



ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

How God Turned a Band of Nobodies into a Movement for Everybody

How did a handful of ordinary people become ten thousand followers of Jesus in the year following his public execution? How did his movement gain so much momentum, especially as ten of the eleven charter members were crucified, burned, or stoned to death? How did ten thousand Christians become one million by the second century, and 3.3 billion today?

Written in the middle of the first century, The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of how Christianity spread like wildfire across the Roman Empire and beyond. For 25 weeks we will journey through Acts in pursuit of the truth behind history's most consequential movement.

Discussion Guide: Week 2

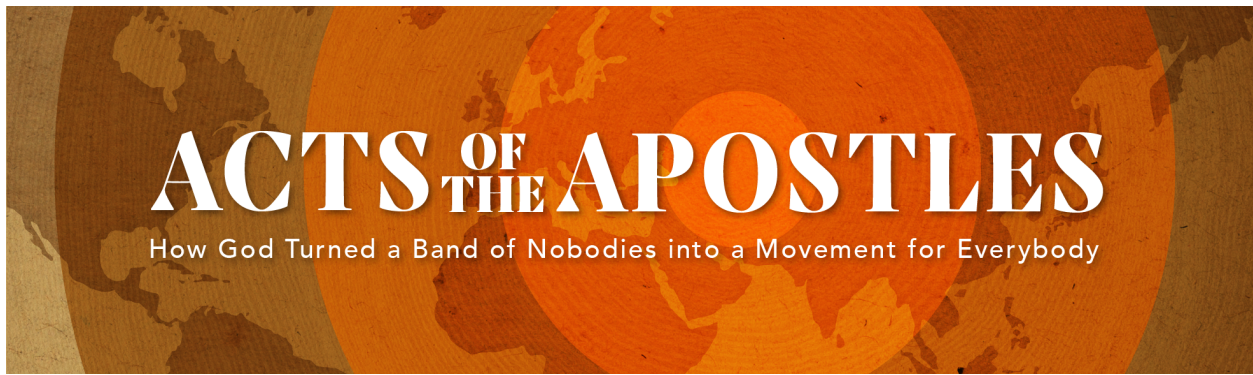
Acts 2:1-13

What is your experience with the Holy Spirit? Would you consider yourself charismatic, closed off, or unsure?

In your groups you will have people all across the spectrum. Your leaders might even have different experiences with the Holy Spirit. Try to read today's passage like you have never read it before. Come in with fresh eyes and see what stands out to you and your group. Make room for people to share and be honest about their views on the HS.

For the Jews, what is the day of Pentecost and what does it celebrate?

Pentecost: happened on a Jewish holiday that was one of the three Jewish feasts that called for a pilgrimage for all Jewish people to flood into Jerusalem. Every Jewish family in the known world would make the trek to Jerusalem. It got its name, Pentecost (fiftieth), from the fact that it took place 50 days after Passover (the last one being concurrent with Jesus' crucifixion) It was a feast of harvest and Pentecost had symbolic significance: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to be a great harvest for the world, and that's precisely what happened.



The festival remembered Moses going up to Mount Sinai to receive the law. The difference is that Mt Sinai people are terrified and 3000 perish from the fire that came, but at Pentecost people are amazed and perplexed and we'll see later that 3000 are saved by the fire that came down that allowed everyone to speak in every different language.

Acts 2:1 says they were "all together in one place" who is all and why is this important?"

More than just the 12, Acts 1:14-15 says - They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.... (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

This is important because the HS is poured out on all believers. Not just men, or the 12 apostles, but all. This was prophecy in places like Joel 2:28-32. The Holy Spirit does not move through any hierarchy or have any bias.

