

# **THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST**

## **PENTECOST**

## **PENTECOST: THE FEAST OF FULFILLMENT**

*“When the day of Pentecost had come . . . .”*

(Acts 2: 1A)

On Pentecost the church particularly commemorates Christ's outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, many people today do not know much about Pentecost. Did you ever notice that many calendars indicate Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, but omit Pentecost? Apparently, Pentecost does not generally speak to the human imagination as much as Christmas and Easter. We have Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies, but who ever heard of Pentecost pansies?

There is, to be sure, also a good number of people who see precisely this day as the highlight of the ecclesiastical year. They even have named themselves after this day. I refer, of course, to the Pentecostal assemblies, one of the largest and fastest-growing denominations in North America. They say: to be really a church of Christ, you must be a pentecostal church. And their repeated and vehement complaint is that the "mainstream" churches have completely ignored Pentecost or suppressed its truth and reality.

Our concern is not primarily with the teachings of the Pentecostals, although reference will be made to them in this and following chapters, either implicitly or explicitly. In this chapter our concern is first of all with the question why the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. Why was it not fifteen, or forty-five, or sixty days? Does the fact that it happened on the *day* of Pentecost have a special meaning?

That question will be answered in the affirmative. It was not without reason that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the first Pentecost after Easter. For Pentecost was already of old the feast of fulfillment, when the people of God received and enjoyed the blessing of God's covenant grace. And we also, as New Testament Church, may see Pentecost as the feast of fulfillment. For on that day we received the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as the fruit of Christ's completed work of atonement. As such, its occurrence is unique and its blessings are constant.

## **THEY DID NOT KNOW**

We should realize that the disciples did not know that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on Pentecost. Yes, they knew that He would come, witness Christ's own promise: "before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." They knew it would happen soon, but not exactly when.

They also knew that they had to stay and wait in Jerusalem. And that is what they did. As we have seen earlier, they returned after the ascension of the Lord Jesus to "the upper room," where they had been staying. There they prayerfully awaited the fulfillment of the promise. So it continued until the day of Pentecost. We read in Acts 2: 1 that when the day of Pentecost came, they were together in one place, possibly the same house where also "the upper room" was located.

I said: the disciples did not know that on that particular day the Spirit would be poured out. At least, we have no indication of any prior knowledge on their part. But, perhaps, in view of the character of that day, they should have expected something to happen.

## AN IMPORTANT DAY

For Pentecost was certainly one of the most important festive days of the Jewish calendar. It was a day when Jerusalem was filled with many pilgrims who came to worship in the temple. What better day to expect a work of God than this one?

It has been assumed that the Lord Jesus chose this day precisely because so many people would be gathered in Jerusalem. If you want a “crowd” to witness what will happen, certainly one of the feast days makes for an excellent opportunity. People everywhere, from all over, come especially for the occasion: what an excellent opportunity to reach a large audience. And Pentecost is the first official feast after Easter.

But that is not the reason why the Lord Jesus chose the day of Pentecost for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Our text actually lays a much stronger connection. In the English translation of the Revised Standard Version it just says, “And when the day of Pentecost had come. . . .” The King James Version, a bit more accurate, but not accurate enough, has: when the day of Pentecost had fully come. The New International Version (NIV) simply states: when the day of Pentecost came, a rather bland translation. The North American Standard Bible informs us by means of a footnote that it literally says: when the day of Pentecost *was being fulfilled*. The original text indeed has that verb. That is why the old King James Version added the word *fully*.

## A DAY OF FULFILLMENT

Why do we bother to enter into such detail? Because it is important. The Lord Jesus chose the day of Pentecost for the outpouring because of its *redemptive-historical* significance. The outpouring on that specific day was nothing less than a fulfillment of a covenant promise made long before, a blessing foreshadowed in the ceremonies of the old covenant.

The expression that a time or a day is being fulfilled means in the Bible that a prescribed period (of waiting, or of purification) has now officially and legally passed. The time set by the Law of God has arrived. And that time is measured from the event that precedes it.

Let me explain further by going back with you to Leviticus 23, where we read about the feast days prescribed to Israel. Israel’s first and foremost, ever-returning feast day was, of course, the sabbath, the weekly day of rest. We find that in Leviticus 23: 1-3. In verse 4 we read about the appointed (special) feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations. The first one of these holy feasts was in the first month, starting on the fourteenth day, the feast of the Passover and Unleavened Bread. This Passover feast, we read in verse 10, coincides with the gathering of the first fruits, the beginning of the harvest season.

