

The Miracle of Pentecost

"Astounding!" "Dumbfounding!" "What is the meaning of this?" "What is happening?" These were the startled expressions coming from the mouths of a crowd of several thousand on the Day of Pentecost nearly two thousand years ago. Those who uttered these words of astonishment were mostly Jews and proselytes, with a sprinkling of Romans and other gentiles among them, who were gathered in Jerusalem for the *Feast of Weeks*, or the fiftieth day following the offering of the wave sheaf. All knew it was the "Feast of the Firstfruits," and that it was celebrated "on the morrow after the seventh Sabbath" following the wave sheaf ceremony. But none had the slightest inkling of what was to happen on this momentous day. They were shocked, startled, puzzled! Then, by the thousands, they tearfully crowded around Christ's apostles, asking to be baptized! They repented in droves at the inspired preaching of the apostles, who wore flickering, brilliant crowns of flame! Read, in your own Bible, of the *miracles* that took place on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection—of the *miracle* of Pentecost!

by Garner Ted Armstrong

A swarthy trader from Egypt, who was half Jewish, began speaking in a sardonic whisper to the Arabian standing next to him. "They have got to be drunk with new wine!" he said.

The Arabian watched as the trader made a circling motion around his head with his index finger and rolled his eyes derisively. He didn't understand a word the Egyptian–Jew had said, but he got the message.

A Phrygian camel driver laughed, gestured toward the disciples who were in full view, and said, "I'd like to know how they do it--I mean, how is it that they manage to have all those flames flickering around their heads, and not a hair singed?"

Neither of the other men understood the Phrygian, until a Levite from Media, who was skilled in all three languages, translated for each of them.

"They can't be drunk, seeing it's only about 9:00 in the morning, and there isn't a wineshop open in the city--but tell me this, how is it that each of you are understanding what these men have been saying, when they are speaking in *my* language?"

The Egyptian looked startled, and the Arabian's mouth dropped open. The Phrygian camel driver laughed, "Oh, no. Impossible! They, every one of them, have been speaking in *my* tongue--which is surprising, for not many in Jerusalem know the dialect of Phrygia!"

The word had spread like wildfire throughout the city: "A miracle! A miracle! Some of the followers of that man Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah, are standing there with their *hair* on fire, and speaking in about *sixteen different languages* and all of us are hearing them in our *own dialect!*"

When the excited babble of voices came to Peter, after most of the other disciples had addressed the crowd, Peter stood up, gestured for silence. His hair was blazing; flickering tongues of flame were leaping over his head like a golden corona; yet, there was no damage to his head or hair!

"Men of Judaea, and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let this be understood! Listen to my words! These men are not drunken, like you think they are, seeing it is only the third hour of the day.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,

I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

The Phrygian nudged the Arabian, who looked at the Median Levite. "Did you understand that?" The Phrygian asked no one in particular. The linguist from Media rapidly asked each the same question, and all nodded vigorously, their eyes wide with wonderment.

"Something is going on here--something I can't explain!" the Levite said to them. "We'd better listen!"

Can any of us truly imagine what it must have been like for the large crowd of people from all over the Mediterranean world to have been assembled in Jerusalem on that momentous day? Can we picture, for even a moment, the astonishing sight, the astounding words that were spoken, or the excitement and wonderment that swept over the audience?

One of the most stupendous miracles of all time was taking place before their astonished eyes, and filling their ears. It was the miracle of Pentecost, when God's Holy Spirit was first made available to the human race; when the "other Comforter" Jesus Christ promised (John 14:26) was sent to mankind.

Why Did It Happen On Pentecost?

But could not Christ have sent the Holy Spirit on any day He chose? Pentecost was a full fifty days past the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and therefore a good fifty– three or –four days after Christ's resurrection!

Why, then, were Christ's disciples meeting together on this annual Sabbath, which had been known as the "Feast of Weeks," or the "Feast of the Firstfruits"?

First, because Christ had commanded them to do so. Luke wrote, of the "apostles whom He had chosen: To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, 'Which,' saith He, 'Ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.' When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, 'Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:2-6).