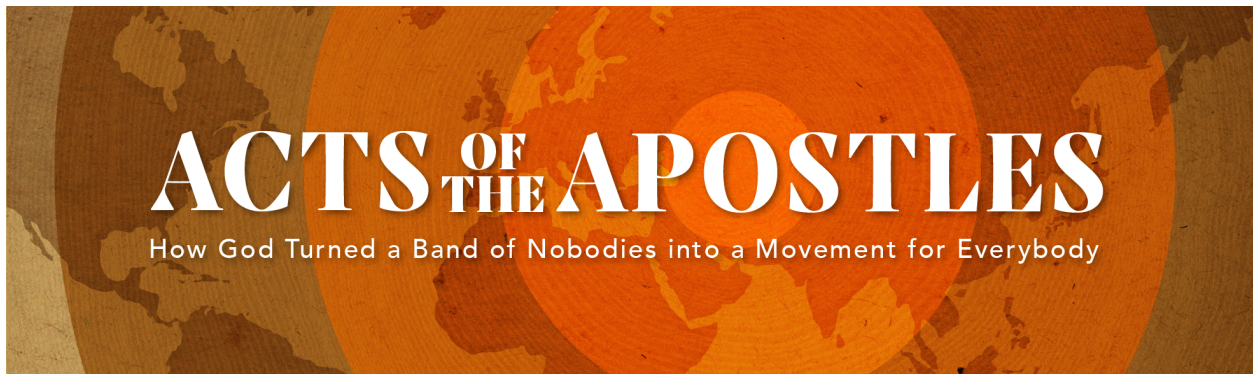
The Holy Spirit Comes in Power

What words are used to describe the Holy Spirit indwelling the disciples? What does this teach us about the Spirit's movements and presence in our lives?

The power of the Spirit is repeated over 90 times in the New Testament. The Spirit always comes in power. We see images like "blowing like a violent wind from heaven" and "tongues of fire" - Wind and fire are untameable forces that come with theophanies in the Old Testament (Exd 3:2, Deut 4:24, 2 Sam 5:24, Job 38:1)

You cannot control fire and wind. They're terrifying and exhilarating. Devastating and purifying. The Holy Spirit cannot be tamed. And that's what He wants to do in our lives. To powerfully shake us up that there's no other explanation but it's a move of God.

The speaking in tongues we see here is probably different then what you initially think of. It's clear in Acts 2 that the believers were empowered to speak in foreign languages they didn't know but the travelers understood (a linguistic phenomenon)



The purpose of this manifestation was so the Gospel could be preached and all could understand in their own language.

This is different from what Paul mentions in his letters. The speaking in tongues he writes about is more focused on prayer, prophecy, and praise, and you need someone to supernaturally interpret what is being said. Speaking in tongues is a clear gift from the Spirit, but it is not the only manifestation of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Further Reading on Spiritual Gifts and Speaking in Tongues

- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
- 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

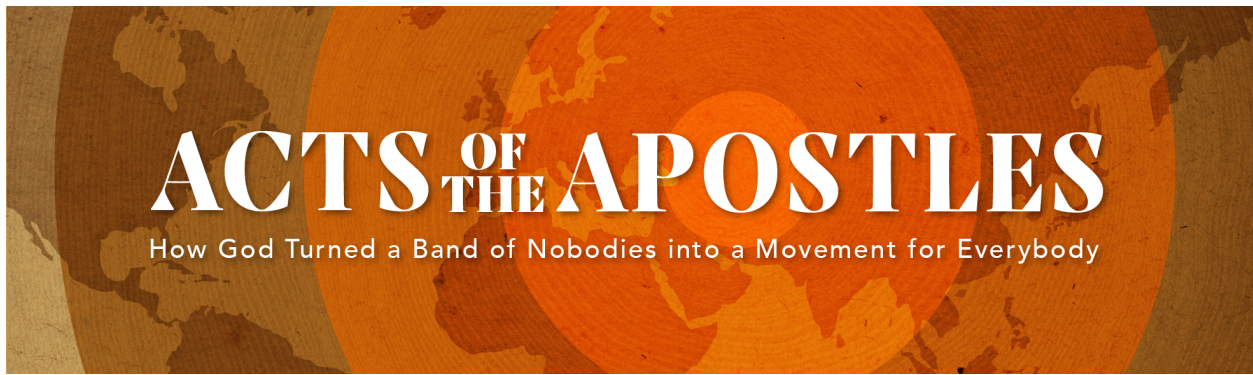
The Holy Spirit Unites

In Acts 2:5-11 Luke says every nation under heaven was represented then lists the people present and the regions they came from. This passage parallels the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 that precedes the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1-9. How can Pentacost be read as a reversal of Babel?

The Holy Spirit doesn't come to divide, but to unite. This is a cosmic reversal from a story in Genesis 10 called the tower of Babel:

Gen 11:1;4,8-9 - Now the whole world had one language and a common speech ... Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves... 8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Babel - because of human pride, arrogance and defiance of God the human race is divided. They denied God's call to spread out and settle the land, tried to manufacture a way to reach God, and created a fake uniformity. God divided the people and gave them their own languages so they couldn't understand one another.