So first: the Passover. And the Passover, as you know, is the feast of the deliverance out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Israel was always to mark that event of liberation by the Passover and the offering of the first fruits.

But then comes the second feast, about which we read in Leviticus 23: 15, “And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering (the first fruits): seven full weeks shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath. . . .” Pentecost means literally the fiftieth day, an exactly prescribed time from the day of the Passover.

## THE COMPLETION OF THE HARVEST

And what was the meaning of this “fiftieth-day feast,” this Pentecost? It was the feast which marked the *completion* of the harvest, the harvest in all its fullness and richness. Pentecost was therefore the feast day on which Israel celebrated the many blessings of the LORD which He had given them in the promised land, after delivering them out of slavery.

In the history of salvation, then, Pentecost is a feast which celebrated the rich blessings which flowed forth out of God’s work of deliverance. He not only led them *out of bondage*, but He also led them *into freedom*! He not only made them *free*, but also made them *rich*! Pentecost, therefore, is the wonderful and gracious consequence of the Passover feast. That is why the two are always connected; it can only be Pentecost-feast of blessings in Canaan after it has been Passover-feast of deliverance from Egypt. Do you see the redemptive-historical connection?

Seven full weeks, forty-nine days, had to be completed after the Passover. And on the morrow of the next day, the fiftieth day, the time was fulfilled, the harvest was gathered, and Israel was called together to rejoice in the rich blessings of God. Why seven weeks? Because the number “seven” is the number of the fullness of God, the fullness of His glory and His grace, the fullness of His power and His blessings, which he has poured out over His people. I could not help thinking here also of the expression: the seven spirits which are before His throne, the fullness of the Holy Spirit with all His power and majesty.

The feast of Pentecost, of the full harvest, flows out of the feast of the Passover, of the first fruits. Israel was to remember always that the many blessings poured out by God were a direct result of His mighty work of deliverance. The blessings were given to a people that was passed over in God’s judgment and whose sins had been reconciled by the blood of the passover lamb.

## BEGINNING AND RESULT

Do you not see that the words of our text, “When the day of Pentecost was fulfilled” have a special meaning?

For we may see it now in a deeper light. The passover found its fulfillment at Golgotha. The first fruits are evident in the resurrection of Christ. There *we* were liberated from the bondage of sin and death in Christ Jesus. Then the great paschal lamb, Jesus Christ, sacrificed Himself for our sins. There the way was opened for all the heavenly blessings of God to be poured out over us.

Is it then such a wonder that on the day of Pentecost, when according to the law the required time of waiting had been fulfilled, the Holy Spirit was poured out? The Holy Spirit is the One who imparts to us all the riches of Christ Jesus. He fills us from above with every spiritual blessing in Christ. If Pentecost follows Passover, shall then not the outpouring of the Holy Spirit follow Golgotha and Easter? Do the death and resurrection of Christ not open the way for the greatest and richest of all heavenly blessings: the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Now the people of God will be filled with riches even greater than under the old covenant.

That is why Luke puts it this way: the day of Pentecost was *fulfilled*, because on that day the church officially and lawfully reaped the full benefit of the deliverance in Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. What was foreshadowed under the old covenant in Passover and Pentecost found its fulfillment in the redeeming work of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Leviticus 23: 16 finds it way right into Acts 2: 1. And it is God Himself who lays connections here which we may never ignore.

## **DO NOT ISOLATE PENTECOST**

We may, for example, never isolate "Pentecost" from Good Friday and Easter. The Holy Spirit does not come out of the blue, all on His own, but He is the Spirit of Christ, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He fulfills and completes the work of Christ, by pouring out over us all the riches we have through the cross and the resurrection in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to finish and perfect the work of Good Friday and Easter, to bring in from the first fruits (Easter) the full harvest of all God's children.

What does Pentecost then mean? It means that God now through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit lets us receive and enjoy all the gifts we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus the church is greatly enriched precisely on that day.

Notice also the contrast here. Most of the Jews were celebrating on that day the "old" Pentecost, the feast of the earthly , material blessings in Canaan. But the disciples may celebrate the new feast of the heavenly, spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. For them the old Pentecost has no more meaning as such, for it is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On that day, Christ takes His Church, leads it into the full riches of the new covenant, and says: see how I make you blessed unto all eternity to enjoy forever the riches of grace.