As an aside, notice carefully that these young men did not envision a globe-girdling kingdom. They did not imagine for one moment the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world (Revelation 20:4), but were thinking, instead, of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel to its ancient glories, as it had been during the days of Solomon.

Christ answered, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.

"But ye shall *receive* POWER, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea [a Roman province around Jerusalem], and in Samaria [a northern province, inhabited by a race of people called "Samaritans" who were forcibly emigrated by the Babylonian empire many years earlier], and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

Obviously, the disciples understood by Jesus' words that they were to *remain in Jerusalem* (verse 4), and to *wait* for the promise of the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were *all* with *one accord* [there was *peace* and *harmony* here; complete agreement; an absence of competition and strife], in *one place* [it was obviously a very large room of some kind] and SUDDENLY [they didn't expect it, and it was startling!] there came a *sound from heaven* as of a rushing mighty wind [like a tornado, or hurricane], and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:1,2).

They were probably sitting at tables laden with food, enjoying the *Feast of Firstfruits*, just as they had all their lives. This was the day which began to be called the "fiftieth," which is what "pentecost" means, in the Greek language.

Why the "fiftieth"?

Let the Word of God answer: "And ye shall *count* unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven *sabbaths* shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number [count off] *fifty days*" (Leviticus 23:15,16).

Seven sabbaths (seven full weeks, each ending with the Sabbath) equal forty-nine days. The morrow *after* the seventh Sabbath is the *fiftieth* day, and therefore "Pentecost" in the Greek language.

Many years after the Holy Spirit came on that momentous Pentecost, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.

"But I will tarry in Ephesus *until Pentecost*" (1 Corinthians 16:7,8). There was a large church at Ephesus, and Paul, writing in the late 50s A.D., about *thirty years* after the ascension of Christ, explained to the Corinthian church why he must remain for a time, delaying his arrival in Corinth. He wanted to remain in Ephesus "*until Pentecost*."

It was no accident that Jesus Christ chose *Pentecost*, or the "Feast of the Firstfruits," to send the Holy Spirit upon His apostles, and to make God's Holy Spirit available to mankind.

The First of the Firstfruits

Jesus Christ was the *first begotten* among all mankind! Never before had a human being walked this earth with the *Spirit of the Father* dwelling fully within him!

Jesus Christ had the preeminence. He was *first*. Paul wrote, "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee'? And again, 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a son'? And again, when He bringeth the *first begotten* into the world, He saith, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Hebrews 1:5,6).

Jesus Christ was not only the *firstborn* of Mary (Matthew 1:25), but He was the *first begotten* of God the Father in the history of the world.

The "firstlings" of the flock, as well as the firstborn among Israel, were holy to God (See Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:12). The right of primogeniture, or the birthright, was passed on from firstborn son to firstborn son. As the very *first* to be begotten of God, Jesus Christ was the very *first* among the *firstfruits of salvation* of all the world.

Paul wrote of Christ, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* of every creature: For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in the earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or

principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him; And He is BEFORE [ahead of, not only in time, but in authority] all things, and by Him all things consist (read Hebrews, the first chapter). And He is the head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the *firstborn from the dead*; that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:14-18).

When Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary, He became *human*. He was made flesh. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

"And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:14-16). Later, Paul wrote, "Who in the days of *His flesh*, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" (Hebrews 5:7,8).

As a flesh-and-blood human being, Jesus Christ was not *composed of spirit*, but composed of *flesh*, from the elements of this earth, just as you and I are fleshly human beings.

But there was a difference. Jesus Christ was not only begotten of God by a great divine miracle, He was imbued with the Holy Spirit of God from birth. God's Holy Spirit was within Christ's mind and nature from the beginning. He was the first to be begotten of God from the *flesh*, and He was the first to be begotten of God by the *Spirit*.

God's great plan of salvation is revealed by seasonal progression in nature—by the *harvests* that provide food for man. There were two harvests in Palestine (the spring barley harvest, and the harvest of the autumn) about the time of the Feast of "Ingathering," or the Feast of Tabernacles.

When God called Israel out of slavery, He revealed to them that the first month of the sacred year was the "month of green ears," or *Abib*, when the first tender shoots of the barley plants were emerging from the soil.

