



Notes for Preaching - Doug Beacham

Pentecost Sunday (May 31, 2020)

Introduction

The IPHC is focusing now, between Ascension and Pentecost, on a call to pray for the Ten Days to Pentecost. It is my prayer that all of us will engage in special times of prayer and fasting, preparing ourselves for what the Holy Spirit is doing and will do in the days to come. You can find out more information at <https://iphc.org/ariseinprayer>.

In a recent interview with the IPHC, Dr. Mark Rutland remarked that while we are in the midst of a crisis, our leadership style focuses on managing the organization and the crisis. But when we begin to move past the crisis, our leadership must shift to vision, talking about the future. I believe that is where we are as the IPHC. Even if we encounter additional waves of the virus, we must be intentional about fulfilling the Great Commission.¹

As an additional note, I have enjoyed preparing these studies since the week before Palm Sunday. I pray they have been a blessing to you. This Pentecost study will conclude the series. I am considering doing a series for Advent that will begin on Sunday, November 29, 2020.

For additional IPHC books related to Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and life in the Spirit, see the sources in this footnote.²

The doctrinal history in early Christianity is important for our understanding of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. I refer you to this source for more information on the doctrinal

¹ I refer you to the excellent article by Karen Lucas in the IPHC Encourage magazine <https://iphc.org/encourage/>. She discussed the Spanish flu Pandemic of 1918-20 and its impact on the IPHC. She mentions the “waves” of the Spanish flu that returned at various points over those years.

² G.F. Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride* (http://pctii.org/arc/taylor_bk.html). This appears to be the first book length explanation and defense of speaking in tongues as initial evidence. J.H. King, *From Passover to Pentecost* (Franklin Springs, GA: LifeSprings Resources, 2004 reprint); B.E. Underwood, *Spiritual Gifts: Ministries and Manifestations* (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press (now LifeSprings Resources), 1984).; Garnet Pike, *Receiving the Promise of the Father: How To Be Baptized in the Holy Spirit* (Franklin Springs, GA: LifeSprings Resources, 1997).

history, Volume 4 of *Ancient Christian Doctrine*, "We Believe in the Holy Spirit," edited by Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009). The introduction to this book, written by Elowsky, is a very readable overview of how the church fathers understood the Holy Spirit in His role as inspirator of the Scriptures, and how the church through various councils dealt with the triune nature of the One God of Israel, especially at Nicaea in 325 AD, and Constantinople in 381.

Key Texts - Observations and Commentary

I begin with a note about two Old Testament texts that are often cited—including by me—as part of the Old Testament background of the Day of Pentecost: the giving of the law at Sinai and the book of Ruth. There does not appear to be canonical biblical support that either of these episodes was part of the temple or synagogue emphasis during the time of Jesus. I do not remember Jesus or the apostolic writers of Scripture connecting the event of Acts 2 directly to the giving of the Torah (Law) at Sinai, or the reading of Ruth in the synagogue.

Regarding the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the pseudepigraphal Book of Jubilees is an interesting study. Probably written after 135 BC, during the height of the Maccabean period and the reign of Hyrcanus, it is a discussion of the biblical book of Genesis and part of Exodus.³ Jubilees reflects a strict renewal of Jewish life under the Torah, and a rejection of the Hellenistic influences that preceded the Maccabean revolt. In Jubilees, the writer associates the Feast of Weeks with Noah and his covenant with God. It is also considered as having been observed in heaven from the beginning of creation. It is not until well after the beginning of the Christian era that rabbis associate the Feast of Weeks with the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. It is called today the "Festival of the Giving of the Torah."⁴

For Christian interpreters of Pentecost, while the connection with Sinai and the New Testament account does not directly correlate, there are nonetheless interesting

³ Pseudepigrapha refers to Jewish texts that are sometimes accepted as canonical by some churches. John Hyrcanus I lived from 175-104 B.C. He was priest and king of the Jewish nation from 135-104 B.C. A member of the Hasmonean dynasty, he was the youngest son of Simon Maccabeus. A free copy of Jubilees can be read at https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Book_of_Jubilees/qaJDAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.