## **NOT REPEATED**

Now we must see the consequences also. Just as Good Friday and Easter were redemptive-historical events or occurrences, which cannot be repeated and are never repeated, so Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is *not* repeated. The death and resurrection of Christ open the way to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and that outpouring is a unique occurrence. For us Pentecost is the official and lawful beginning of a new era in the life of the people of God. Christ died only once, yet we reap the benefits of this all the time. He rose only once, yet we enjoy

the fruits of it every day. So also: the Holy Spirit is poured out only once, and yet we share in His presence and power constantly.

It's almost like – forgive me the very imperfect comparison – officially taking into use a public building. You do that once, when the building is opened, with a colourful ribbon-cutting ceremony, and then the building is open for all to enter. You don't constantly repeat the ribbon-cutting ceremony, for that would be an insult to the architect and builder.

Therefore, it is not Scriptural to speak of a “pentecostal” experience today. You can not repeat the pentecostal experience. I do not usually quote from specific sources in this book, but let me by way of exception insert a quote from a masterful little book by Professor Donald MacLeod of the Free Church of Scotland, a book called *The Spirit of Promise*.

Prof. MacLeod compares Pentecost to the crossing of a threshold, from one dispensation to the other, and he adds: it is a threshold to be crossed once, and once only into the new era. He writes further, “To speak of present-day experiences as pentecostal is to overlook the unique grandeur of the event. It was one of the decisive moments in the history of redemption, comparable to the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the second advent. Luke's description of it is reminiscent of the appearance of Jehovah on Mount Sinai. . . . To speak of present-day charismatic experiences in these terms would be absurd. Pentecost was a climactic perforation of human history by the divine, a unique point of transition from the era of preparation to the era of fulfillment.”

Indeed, a unique point of transition. A definite dividing line between the old and the new covenant, drawn once, after the great sacrifice and the glorious resurrection of our Lord.

## A NEW SITUATION

We are now as church of the Lord Jesus Christ in a new situation. The Spirit is present among us, has made His permanent dwelling in the church. That is why we may constantly reap the blessings of Pentecost. We do not need any repetition of Pentecost to share in these blessings, for they are constantly with us. If the Spirit is now with the church, so are the blessings of Pentecost.

What are these blessings? Not necessarily those of the day of Pentecost itself. Those signs had a temporary significance. They belonged, as it were, to the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The blessings which are constant are those which we and all believers of every age and place have in Christ: the blessing of redemption from sin, renewal of life, and the hope of the life everlasting. The building is open: the way to God in Christ through the Spirit is open.

## CONSTANT BLESSINGS

Constant blessings, now, because it has been Pentecost. We can speak about the lasting gifts of the Spirit: the Word of God, the offices in the church, the

imparting of wisdom and knowledge in the way of salvation through the teaching of the Scriptures, the communion of saints. The Holy Spirit continues also today to guide the church and all its members in the way of Christ Jesus, our Saviour.

Constant blessings. We can speak also about the fruits of the Spirit, as they are mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Time and again the Holy Spirit brings forth these fruits in the lives of believers everywhere.

And all these gifts and fruits, these manifold blessings, direct us to Christ Jesus, who pours them out from the throne of God by the working of the Holy Spirit. And so the church in all these things glorifies Jesus Christ as the Source and the Giver. The Holy Spirit leads us to glorify Christ as our great Lord and Saviour.

Pentecost, I said, is a unique occurrence, but indeed we still reap the constant blessings today. If it were not for Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit, we would not believe in the Lord Jesus. We could not come to faith nor persevere in faith. But we have received the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as fruit of Christ's completed work of atonement.

Abiding presence. We may sing, Hymn 36 (*Book of Praise*)

Praise the Spirit who will never

Leave the Church by blood once bought!

Constant blessings. We may sing, Hymn 36:

Wilt Thou with our Saviour's merit

Fill the earth's remotest end.

The one day of Pentecost led to a never-ending flow of spiritual blessings, all merited by Christ and imparted by the Spirit, so that we may sing Israel's Pentecost-thanksgiving song, Psalm 65, in a new light:

There in Thy holy habitation

Thou wilt Thy saints provide

With every blessing of salvation

Till all are satisfied (Psalm 65: 3)