He told them they were to offer a special offering to God when they entered into the promised land; an offering of thanksgiving for the fruit of that bounteous place. He said, "When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf [an armload of grain] of the *firstfruits* of your harvest unto the priest:

"And he shall *wave the sheaf* before the Eternal, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Leviticus 23:10,11).

The "wave sheaf offering" pictured the *risen Christ*, now cut off from the earth, *resurrected* from the tomb, being presented to God as the *firstfruits* of God's harvest of all mankind. Fifty days later was the spring barley harvest. The *firstfruits* would be harvested then, commencing with the *Feast of the Firstfruits*, or the Feast of Weeks.

Jesus Christ is the central figure of all this symbolism. How strange it is that mainstream professing Christianity utterly *ignores* all of God's annual sabbaths, with their rich typology! Setting aside any argument about whether the large denominations should be *keeping these days*, why do not their pastors at least *educate* their congregations about the rich *meaning* of them?

Christ is symbolized by the Paschal lamb; by the sheaf of the wave offering; by the firstfruits; by trumpets, which herald His return to earth; by the sin-offering and "scapegoat" ceremony of Atonement, which picture Christ's sacrificial death and His work to disqualify and eject Satan; by Tabernacles, for He "tabernacled in the human flesh," and by the "Last Great Day," for He is the *Judge* Who will judge all mankind (Revelation 20:11).

Each of the annual holy days pictures *Christ* and His atoning work in one way or another. Why not teach them, even if only as history and typology? One would be prone to think the pastors of thousands of churches *studiously avoid* teaching anything about God's seasonal festivals, for fear their congregations might ask them, "Then why don't we *keep* them?"

It was most obvious to Christ's chosen disciples that they would experience the stupendous miracle of receiving God's Holy Spirit, His *power*, on the "fiftieth" day, or the Feast of Sabbaths! It was the next holy day on the sacred calendar following Christ's final appearance to them; only about ten days from that wondrous event!

It was not only a day when God the Father *begat thousands of children*, it was a *birthday* of sorts, as well!

Jesus Christ Builds His Church

Jesus Christ had said to Peter, "I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [Greek: *petros*, the masculine, which means, a "pebble," or "a stone"], and upon this ROCK [Greek: *petra*, the feminine, which means a huge massif, a whole mountain of stone] I will build My church, and the gates of hell [*hades*, meaning "the grave"] shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

This vitally important verse requires careful study; careful comparison with the many other scriptures which shed light upon Jesus' statement.

Millions believe Jesus was saying He would build His church *upon Peter*, as if Peter were to become the "chief apostle," or the first pope. But the Greek words, as well as many, many other divinely-inspired scriptures of your Bible make it clear this was not the case.

Jesus Christ is the HEAD of His true church, not Peter. First, remember that the Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*, and means "an assembly," or "a group," or "called-out ones." The word means a group of *people*, and has nothing to do whatsoever with a building, a temple, a cathedral, a steeple, or an organizational hierarchy. Christ prophesied that His group of called-out ones would be small, scattered, *persecuted*.

He said to His disciples, "fear not, *little* flock," when he promised them the Kingdom.

Notice Who is the *Head* of Christ's church: "Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world [age], but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the HEAD over all things to the church, Which is *His body*, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Only a few verses later, Paul wrote concerning the gentiles, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the *apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ Himself being the *chief corner stone*; in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Jesus Christ is the HEAD of His group of called-out ones, not Peter, or any man—not then, not down through history, and not *now*!

Notice further: "And He is the *head* of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

Jesus Christ is the *ROCK* upon Whom He established His church, not Peter! "Because I will publish the

name of the Eternal: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the ROCK, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment" (Deuteronomy 32:4). A few verses later, God says, "then he [Israel] forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the ROCK of his salvation....Of the ROCK that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forsaken God that formed thee" (verses 15,18).

David said God was his "rock of refuge" and referred to Christ as the "*Rock*" almost two dozen times in the Psalms.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea: And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual ROCK that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Jesus Christ built His true church on the Day of Pentecost, in the early summer of A.D. 31 in Palestine. HE was Head of His church then, and He is Head of that *same* church, wherever there are "called-out ones" who are joined to Christ through the Holy Spirit today.