In Pentecost this was reversed. Every language and nation and tribe under heaven is at once united by the the gospel. Even though they all spoke different languages, they could all understand the Holy Spirit. The curse at Babel is being reversed at Pentecost through the unity of the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Map of all the nations:

https://www.conformingtojesus.com/images/webpages/nations_in_jerusalem_at_pentecost_acts_2_map_1.jpg (This is covering tens of thousand of square miles)

The Gospel does not seek manufactured uniformity, but unity. What is the difference between the two? How does the Holy Spirit produce unity among believers?

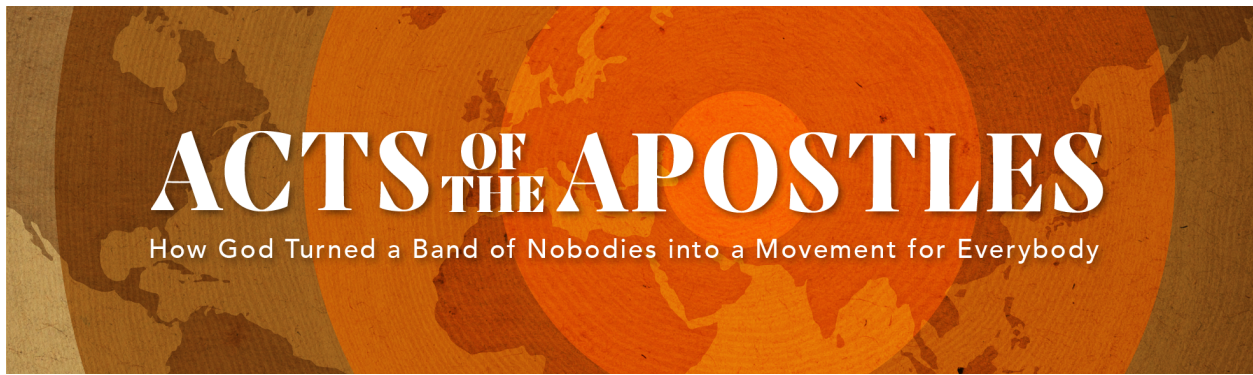
Today we can find syncretism everywhere we go. This is the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. The world is trying to force everyone to look, believe, or behave the same. This is manufactured uniformity.

Unity is what the Gospel provides. Christians can look, talk, and act differently but what binds us together is Jesus. Even though people assume the average christian is a stuffy white American man in his 40's the reality is 65% of Christians are african/asian/latin american. Only 10% of Christians live in North America. The Holy Spirit unifies us with believers all across the globe who probably look and act nothing like us. The only thing that could possibly tie an American male businessman in Houston to an African female farmer in Ethiopia is the good news.

The Holy Spirit Produces Joyful Fearlessness

Many in the crowd in Jerusalem thought the Spirit filled believers were drunk. Why would the crowds think this? How does the Holy Spirit transform our lives in such a way that makes us look strange to the rest of the world?

Being full of the Spirit almost looks like being drunk.



Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit

The difference is alcohol is a depressant. You became less aware of reality. The things that bother you become dulled down. It dumbs you down.

The Spirit awakens reality. He enlightens you about the wonders of God and what Jesus has done. He illuminates and helps you understand the ultimate reality that God loves you more than you can ever understand. He should transform your life and cause you to live so generously and joyfully that the world is confused. The Holy Spirit should violently shake up your life. You will find yourself thinking about God more, falling in love with Jesus more, and wanting the things that don't matter a little bit less.

Reflection Questions

There is a difference between knowing about something and experiencing it? Is your faith primarily fact based or experiential?

The key here is not to shame people who haven't experienced God. When we talk about the HS some people can feel shame or guilt for not experiencing His presence. While we should spur and encourage people to experience God more fully, the last thing we want to do is leave them feeling like they aren't saved or there is something they have to work towards to be better Christians.

To receive the Holy Spirit Jesus' followers didn't conjure Him up or follow a specific formula; they simply gathered together in prayer and waited. Have you waited and made yourself available for the Holy Spirit?

Group Leader, how can you follow the example of the early church and gather with your people in prayer and eager expectation waiting for the Spirit to show up?