Miriam was a prophetess, Hannah prophesied, Huldah was a prophetess (2 Kings), as was Deborah. Anna is noted as a prophetess in the temple in Luke's infancy narrative, and Mary certainly speaks prophetically in her Magnificat. So there is precedent for women speaking the Word of God, but the New Testament will see this in greater profusion. In Acts itself we will see, four daughters of Phillip, all prophetesses, And women were clearly praying and prophesying in the church at Corinth.

This is a great democratization of the life of God. And it's part of the appeal of Christianity to women --- then and now. The gift of the Spirit does not follow the rules of the patriarchy. He blows where he wills. Unbound by our conventions and the traditions of men. Sons and daughters are both now full members of the royal priesthood. They both have direct, unmediated access, apart from any human hierarchy, to the heavenly sanctuary. The only mediator between God and his people is Jesus Christ. Sons and daughters are anointed priests and kings, and now, by the Pentecostal Spirit, they are anointed prophets. The Spirit does not discriminate on the basis of sex. Nor does he discriminate on the basis of age. Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Male and female, young and old.

And finally, the Spirit does not discriminate on the basis of class or social status. And here, for good measure, gender is mentioned again. Even on my male and female servants. The culture may think of them as slaves, or household servants, but God dignifies them with the title "my" servants. Male and female. In those days – what days? The last days – in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, and

they shall prophesy. Long before Joel prophesied, Moses, in Numbers 11 (our first lesson), had the Spirit taken from him by the Lord, at the Tent of Meeting, and distributed to 70 elders, who, upon receiving the Spirit, prophesied. Two others, who were not at the tent of meeting, also received the Spirit and prophesied.

And Joshua, jealous to protect the honor of Moses as mediator, protests that these two, since they weren't in the authorized place with Moses, should be forbidden to prophesy. Do you recall Moses' response to Joshua? Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" Moses wanted everyone to receive the Spirit, and he wanted everyone to prophesy. What he prayed or wished for, what Joel prophesied about, Peter announces, is now at hand. Men and women. Old and young. Male and female servants of the Lord. And soon, Jew and Gentile. On them, on all flesh, the Spirit is lavished, and they become vehicles, instruments of the revelation of God. Of dreams, visions, prophecy.

There are two things we can learn from this text. First, it is now the last days. And it has been the last days since the coming of Christ, and it shall be the last days to the end of the age, when Christ comes in glory. Sometimes people ask if we are in the end times, and I usually say we have been in them for 2000 years. If you mean: are we in the last days of the last days, about that I have no idea. But it's of little to no import if we understand that we always, already live at the end, in the last days. If we grasp that the coming kingdom has now come. If we grasp that the gift of the Spirit is an eschatological gift --- a firstfruits of the full harvest at the end of the age, a pledge or down payment of our future full inheritance.

In short, to grasp what it means for the Spirit to be given in the last days, is to become an eschatological person. A person who grasps that to live out of Christ, the giver of the Spirit, is to live out of, and by, the age to come. And this is Christian sanity. This saves us from crazed end-time predictions and speculations. Those, it turns out, undervalue what it means to live at the end of the ages. And it also saves us from a Christianity that is too this-worldly, a Christianity which is not pervaded by the fire of the eschaton in every fiber of its being.

Second, this passage cannot help but stir in us, a desire for all, for all, to deploy their spiritual gifts. For this passage is profoundly democratic, and it breaks a lot of our stereotypes. For all, male and female, young and old, all get the same highly valued revelatory gifts. Women don't get womanly gifts, while men get manly gifts. All flesh gets the same exalted order of gift here. And whatever that means today; however we want to parse it, and its complex and we can't just draw straight line, still it probably requires some rethinking and movement outside of our little traditional boxes.

But, leaving that aside, we need to see all the saints, as gifted, anointed members of the royal priesthood, or what we might call the prophethood of all believers... all the saints, called side by side to declare the wonderful works of God, the praises of the one who, by the Pentecostal Spirit, has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. In these last days, the Spirit is given for this. Amen.

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