Christ had told His disciples they would receive *power* when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Now, notice the amazing manifestations of that *power* Christ sent from heaven:

The Power of Preaching the Gospel

What was the kind of *power* Jesus Christ sent? First, the startled disciples and the other people gathered on that Pentecost nearly two thousand years ago heard a *powerful sound*. To them, and to Luke, who may well have been there, it sounded like "*a rushing, mighty wind!*"

Time and time again, when our television news reports terrible tornado damage, those who escaped with their lives, but who may have experienced terrible damage, or lost their homes, will say, "It sounded just like a freight train!" Anyone who has been close to the railroad tracks when a freight train thundered by will well remember the sound! With a *roar*, a deep, thunderous rumble, like a *hurricane*, the Holy Spirit of God *filled the room!*

Would you have been astonished? I certainly would have! They seemed to hear the whole room *filled* with this roaring, powerful, mighty sound!

Suddenly, as they were looking about in wide-eyed surprise and wonderment, *fire* seemed to materialize in the air! Flickering, leaping, dancing tongues of *flame* separated, came down from the air above the disciples, and seemed to *settle on their heads*, like fiery *crowns*; blazing, bright yellow and orange *fire* was now clearly visible atop the head of each one of Christ's twelve apostles!

Yet, not a hair of their heads was singed. What would have been our reaction if we had been there? Words like shock, surprise, astonishment, perplexity, and wonderment come to mind.

Naturally, when the first one of Christ's twelve apostles stood and beckoned to the crowd, a great *silence* must have immediately filled the room!

Apprehensive, shocked, astonished, perhaps fearful, the crowd would have given these men their *undivided attention!*

Talk about *power!* It was not necessary for God to use some "marketing techniques" on this Day of Pentecost. No attractive advertising, or clever phrases, or radio or television ads, or printed pages were used. No, this was the *power of God Almighty*, and it immediately *got their whole attention!*

Quickly, some of their number ran out. Wildly shouting, gesticulating, they ran into the streets of Jerusalem (Acts 2:6), calling out to everyone about the unbelievable *miracles* they had seen and heard. Gradually, the crowd swelled, until there were *thousands* present!

Then, repeated hundreds of times, the scenario you read at the beginning of this booklet took place. "Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were *confounded*, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all *amazed* and marvelled, saying one to another, 'Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue [language], wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes [gentiles who had converted to Judaism], Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in *our tongues* [our native languages and dialects] the wonderful works of God'" (Acts 2:6-11).

This was *intelligible speech*. These were spoken and written *languages*; at least sixteen of them in all, some of which were similar, but others of which were completely different, as Greek and Hebrew are completely different! This was not a riotous demonstration of gibberish. The apostles were in *control* of what they said.

Paul instructed the Corinthians, "If any man speak in a language [the word "unknown" is italicized, and was supplied by translators. It does not appear in the original text], let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that *by course* [meaning, "one at a time," so each can be heard and understood—not all three talking at once]; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, *let him keep silence* in the church: and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets [inspired preachers, or speakers] speak two or three, and let the other judge [listen, and evaluate]. If anything be revealed to another [prophet] that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy *one by one* [one at a time, not in a babble of confusion], that *all may learn* [from intelligible speech!], and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are *subject* to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:27-33).

Clearly, the format for worship services in the early church was different from most church services today. Two or three different speakers addressed the people, probably in more of a "Bible study" manner, or tone. They spoke *one after another*. If one had the *gift of speaking in foreign languages* (not "unknown," meaning no language at all, but gibberish), he was welcome to speak, so long as there was a *translator* present, to make known to others what he was saying.

This was a *gift of the Holy Spirit* for the purpose of *evangelism* in the early church, for many were Greeks, Romans, and people from all over the Roman empire. Many were bilingual, or even trilingual.

A careful reading of this important chapter shows that, while God may have given the gift of *languages* to a few in the church, He did *not* repeat the miracle of Pentecost, for the miracle in Corinth was *in the speaking only*, and not in the hearing. Otherwise, no translator would have been necessary.