⁴ See <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/how-shavuot-became-the-festival-of-the-giving-of-the-torah/> for a contemporary popular Jewish look at this.

connections. First, we know from the Apostle Paul that there was much discussion related to life in the Spirit and the connection to obedience to the Law of Moses (see Romans and Galatians). Second, in Exodus 32:28 three thousand Israelites were killed after having participated in making the golden calves while Moses was on Mt. Sinai. But on the day of Pentecost, in response to the proclamation of the gospel by Peter, three thousand were born again (Acts 2:41).

Regarding Ruth, it appears that it was in the eighth century AD that we have clear evidence of Ruth being read in the synagogue. But again, there are clear harvest connections in the Ruth story that seem to connect it to the time when the Feast of Weeks would be celebrated.⁵ Of particular interest is that Ruth, who is a Moabitess, is brought into the covenant family of Israel in Bethlehem, “the house of bread” (again, note the grain harvest element). The sending of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 initiated a movement that came to see the death and resurrection of Jesus in a larger measure than just God’s plan to redeem Israel. The presence of the Holy Spirit became the lens through which the Gentiles could be incorporated into the promises made by the Father to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15.

Obviously, there are many biblical texts that can be part of your preaching for Pentecost. For instance, Jesus’ teachings in John 14-16 are extremely important in relation to the Holy Spirit. You can easily spend time developing various themes from the Feast of Weeks as described in Leviticus 23:15-22; Numbers 28:26-31; and Deuteronomy 16:9-12.⁶ But for our purposes, I am going to focus on Joel 2:28-32 and its fulfillment in Acts 2:1-46.

Joel 2:28-32

This brief, 73-verse prophecy, from an otherwise unknown prophet named Joel, provides the vital prophetic elements that were fulfilled in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. Joel’s name means, “The Lord is God.” The book reflects a Judean, Jerusalem setting. Its date has been suggested as anywhere between the reign of Joash in the 800s BC to the post-exilic period. There are indications that worship in the Temple occurs during Joel; whether it is Solomon’s Temple or the one begun by Zerubbabel and described in Ezra is a matter of

⁵ See <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/holy-land-studies/read-ruth-pentecost/>

⁶ There’s an excellent article about the Feast of Weeks in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 638-639. The article was written by Daniel K. Falk.

debate.⁷ My personal view is that it reflects the Second Temple period for several reasons, such as the reference to Greeks in 3:6.

The book is written in response to a devastating agricultural plague of locusts that destroyed the economy, negatively impacting the offering of sacrifices in the Temple. There were four waves of locusts that came overland like an invading army: chewing locusts, swarming locusts, crawling locusts, and consuming locusts. Joel 1 described the total destruction of crops, trees, vines. As a result, the grain offering and drink offerings are “cut off from the house of the Lord” (1:9).

1. The devastation is so bad that Joel sees it prophetically as an eschatological “day of the Lord” (1:14; 2:1, 11, 30, 31; 3:12-16). It is a day of great judgment upon all peoples, and a manifestation of the righteous glory of God in redeeming His creation.
2. The locust plague is viewed from the lens of divine judgment upon the earth. As an instrument of divine judgment, the goal is repentance (Joel 2:12-17).
3. In spite of the plague, Joel makes clear, the Lord has not abandoned His people. The Lord’s acts to heal include great provision of what has been lost, so that true worship can occur once again (2:18-27).
4. The promise of the Spirit in 2:28-32 is part of the grand prophetic vision given Joel regarding a greater work that God will do in the earth. It is important to note that the presence of the Holy Spirit in this prophecy goes far beyond Temple worship. It foretells what Jesus said in John 4:21-24 to the Samaritan woman, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking

⁷ The Second Temple period is a lengthy era that began in 539 B.C. with the Persian king Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and construct a temple that Cyrus funded (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; the Book of Ezra). The Second Temple period ended in 70 A.D. with the destruction by Titus and Roman armies. It is the Second Temple Period that is the backdrop for the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, among others. This period is also the backdrop for the rise of various elements of Judaism that were influential during the time of Jesus; that is, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, etc. I encourage your study of the Second Temple period as it is very important as it relates to the ministry of Jesus and the rise of the early church.

such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

5. The Joel prophecy of the Spirit includes an eschatological gathering of the nations for judgment at the Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2-21). This valley is called today the Kidron Valley. It runs from the north, northeast part of Jerusalem, down the eastern side between the city and the Mount of Olives, and continues southward below the city. Joel saw this location as “the valley of decision” (3:14). It is important to keep in mind that Jesus crossed this valley numerous times in His journeys between Bethany and Jerusalem, and that the Garden of Gethsemane is located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives.

