

## STUDY NOTES

Lesson 2: Acts 2, 3, 4, 5

*And with great power  
gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus:  
and great grace was upon them all.*

*Acts 4:33*

*And daily in the temple, and in every house,  
they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

*Acts 5:42*

### **THE POWER OF PENTECOST**

The second chapter of Acts begins with the early followers of Jesus simply doing what the Lord had told them to do, that is, waiting in Jerusalem until “power is come upon you.” (Acts 1:4,8) Then “suddenly,” implying something unlooked for, a sound as of “a rushing, mighty wind” comes into the place where they are gathered. In addition to the great sound, there is a visual manifestation of fire from heaven, which comes down and separates until it sits upon the head of each one present in the form of “tongues of fire.”

The result of these miraculous demonstrations of God's presence and power is that each man there began to speak “with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.” Here we have miracle upon miracle, not performed by one man—a prophet, for example—but manifesting itself upon the whole group at once, producing a whole roomful of “prophets” speaking in the name of the Lord.

In this picture of Pentecost we have demonstrated a whole new scheme of God's redemptive plan. Whereas, in the past, salvation came by identification with the nation of Israel, God's chosen covenant people, through circumcision (a rite, after all, that was done to baby boys at eight days old and presumably without their consent), now it was coming to individuals *individually*. Forgive the odd syntax but it is hard to express what a revolution this was. Something of the import of it was demonstrated when the veil of the temple that separated the holy of holies from the outer courts of the temple was split from top to bottom upon Jesus' death on the cross, signifying that the way into God's presence was now open to all.

Once, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the people of Israel had wailed to Moses, “We are terrified at the idea of hearing the voice of God ourselves. You be our go-between and we will do whatever you tell us that God says.”<sup>1</sup> God's mighty power which had manifest itself as a pillar of fire going before the camp of Israel and resting upon the tabernacle, was now resting upon each believer! It was indeed the dawning of a new day wherein each believer could have a relationship for himself or herself with God. One could get into the old covenant by being born into a believing Jewish family. But to get into the new covenant, each one must make a conscious individual choice to become a covenanted believer through baptism.

### **THEY WERE ALL AMAZED AND MARVELLED**

The great “sonic boom” of the Spirit brought crowds running to see what had happened. These were faithful Jews who were in Jerusalem from all parts of the Mediterranean world for the celebration of Pentecost. Luke here lists about 15 nations and peoples representing the known world. These people were included in the miracle

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrase of Exodus 20:19

because while they all stood there listening to the group of Galileans speaking, each one "heard them speak in his own language." This too is both a miraculous happening in the present and a prophetic picture of the future, for from this time forward, the gospel was ordained to be taken to every kindred, tongue, and people" until it sweeps the earth as with a flood. This was the beginning.

### **PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST**

Peter's sermon to the crowd at Pentecost is the first of several in Acts. His basic theme is that Christ's death and resurrection were part of God's plan and that all that had happened was foretold in Old Testament scripture. Peter's use of the Joel 2: 28-32 scripture is instructive of the way prophetic scripture can be applied. The prophet Joel had prophesied in about 800 B.C. He spoke of an outpouring of the spirit and the crowd at Pentecost had obviously seen that happen on that very day. The verse that speaks of "signs in the earth beneath" would apply both to the well-known miracles of Jesus' and to the sign of the gift of tongues. That the "sun would turn to darkness" was fulfilled at the crucifixion of Jesus in both the Old World and in the New (though unknown to Peter). He then ends with Joel 2:32—"and all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved—" a call to repentance that is true for all times. But what are we to make of the "moon [turned] into blood" part of the scripture? This same scripture of Joel is quoted three times in the Doctrine and Covenants as having a future fulfillment? Was it a prophecy about Christ's time or the future?

This is a good example of the truth that scripture is the living word of God, and is not fixed and static. The rule is: if it applies, then it applies! The application is not either this or that, but both this and that. The course of God is one eternal round and the themes of scripture recur many times. One example of this recurrence is the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. At the opening of this dispensation there was a repeat performance of the spiritual drenching that happened in Acts 2, complete with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire. One scripture or scriptural theme may therefore have several fulfillments.

### **EARLY GROWTH OF THE CHURCH**

Peter's challenge to his listeners to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus results in a gathering of 3000 new members of the church that very day. These converts were the "firstfruits" of missionary work in the Christian era. That such a harvest of souls would come on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, also known as "the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours" (Ex 23:16) is a remarkable coincidence and testimony of how the Lord brings together every detail of the Old and New Testaments that "All things [might] have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me (Moses 6:63)." We can only stand all amazed at the way the Lord has all things in his hands.

The picture of the church in Acts 2:41-47 is of a group of saints who were unified economically and spiritually. The early chapters of Acts repeatedly mentions them meeting in the temple. The temple was a foundational part of Jewish worship and these early saints did not think of themselves at this point as having left the Jewish religion.

### **A REMARKABLE HEALING**

Thus Peter and John "went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour" (about 3 pm) as would many other observant Jews in Jerusalem. There they meet a man crippled from birth. When he begs alms, Peter says, "Look at us!" Thinking he was about to receive money, the beggar looks up expectantly. Instead of coins however he receives an extraordinary healing. Commanded to walk, "in the

name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," his feet and legs receive strength instantly, and the man jumps up and follows Peter and John rejoicing and praising God.

### **PETER PREACHES IN THE TEMPLE**

Peter now has a ready audience, for all the people from Jerusalem knew the crippled beggar who sat every day in the same place at the temple gate. And here he was, leaping in circles around the two apostles as they walk through the temple courts towards the daily gathering of the Saints. The people are looking at him in "wonder and amazement." Everyone there knew of the healings Jesus had done among them. This miracle was strikingly similar. Jesus however healed in his own authority, commanding people to be made well. Jesus was Lord. Peter is his servant, as he makes clear.