This is what we have learned: that any prophet or preacher who had the gift of languages was in complete *control* of that gift—it was "subject" to him (verse 32); that no more than two or three were allowed to speak at any worship service; that each should speak one at a time; that, if the speaking of one triggered an important thought in the mind of another, the first was to desist, and the other could then speak; and that any prophet or preacher who had the gift of languages could *not* speak in a different language unless a *translator* was present, who could help others understand.

Paul said, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues [*glossa* in the Greek, meaning "languages"] more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding [Greek: "the understanding of me; that is, being *understood*], that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a [foreign] language" (1 Corinthians 14:18,19).

The thousands present on that miraculous Day of Pentecost *heard intelligible speech!* The miracle was both in the speaking, *and* in the hearing!

They plainly exclaimed to each other, "We do hear them speak in *our languages* the WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD" (Acts 2:11).

But some mocked in derision. Some laughed, ridiculed the apostles, no doubt thinking the mighty roaring wind and the leaping tongues of flickering fire on the apostles' heads was some kind of trick.

They said, "These men are full of new wine!" (Acts 2:13).

Why would they say such a thing?

It is very important to note that God's Word plainly tells us these apostles spoke *one at a time!* They spoke in clear, intelligible language. In their own minds, they were speaking in their own language, their own Galilean dialect. But in the *miracle of Pentecost*, God caused their speech to be heard in about *sixteen different languages*.

Those who mocked were not mocking because of the manner in which the apostles *acted*, the way they deported themselves. No, they mocked because of *what they were saying!*

The Message of Pentecost

What was it the apostles said which would cause some in the crowd to ridicule them, to claim they had to be "drunk"?

We do not have the record of any of the statements made by the other eleven, who spoke prior to Peter. We have only a portion of what Peter said, as recorded by Luke, in Acts, the second chapter.

Read slowly and carefully Acts 2:14–40 to remind yourself of Peter's inspired message. Luke may have written it down in either Aramaic, an Hebrew dialect, or Greek—or both. It has come down to us through the Greek, Latin, and finally Old English tongues, into our modern English. But it was being understood, as Peter spoke, by people from Arabia, Egypt, Rome, and many, many other cities and countries!

Peter denied they were drunk, and insisted this was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of God's Holy Spirit being poured out "upon all flesh" (verse 17).

Then, he came quickly to his main point: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God [God *allowed* Christ's death], ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (verses 22-24).

Immediately, Peter began emphasizing the *resurrection of Jesus Christ!* He continued stating this powerful truth in many ways, over and over again!

Notice: "For David speaketh concerning Him, 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades*, the grave], neither wilt Thou

suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (verses 24-26).

Peter then insisted David was *dead*, that he was buried, and that his sepulchre remained with them until that time (verse 29).

Notice how many times Peter spoke of the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ: "God had sworn with an oath to him [David], that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would RAISE UP Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the RESURRECTION of Christ....This Jesus hath God RAISED UP, whereof we are all witnesses" (verses 25-32).

After speaking powerfully, his voice ringing with authority and conviction (for, after all, he was telling them what he had *seen with his own eyes*, what he knew, what he had experienced—not something he merely "believed" to be true, but something he *knew* had actually happened!), he told them what it was *they* were experiencing—the MIRACLE OF PENTECOST!

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath now shed forth this, which *ye now SEE* and hear" (Acts 2:33). Peter was speaking to them with a brilliant crown of *flames* atop his head and no doubt pointed to the flames as he spoke.

Could there be any more powerful witness?

They were experiencing *miracles from God!* They could SEE the flickering flames. They had *heard* the mighty rushing sound, like a tornado or hurricane. They could hear each of the apostles speaking in *their own tongues*, though there were over a dozen different languages represented!

Peter concluded this powerful discourse by saying, "For David is *not* ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, 'The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ!" (Acts 2:34-36).

Now, the majority of those who were being *astonished* by these awesome manifestations of God's Spirit were truly listening. Now, following the inspired, powerful words of Peter, as they saw the flames leaping about his head and glanced at the other eleven with their amazing crowns of fire, they were *shocked!* Suddenly, they KNEW!