6. Notice that in Joel’s Pentecost prophecy, the Spirit of God will not be restrained by gender, age, religious group, or ethnicity. The Spirit will be poured “out on all flesh” (2:28). Also notice that revelation by the Spirit will occur in “dreams and visions.” In this eschatological day of the Lord, God “will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth.” Finally, notice that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” an invitation to saving grace and mercy through Israel that is meant for the entire world, expanding divine blessings to anyone who will call on “Name of the Lord” (2:32).

7. The “early and latter rain” are named by Joel as part of the restoration that God will provide from the destruction (2:23). In Joel the early rain is called the “former rain” (NKJV). In Israel, the early rain occurred in October and went through the winter months. It was the time of softening of the soil after the hot summer, and the time for planting. The latter rains in the spring were the final preparation for harvest.

Acts 2:1-47

1. This passage is very familiar to us as Pentecostals. I’m going to focus on the major text sections as a way of refreshing your memory and thought process of what Pentecost is about, as revealed in Acts 2.

2. Acts 2:1-4 tells us that there was a “fullness” of the Day of Pentecost. Since Joel’s prophecy, a period of perhaps five hundred years or more, the Jews had celebrated the Feast of Weeks. The notion of “fully come” can imply it was full daylight, as Spirit empowerment occurred by 9 in the morning (Acts 2:15), or may imply a theological fullness, or fulfillment, of the Joel prophecy.
3. The 120 (1:15), included men and women, and they were “all with one accord in one place” (2:1). The idea of “all with one accord” reflects the two Greek words, *pantes homo*, or “all together.” There is a clear sense of unity beyond physical togetherness implied in the language. This unity did not just occur. It came about as the result of the ten days between the Ascension and Jesus’ command that His followers go to Jerusalem and “wait for the Promise of the Father.”
4. What did the disciples anticipate? They knew that the next Jewish feast was the Feast of Weeks, *Pentecost* in Greek. They understood that the Feast of Weeks was about harvest. We do not know what they were told by Jesus in the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, other than that He spoke to them of His kingdom. We also know that He opened the Prophets to them. In my opinion, Jesus spoke of numerous Old Testament passages to the disciples during these forty days. He spoke of the passages that specifically related to His death, resurrection, and eternal reign. I also believe that Jesus spoke of passages such as Joel 2 and how those passages would be fulfilled. Whether Jesus told them about new tongues, we do not know. What is interesting in Acts 2 is that the disciples do not seem to be amazed that they are speaking in new tongues! It is the crowd that is amazed (2:6-12).
5. The presence of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was first manifested as “a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind” (2:2). The word “suddenly” is an adverb: in Greek, *apnno*. It contrasts the obedient waiting on the disciple’s part with God’s suddenly. This divine presence “filled the whole house where they were sitting” (2:2). In the presence of the divine wind, tongues of fire “sat upon each of them.” The “tongues of fire” (think of leaping flames from a fire) were distributed (divided among them). The Greek for “divided” in 2:3 is *diamerizo* and is used again in Acts 2:45 to describe how the disciples divided their goods as a blessing to everyone.

6. In response to the audible and visible presence of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:2, 3, the disciples “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4). Notice the convergence of sound, sight, and speech. They did not speak in other tongues until they were filled, and the Spirit gave them the utterance. But it is important to note that the actual speaking was something the disciples themselves did. The Bible does not attempt to describe the physiological way(s) by which the Holy Spirit spoke through them. The point is that the Holy Spirit filled them, gave them the utterance, but they had to speak what was given.
7. Acts 2:5-13 describes the multitude in Jerusalem for Pentecost. The Upper Room was likely near the Second Temple so that many could hear the 120 speaking in their native language. That is the point of the tongues in Acts 2: that the nations can hear the proclamation of the Lord in their own language.
8. There seems to be a difference between the tongues of Acts 2 and the common Pentecostal understanding of initial evidence. While there are some verified instances of initial evidence tongues being in a known language foreign to the speaker, it is more common that the Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues as initial evidence is comparable to Acts 10:45-47 when the Gentile Cornelius received the Holy Spirit.⁸
9. The response of the multitude was confusion (2:6), amazement (2:12), perplexity (2:12), questioning, “what does this mean,” (2:12), and mockery (2:13). Not much has changed in two thousand years regarding how people respond when Spirit-anointed tongues are spoken!
10. Acts 2:14-36. Notice that Peter and the eleven are together as one group. The sense of unity is again clear. Peter did not hesitate to reference the Joel 2:28-32