Peter plainly tells the crowd that they must not regard this miracle as something he did. It was done by faith "in the name of Jesus." To the Jews, a name had power. It did not just identify a person but was an expression of the very nature of their being, so that the power of that person is present in their name. In fact, the phrase, "*The Name*," was one way the Jews could refer to God without actually having to say his name, *Jehovah*, which was considered too holy (and powerful) to use in everyday speech. Thus, healing the man *in the name of Jesus* was as if Jesus had been there and healed the man himself. How powerful this Jesus must be if by his very name he was still among them working miracles!

In Peter's sermon here at the temple he uses the important Deuteronomy 18:15 scripture, one generally recognized by the Jewish people to refer to the Messiah (See Lesson 3 Scripture List). This prophecy of Moses says that God would "raise up a prophet like unto me," along with the command that the people must listen to that prophet and do "everything he tells you." By using this scripture Peter shows that he is not asking the Jews to reject Moses and his law. If the people truly believe in Moses then they will also believe in the one Moses prophesied about. His approach with the Jews is that accepting Jesus as their Messiah is the logical fulfillment of their Jewishness.

The words of the Savior himself are, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:45-47)

### **THE SANHEDRIN STIRRED UP—CHAPTER FOUR**

The fallout of Peter's healing of the lame man and subsequent sermon is an additional 5,000 Jewish converts! The Sanhedrin could not abide this challenge to their power and they have Peter and John thrown into prison for the night and brought to a hearing the next day. Peter there makes a bold defense in which he declares that these leaders fulfill prophecy that "the stone which was set at naught of you

builders is become the head of the corner." (Psalm 118:22) The Sanhedrin are amazed at the boldness of these "unlearned and ignorant men." Peter's words did not find any opening into the stony hearts or closed minds of the Jewish council, but they cannot accuse them of any crime. Instead the leaders released them with a stern warning that if they preach in the name of Jesus again they will be subject to punishment.

### **THE DISCIPLES PRAYER**

The apostles gather to rejoice with a group of saints over their delivery. Their prayer, recorded in Acts 4:24-30, is remarkable for its courage and selflessness. They realize from the prophecy they quote in Psalms 2:2, that they are destined to be up against the rulers and powers of this world. But rather than pray for protection, they pray for boldness, that they may preach the word with steadfast courage. God's approval of their righteous desires is shown by another outpouring of the spirit upon them and the miraculous "shaking" that accompanied this.

The practical result of such abundance of spiritual blessings and courageous witness is the unity of the believers. As they went through these dramatic occurrences together, their natural-man selfishness faded away and they found themselves truly united in their desires for Christ's name to be glorified, and in love and concern for one another. It was a short step from there to living the law of consecration.

#### ALL THINGS COMMON—CHAPTER FIVE

While it does not seem from the text that every Christian sold all they owned, for they still met together in their homes (Acts 2:46 & 5:42), it appears that they sold extra properties. Barnabas is mentioned as having sold land and given the money to the apostles. In this way the worthy poor among them were provided for and they would be economically as well as spiritually one. We know from Latter Day revelation about the law of consecration that this is God's ideal for the people of Zion, though it seldom is sustained in practice because of the stubborn weed of our native selfishness.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira, who lie to Peter and are struck dead for their deceit serves as a lesson to the saints, and we are told that "great fear came upon all the church." It is interesting to note the similarities between this sad story and the story of Achan in the Old Testament. Achan was similarly possessed with a spirit of greed and deceit. In the Israelites first battle after arriving in Israel, he stole a wedge of gold from the city of Jericho and hid it under his tent. His sin was discovered by revelation, as was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, and also caused his death. Both incidents happen at the beginning of a new era for God's people when a harsh consequence was necessary to teach the people a lesson. The gold wedge was called "the cursed thing"—a curse that follows all those material things we lust after and lose our integrity to get. The lesson is: You cannot serve both God and mammon—the false god of wealth.

#### BACK BEFORE THE COUNCIL

The church meets with so much success, and the miracles done by the apostles are so mighty, that a "multitude out of the cities round about" bring their sick to be healed, and they are healed, "every one." Such astounding success was bound to raise the anger of the ruling Sadducees and once again they put the apostles in prison. They didn't stay long however, for an angel freed them, telling them to return and preach at the temple the next day. The officers again brought them before the council, where no mention was made of their miraculous escape. Were they embarrassed by it or did their angelic deliverance have a humbling effect upon the high priests? Notice that they seem afraid to even pronounce Jesus' name, saying only "this man" and "this name."

Just as they didn't stop preaching at the temple, neither do the apostles tone down their accusations against the council, for they immediately bear witness that Jesus is both "a Prince and a Savior," whom God raised up and "ye slew and hanged on a tree!" This is the heart of the trouble, for the Sanhedrin fears that Peter and the others are trying to turn the people against them by "bring[ing] this man's blood upon us." The charge of blasphemy is not brought up; rather they seem to be charged with something like contempt of court for refusing to obey the previous order to stop preaching in the name of Christ. They are unrepentant, saying simply, "We ought to obey God rather than man." Into this impasse come the wise words of Gamaliel. Such is his reputation that his counsel of moderation persuades the group to let the apostles go, leaving to God the success or failure of their venture. The apostles are beaten and let go with a warning to cease preaching about Jesus the Messiah.

Later we will see Gamaliel's pupil, Saul, have a different and more violent reaction to the Christians, but that chapter comes later, when the Christian message begins to change into one more open to the charge of heresy. This is the calm before the storm.