Thoughts came rushing back. Some of them had been among the crowds, shouting "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Some had watched Him drag that heavy pale along the streets, and fall under the load. Some had seen the livid, bloody wounds all over His body; the vicious crown of thorns that had ripped His scalp. All had *been frightened* and had *wondered* about that incredible dark, dark day, when it had become like midnight, and a mysterious darkness had settled over the land; wondered, and been fearful, when a *great earthquake* had shaken the city! They had heard the wildest rumors! A relative had said, "Grandpa is ALIVE! He came walking into the house only an hour ago (Matthew 27:52,53).

They had heard that the *veil in the Temple* that covered the entry into the Holy of Holies had *ripped asunder* when the big quake shook the land.

Now, their consciences were screaming at them! Now, they suddenly *knew!* He really WAS the promised Messiah! He really WAS the Son of God! They had *killed Christ!* They had *murdered the Savior!*

Some began crying. Many shuffled about, looking down in shame. Tears sprang to their eyes, and their hands trembled. Some began shouting out their anguish to Peter and the apostles and to each other, torn by shame and self-revulsion at what they had done. "Men and brethren, *what shall we do?*" they asked.

"Then Peter said unto them, REPENT, and be *baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! For the promise is unto *you*, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38,39).

What a fabulous, gracious, merciful *promise!* They could be forgiven! Forgiven for having taken part in *mob violence*; in having participated in an illegal, hateful murder!

But Peter continued to speak. He continued to assure them of God's mercy, of the fact that even Jesus Christ Himself, Who was ALIVE, was willing to forgive them! "And with *many other words* did he testify and exhort, saying, 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation!'" (verse 40).

Were some dropping to their knees? Were some hugging one another, crying? Were some lifting their hands to heaven, with tears in their eyes? Were some approaching the twelve, eyes wide with wonderment, trembling, asking them if they could be baptized? Yes, all of this, and more.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about *three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41).

The Church of God Is Born

There were pools, baths, and vessels of water for camels and horses aplenty in Jerusalem. All that Pentecost afternoon, Christ's disciples were very, very busy.

By the score, and by the hundreds, the excited, weeping, eager people came forward to the disciples. As each confessed his or her sins, tearfully and pleadingly expressing how deeply sorry they were for all they had done—for their calloused disregard of Jesus Christ and for their own part in contributing to His death—the disciples quickly lowered them into the water, then brought them up.

Some of those doing the baptizing, including Andrew, Peter's brother, had been students of John the Baptist. They knew exactly how it was done. Andrew had been present when Jesus Himself had been baptized of John (Luke 3:29), and had heard John say, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Luke wrote, "Then they that gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread [eating meals], and in prayers. And fear [awe, wonderment, amazement—not fright, or terror] came upon every soul: and *many wonders* and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:41-43).

We are not told what these astonishing signs and wonders were, but they were no doubt related to the *necessities* of the times. Was the miracle of loaves and fishes repeated? Were there miraculous healings? Did the gift of speaking in foreign languages continue? No doubt it did.

Remember, all these people who had flocked into Jerusalem were pilgrims, joining the local citizens for the *Feast of Weeks*, or Pentecost. They were knowledgeable of the Law. They *knew* about God's annual sabbaths, and they must have known many of the prophecies, such as Isaiah 52 and 53, and many of the Psalms, which foretold a new *Messiah*.

Now, as God opened their minds by the power of His Holy Spirit, they suddenly began to *see*, to *understand*, the marvelous truths that had been hidden from them before.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:42-45).

They wanted nothing so much as *being together*, these newly-begotten members of God's church. They wanted to ask endless questions, and to eagerly hear the answers; to listen to the astonishing recollections of the apostles who had spent three and one-half years with Jesus Christ; to hear of His miracles, of how He had walked on water, and healed the deaf and blind.

Because they remained far longer than they had planned, they sold possessions, and willingly shared all they had with those who were not as well off. This was not some early form of "communism," but an eager *sharing*, a generous spirit of *giving*, brought on by their deep conversion and their wondrous newfound knowledge of God's Word. Had not Jesus Christ taught that one should give to another?

