

Acts chapter 2

Notes from New Interpreter's Bible Commentary on Acts beginning at page 52. Additional resource is Acts by Hermenaia and The Jewish Annotated New Testament Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler.

Pentecost which means fiftieth is 50 days after Passover 7 full weeks and a day after Passover.

This completes the Easter story, for the promised Spirit comes. The Spirit is what enables the community to carry on the work and will of Jesus.

Vvs 1-13

The importance Jesus gives the Spirit puts significant importance on this portion of the story. We are people reborn of the Spirit.

Today's dramatic encounter helps us to feel and experience a taste of what it is to receive the Spirit and how the disciples witnessed the coming of God's Spirit. For Luke, without the coming of the Spirit there would be no "rest of the story".

Yet this is a rather short narrative. It is powerful, but concise and Luke tells it more fully than others. Paul mentions it in 1 Cor 15:6 and 15: 45 Paul tells of the Spirit coming to 500 and the fact that the Spirit is life giving. John mentions the Lord bestowing the Spirit upon his disciples.

When the day of Pentecost had come the entire community is baptized in the Spirit. The day begins with a group gathered in a house. Somehow the noise within becomes loud enough to attract attention. They don't hear speaking in tongues as some speak it (glossolalia- ecstatic speech) or even Aramaic, but each hears in their own native tongues. All speak in unison and somehow they know what the other is speaking.

The significance is the inbreaking of heaven into human affairs.

Note that the Spirit is not mere wind or flame but to describe the Spirit in terms that humans can comprehend we are told it sounds like a mighty wind and the Spirit appeared as tongues of fire.

The Spirit's power will enable the gospel to be spread to all nations. The speaking of foreign languages is a foretelling of how the message will be spread. Fire as a symbol was used throughout the contemporary culture to proclaim the prophetic was about to happen. The spirit of prophecy awakens in fire.

Jesus of course used fire as a purifying force and I think the two go hand in hand. The Spirit thus proclaims that people will speak and hear prophecy but also they will think of God in new and prophetic ways.

The Spirit gives insight to those it fills. True knowledge replaces guesswork and conjecture. With the Spirit we are able to interpret Scripture truthfully. Let's also be clear that the Spirit is not the private property of the 12 or even the faithful gathered on Pentecost. It is a shared Spirit a permanently shared Spirit. Luke emphasizes this by repetition of they were all together and in a whole house in which all were sitting.

So, when the Spirit came they spoke in foreign languages unknown to them and understood one another.

Later in Paul's teaching the gifts of the Spirit are used to empower Christian ministry and Christian formation. It is Paul that speaks of this special language (glossolalia) given to a few believers by the Spirit to lift up or edify a congregation. This is not the gift given in Acts.

"the Jews" are referenced 50 times in Acts. They are center stage. They are often classified as devout. Mighty acts of God begin with faithful Jews for Luke.

Further reflections on the first 13 verses.

When the day of Pentecost had come – signifies God fulfilling prophecy. Earlier Jesus told his apostles that God has "marked" the crucial dates of salvations history (1:7). Pentecost is one of those dates.

The Spirit is poured out again in Acts to signify God's continuing faithfulness.

God's Spirit is poured on a community gathered not on individuals in isolation.

We tend to worship God as Father and Son, but with this day of Pentecost it becomes obvious what a significant role the Spirit has in the Trinity.

The miracle of speaking in other languages occasions proclamation – which is the community's vocation. Language communicates the wonders of God.

I think it is kind of fun to hear that in vs 7 we are told "are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" in other words they are speaking foreign languages with a local accent, much like we speak foreign languages as where we come from.

Vvs 14-41

Peter's initial response to his mocking audience is to quote a prophecy of Joel 2: 28-32 – it proves that the outpouring of the Spirit is the inaugural event in Israel's last days during which everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Signs and wonders begins to play a large role in the narrative.

We will also see the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to the nations and this is scripted by Scripture's prophecy according to God's purpose.

The tension between Jew and Gentile and the "Gentilization" of the faith takes center stage.

Almost 1/3 of Acts consists of speeches. Most are meant to convince the audience of the gospel's central message: God's resurrection of Jesus confirms him as Messiah and through him God has acted faithfully to the biblical promise to save the world from sin and death. The speeches are missionary in nature – proclaiming God's truth to the world. Some of Peter's in particular are commentary on Scripture to a people steeped in Scripture. One critically important point is the Peter begins to take on an authoritative voice and is the one to introduce the idea that Jesus is the embodiment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant.

So beginning at verse 14.

Peter takes a place of authority to address the others of the 12 and the rest of the audience.

Much like Jesus --- Peter now speaks with authority and says – listen to me. The Greek word here used for listen literally means – let me place it (God's word) in your ears.

Peter defends the disciples against charges of intoxication. Apparently in popular culture of the time 9 o'clock in the morning was an hour inhabited only by those who intend no good.

Peter points out the prophecy of Joel (3:1-5). Peter rewrites the prophecy in multiple ways. After these things becomes in the last days. And he adds God declares. In the last days becomes a catch phrase for the in breaking of the Spirit and the inauguration of a new reality of the Kingdom of God.

There is an inclusiveness to Peter's proclamation. I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.

The Spirit is preparing the way for the church's missionary work. This is a change from OT thought in which the day of the Lord was a day of retribution. Now it is a promise of empowerment.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord means everyone. Jew and Gentile.

Repentance becomes a significant theme for Peter. Repentance is metanoia a turning 180 degrees from sin to God. It is a radical change of mind. Repentance is for all and the call to baptism is for those individual Jews who convert to Jesus' way. Baptism is initiation into a community that lives within the powerful realm of God's Spirit. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin.

For Peter Joel's prophecy is the announcement of salvation and he wants to make sure the people understand Jesus is part of the prophecy. There is also a very reciprocal aspect to salvation. God calls everyone into the blessings of salvation (forgiveness, Spirit, adoption) which is experienced by all who call on the name of the Lord.

Note that the point of the 3000 that were baptized, is not to give an accurate accounting, but to make a good impression on the reader regarding Peter's proclamation.

REFLECTIONS

Luke believes that Scripture, all Scripture is divinely given. Thus it is binding on humanity. Prophecy is central. Thus having Peter use prophecy to back his claims is important for Luke.

The Spirit of prophecy is poured out in these last days. These last days are days set apart for mission. God has a mission and God's mission has a church.

A large part of Acts are defenses against attack of the new faith. The defenses are God centered (we would say theological)

Repent and be baptized.

Repentance is the internal and intellectual act of exchanging old beliefs for new ones.

Vvs 42-47

Summary of community life and mission.

Normative matters of faith begin to be discussed.

The church shares a common life. We share apostolic teaching, breaking of bread and prayer. Apostles have the knowledge of Jesus residing in them as well as being the epicenter of the Spirit's power. The apostles do signs and wonders. The Spirit gives power.

Fellowship (koinonia) is used only in Acts, but for Paul it is important. The community is transformed into fellowship. The community shares common values and beliefs. According to a biblical pattern of behavior founded in Jubilee, the redistribution of proceeds from sold property reflects the social character of God's kingdom, where all share equally in the good gifts of God. The breaking of bread tends to have a sacramental connection for us, but in the context of Acts, it was probably more a reminder of the Jewish practice of sharing a meal after temple worship. The Spirit allows or empowers them to distribute food without care for rank or privilege.

Praising God is imperative.