⁸ Yet even in the Cornelius Spirit-baptism, Peter was able to instantly affirm that the Gentile “received the Holy Spirit just as we have,” and that the message in tongues was discerned to “magnify God” (10:46, 47). Was this the result of the “gift of interpretation,” or was someone present who recognized a foreign language unknown to Cornelius? The Bible does not make this clear.

prophecy.⁹ Peter's first Pentecost message (the second is in 3:12-26) addressed "men of Israel." He immediately drew their attention to "Jesus of Nazareth" (2:22). Peter reminded the listeners that a month and half earlier this Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead. This tells us that the resurrection, and Jesus' risen presence in Judea and Galilee, was common knowledge and conversation among the Jews who were in Jerusalem. Peter did not have to explain very much. Peter was able to immediately connect Joel's Pentecost prophecy to other Old Testament passages, such as Psalm 16:8-11 in Acts 2:25ff, and not have to worry if he was relevant. The entire message, which ended at verse 36, and include three OT passages which reflect the Holy Spirit, Jesus victory over death, Jesus ascension (2:33-35), was designed to bring clarity, declaration, and opportunity for Holy Spirit conviction, to the multitude.

11. Acts 2:37-39 described the response of the multitude. The first point is that "they were cut to the heart." The word "cut" in this passage is *katanusso* and denotes a piercing of the heart. This is a powerful description of Holy Spirit conviction of sin, something that Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do (John 16:8). When the Word of the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit is present working to pierce into the hardened hearts of sinners. This is expressed in Hebrews 4:12, 13 of the power of the Word of God in the human heart and soul.

12. There are two questions from the multitude at Pentecost: "Whatever does this mean?" and "What shall we do?" (2:12, 37). The answer to one is proclamation; the answer to the other is a response of repentance. One gives information; the other transformation. But both are necessary.

13. The final portion of Acts 2:40-47 shows that a new community was immediately formed. Three thousand people responded to the gospel message. The church of 120 immediately grew to 3,120. It was essentially multiplication by 30!

⁹ While we can rightfully say that the Holy Spirit immediately informed Peter of the Joel prophecy, I am also of the opinion that Jesus had already taught Peter and the disciples about the Joel prophecy during the forty days. Thus, Peter did immediately recognize the fulfillment of Joel and it's implications about Jesus and God's grace for the world.

Preaching Thoughts

1. There is much to consider from Joel and Acts, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, Joel viewed the natural calamity of the locusts as more than a natural event. Joel viewed divine purposes in the calamity that is a cyclical part of life. Joel did not blame God for the locusts, nor did he blame Satan. Rather, the locusts became an opportunity to view divine judgment as an occasion for repentance and a new future. Second, as you reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic, it can provide us with the same avenues of approach regarding divine purposes that occur through natural occurring events.
2. A connection of Pentecost with eschatology is important. I don't mean this in the sense of trying to figure out exact dates, etc. I mean it in the sense that the church is empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to Jesus and God's kingdom as we live between Christ's resurrection and His return. We are Spirit-empowered with miracles, tongues, prophecy, etc., as we live "between the times."
3. From my reading of Luke 24 and Acts 1, and what Jesus taught the disciples for forty days following His resurrection, I am convinced that Pentecost is an invitation to prepare ourselves at the feet of Jesus and His Word. The more we understand the Word, the more prepared we are for what the Lord is preparing us to do in our generation.
4. Pentecost Sunday is certainly a time to encourage people to "be filled with the Spirit." While initial evidence is important and should not be neglected, it is equally important that we remember that the infilling of the Holy Spirit empowers us as witnesses of Jesus.
5. The two questions in Acts 2:12, 37, referenced earlier, are excellent starting points for addressing both what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst and our response to His activity.

For more *Notes for Preaching*, [visit the Bishop's Blog at iphc.org](http://www.iphc.org).