

An Ancient Promise is Kept
Acts 2:1-13

Main Point: The coming of the Spirit reminds us that Jesus is an ever faithful, promise-keeping God.

Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 2. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 2 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). We have recently started a new series on the book of Acts. Coming off the heels of our recent vision process, we are exploring together how the early church was formed and carried out its mission following the resurrection/ascension of Jesus. Luke, the author of Acts, doesn't just record history but is actually giving us a pattern to follow. For the same God and Holy Spirit who worked so powerfully in and through the early church also works in and through us today!

Starter:

I remember very clearly the very first time I discovered that politicians don't always keep their promises... (STORY of BUSH – "Read my lips! No new taxes"). Trust erodes when political leaders fail to keep their promises. This is also true in our personal and working relationships as well. The old adage that your "word is your bond" sounds wonderful, but the sad reality is that unless we have contracts and legal obligations in our business dealings, we are never sure if people are going to keep their end of the bargain.

But friends, the God we worship is not like this. Our God defines Himself as one who makes and keeps all of His promises. He reveals Himself as promise-keeper, who is always trustworthy and completely reliable. God stakes His very character and reputation on His trustworthiness and ability to make good on His promises. One could argue that the biblical story – the entire bible itself – is simply one account after another of God making and keeping promises, all to the delight and joy of those who are willing to trust Him. Our text this morning from Acts will be yet again another account of how God has kept His ancient promises to Israel by fulfilling them in the Lord Jesus and those who have put their trust in Him. And my hope is that by the end of this message, you too will trust in Jesus the same way these early Christians did!

Setting the Context:

Lets do a brief review in case you have not been able to be here the last few weeks. The Messiah suffers a mock trial and then crucifixion. However, 3 days later He shows up again, resurrected, just as He promised. Then, for the next 40 days, the Messiah teaches about the kingdom of God. The question is asked: will at this time the kingdom be restored to Israel? As usual, the Messiah gives one of His cryptic answers about the times and seasons of the Father's own authority. However, the Messiah goes on to say that not many days from now, they will be endowed with the promised Holy Spirit and will be a witness from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and the ends of the earth! Then He ascends back into the heavens, with an angel informing them that He will return in the same manner He departed. In the meantime, they are to wait for the Holy Spirit. Last week, we saw them devoting themselves to prayer in the upper room and replacing Judas. With 12 disciples back (signifying a restored Israel), they are prepared for the next stage of their mission. Lets read on to see what happens...

The Disciples receive the Spirit

Acts 2:1-13 - At long last, after days and days of waiting – the Spirit suddenly fills the house they are staying at, filling each of the disciples personally, and enabling them to speak in foreign languages they would not know. Now, these four short verses signify not only the fulfillment of Jesus's word to them, but they also fulfill Old Testament prophesy. Furthermore, this event signals a new epoch in world history. No, you won't read this event in secular history, or hear historians refer to Pentecost the same they'll talk about other historic events like famous wars or the founding of nations. But make no mistake, my friends: from God's perspective, the only other event with more significance than the giving of the Spirit to the disciples on this day is the resurrection of Jesus Himself. So lets unpack these verses in more detail by asking some questions:

- 1) What is the significance of Pentecost?
- 2) What the relationship between the Spirit and Pentecost?

3) Why does the Spirit come upon the people as “flaming tongues” (foreign languages)?

Lets take these one at a time. First, what is the significance of Pentecost?

Jewish Background of Pentecost

Pentecost was one of the Jewish festivals celebrated at a harvest time. Later Jewish tradition associated Pentecost with the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai under Moses. Eventually, it turned into a time of pilgrimage to the Temple, celebrated 50 days after Passover. Here is why this matters: we need to take care to understand the exodus story within its biblical framework. Our tendency is to separate the exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Ten Commandments from the Exodus, and in doing so we miss God’s wider purposes for both.

What I want to suggest is that:

The wider purpose of the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Law at Sinai is to establish a new dwelling place where God and His people could enjoy restored fellowship.