But this first great day, the Day of Pentecost, was only the beginning of God's church! Notice: "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house [from place to place; margin: "at home"], did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily *such as were being saved*" (Acts 2:46,47).

What a wondrous time! There were no doubt a few of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and members of other religious sects who were converted at the same time. They came from all walks of life; some of them were wealthy, and many were poor. To have journeyed from so many points of the compass indicates that many had ample funds to sustain them on a trip of great distance, and no small duration.

No wonder, then, that Almighty God chose the *Feast of Weeks*, or the *Feast of Firstfruits*, to send His Holy Spirit upon these first converts. They would *never forget* these amazing experiences!

For the rest of their lives, they would be able to see, in their vivid memories, the leaping flames of fiery crowns atop the heads of Christ's apostles; to remember that roaring sound; to remember the astonishing signs, wonders, and miracles they saw and heard!

Thus it was that when thousands of these newly-begotten children of God returned to their homes, each was like a *spiritual ambassador*, to excitedly inform their loved ones, their neighbors and friends, of all they had seen and heard. Without the slightest doubt, their powerful witness helped spread the gospel of Jesus Christ *all over that part of the known world* within only a few months!

A *church* had been born!

In a matter of a few hours, by the power of God, *thousands* had been deeply *converted*, convicted of sin, made willing to broken-heartedly *repent of sin*!

But even greater things were to happen in a matter of days.

More Amazing Miracles, Then Arrest, and Jail!

A short while later, Peter and John were returning to the Temple at the "hour of prayer," no doubt intending to teach the crowds who resorted there.

They saw a pitiful lame man, emaciated, helpless, who had to be carried near the entry every day, for he was a beggar, and could not walk.

Study the inspiring third chapter of Acts slowly and carefully, and let God's Holy Spirit help you to drink in of these beautiful words. As the beggar saw Peter and John, he piteously held up his hands, begging, just as he always did to everyone passing by. He had no idea they were anyone special. He was only begging, asking for "alms," or a little money.

Moved with compassion, and inspired by the powerful wonders God's Holy Spirit had performed through him and all the others, "Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, 'Look on us!' And he [the beggar] gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them" (Acts 3:1-5). Obviously, the beggar was *only expecting money*, nothing else.

"Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give thee: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk!*'"

Then, in fullest *confidence* and *faith in God*, never doubting for a moment that God would honor this prayerful command, "he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he *leaping up* stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God!" No wonder! What a joyful, exciting moment in this poor man's life.

For his entire lifetime, from his earliest memories, he had been a helpless cripple. Unable to work, his parents could only hope that passersby would take pity on him, and that he could bring a little money home to help with the food.

Now, suddenly, these men had spoken a command "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," then grabbed him by the hand, and now *he could walk!* No wonder he cavorted! No wonder he leapt as far as he could! No wonder he praised God aloud!

Why did Jesus Christ perform such a miracle through Peter?

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God: "And they *knew* that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were *filled with wonder* and *amazement* at that which had happened to him" (Acts 3:6-10).

The man, who had been leaping and cavorting about, now rushed up to Peter and John, embracing them, hugging them, no doubt crying tears of gratitude, and praising God. A large crowd began gathering immediately: "And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto all the people, 'Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?'" (verses 11,12). Then followed another powerful witness!

Peter preached again about the betrayal, murder, death and burial of Jesus Christ. Once again, he spoke about His *resurrection*, and then told the crowd it had been the *name of Jesus Christ*, through FAITH in His name, that had made the beggar whole.

He urged them, "*Repent* ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the present of the Lord: And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (verses 19,20).

He concluded, "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to *bless* you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

No doubt, there was much more that Peter said. But Luke records, "And as they [John and the others no doubt also spoke again] spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them.

"Being grieved that they *taught the people*, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead [the Sadducees denied there was any resurrection taught in Scripture]. And they *laid hands* on them [arrested them forcibly], and put them in hold [in a locked room, as in a jail] unto the next day: for it was now eventide" (Acts

4:1-3).

Much is not said which is obvious.

First, the religious posturers deliberately ignored the powerful evidence of *divine miracles* that had occurred.

Second, even though the crowd was astonished at Peter and John's actions and speech, they did *nothing* while Peter and John were led away! Such was the influence of the religious leaders in the Temple.

God's Word then says, "Howbeit [in spite of what the priests did] many of them which heard the word *believed*; and the number of the men was about *five thousand*!" (verse 4).

More new converts! More thousands who were deeply convicted by all they heard and saw! Now, God's church was growing by leaps and bounds! They were threatened the next morning, then released.

But shortly, they were clapped in jail again! This time, they prayed fervently, and an angel from God opened the jail doors, stood there in plain sight, and said, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20).

What a wondrous time! What marvelous, miraculous, breathtaking events! Fire leaping atop the disciples' heads; a mighty rushing wind roaring like a hurricane; signs, wonders, great *healings* of the afflicted and infirmed.

Later, Luke wrote about the crowds being so large that widows were being neglected. He mentioned how the "number of the disciples was *multiplied*" (Acts 6:1).

God's church began with a stupendous series of *divine miracles*. It grew *rapidly*, multiplying into the many *thousands* in only days and weeks!

Could Almighty God do that again in *our day* if He chose?

Not By Might or By Power

Constantly, we find ourselves thinking about ways to preach Christ's gospel to the world more efficiently. In faith, we depend entirely upon *voluntary* tithing and giving; depend on God to lay it upon the hearts and minds of those whom He is calling to want to have *their part* in doing His work.

This did not happen at that first Pentecost.

Christ's apostles were *empowered*, NOT by legal documents or organizational charts or some form of "church government." They were *empowered*, NOT by large numbers of people who supported them and began sending tithes and offerings to them. No, they were *empowered by the Holy Spirit of God!*

SUDDENLY, like the sound of a violent *hurricane*, the power of the Holy Spirit filled that large room! SUDDENLY, with blazing, leaping tongues of fire, the air above their heads seemed to flash with flames. The flames separated into twelve equal parts, and, in the astonished eyes of the apostles *and* all the people, settled upon their heads!

SUDDENLY, they *knew* what was happening! Had not Jesus Christ commanded them to *wait* until they received *power* "after that the Holy Spirit had come upon them"? Filled with spiritual strength and courage, absolutely supercharged with faith and *power*, they began speaking to the people!

This was the *miracle* of Pentecost!

For hours, as the crowd swelled into the many thousands, those men, one by one, their hair blazing yet not burning, spoke of their experiences with Jesus Christ; of His death, burial, and resurrection!

Would not Peter have said, "I too rejected Him?" and been emotional when he said it? Would not others have recounted how they faded into the night in shame when he was lifted up on the tree, to die in agony? Could not those inspired apostles have reached out to the people, saying they, too, had experienced their doubts; that they had *fled* from their Savior in the moment of His greatest need?

But it was not merely their words which touched the hearts of thousands, but the Holy Spirit *conveying* those words into the minds and hearts of the people, and the Holy Spirit *opening those minds and hearts to hear!* There was the miracle of the roaring wind, the miracle of the blazing crowns of fire, the miracle of speech, the miracle of hearing each apostle in perhaps sixteen different languages, and there was the miracle of *understanding!*

Then, there was the miracle of *repentance* granted to thousands! In that very day, the church Jesus said He would build was established upon the foundation of Jesus Christ Himself, and upon the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

In that very day, thousands of "new creatures in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:16,17) were begotten! It was the *Feast of the Firstfruits*, and the *firstfruits* unto the Lamb were being harvested!

At any moment, through any human agency, in any place, the Almighty God can use powerful miracles to *call* and to *convert* literally *thousands* of people. For it is "not by might, nor by power [human power], but *by my Spirit*, saith the Eternal of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

Today, we still live in the time of the *firstfruits* of salvation. The great fall harvest will not come until after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the whole world will come under the rule of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (Isaiah 2; Micah 4). A "window of opportunity" is open to *you*, believe it or not. Is it a mere "accident" that God is causing you to read these words; to think deeply about the great miracle of Pentecost? Think about it. God knows you. He knows your middle name, and He knows your address. He knows every thought of your heart. Today, as then, He is saying to each one, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The miracle of Pentecost can occur in *your own personal life* if you are willing.

-End-

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