Let me show you: In Exodus 15, Moses records the song that Israel sang as they celebrated their liberation and journey out of Egypt. Listen carefully to where the exodus out of Egypt was intended to lead: Exod. 15:13, Exod. 15:17-18. The goal of the exodus is to lead them to a new sanctuary, where God will dwell them. Exodus leads to sanctuary; liberation leads to fellowship; deliverance leads to communion. Now, notice what day it is when they reach Sinai: Exod. 19:1, It’s the timing of what would become Pentecost. What happens at Sinai? God renews His covenant with the people.

Exod. 19:4-6. How does God renew the covenant? *First, He gives them His law which functions like a constitution, a charter that facilitates the relationship He has now established with them.* The 10 Commandments are not just a list of rules! They establish a way of life in the new land where God intends His presence to dwell among them in fellowship, love, and communion. Again, let me show you. After the 10 commandments are given, God has them build an altar, and then He invites Moses, Aaron, and the 70 elders to a banquet (a banquet that would foreshadow the ultimate banquets Jesus promises and that we read about at the end of Revelation): Exod. 24:9-11

Now, eventually what happens here for just a few on Sinai would happen for the nation as a whole under Solomon when the Temple – God’s house – would be filled with His presence. 2 Chronicles 7:1-2

Liberation (exodus) > Sancturay (law) > Restored Fellowship

The Spirit in the OT

We first find the Spirit acting as God’s agent in creation in Gen. 1, where He forms and creates “life”, and the Spirit “hovers over the surface of the waters.” When Adam is brought to life He breathed into him “the breath of life”, which is presumably a reference to the Spirit (Gen. 2:7). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the Spirit empowers individuals to do God’s will, giving them strength or wisdom they would not otherwise have. Most importantly, the Spirit is associated with God’s saving (salvific) presence.

The Spirit in the OT is associated with God’s (saving/empowering) presence

Now, I want to take you to a key prophecy where these themes of exodus, sanctuary, new life, salvation, and restored fellowship all come together: Ezek. 36:25-27. In this text, the prophet assures the people who are currently in exile that they will receive a new exodus out of slavery in Babylon and back into the promised land, with a new sanctuary with God dwelling among them. Ezek. 36:25-27

The prophet goes on to describe how not only their lives but their land will become a new sanctuary. The next chapter takes it a step further from the Spirit renewing hearts to actual resurrection bodies: Ezek. 37:5-6, Ezek. 37:12-14.

Now, later in chapter 37, we go a further step still by tying all of this together with a new David: Ezek. 37:24-28. So lets do our biblical math here: new hearts, new bodies, new sanctuary, under a new King. Now, the book of Isaiah has the exact same themes appear in different places where an anointed Messiah (Davidic king) liberates the people of God from exile and restores them in a new creation, new sanctuary of sorts. Let me show you how Luke works this theme of a new exodus, new sanctuary, restored fellowship with God in the power of the Spirit is manifest in the ministry of Jesus.

New Exodus in Jesus

First, in Luke 3, John the Baptist comes to the people of Israel and calls them to repentance by informing them that the Messiah is coming who will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Second, in Luke 4, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and is empowered by the Spirit. Then, He preaches His first sermon (in Luke) by quoting from Isa. 61: Luke 4:18-19. This text (taken within the larger frame of Isaiah 40-66), like its counterpart in Ezekiel, is replete with these new exodus themes.

Finally, when Jesus had His last meal, where He instituted communion, what special Jewish event was it on? *Passover*. On this Passover, Jesus makes a new covenant with His body and blood as an atoning sacrifice for His people so that He could establish fellowship with them.

Old Exodus	<u>Passover</u>
New Exodus	Jesus (atonement)

Jesus, through the Spirit, fulfills the Promise of New Exodus for God's People

So, Jesus's death and resurrection open the way to make this possible. But there is another step to be taken. Just like Israel was delivered out of Egypt so they could build a new sanctuary that would be filled with the Spirit of God. Again, look at how Luke describes the events of that day: Acts 2:1-2

Think about where they are physically. Most scholars agree that the events that took place here were just outside the temple courts. Now don't miss the significance of what Luke says here: the fire from heaven – which formerly came upon the Tabernacle and the old house of God - has now come upon the new house of God: Jesus's disciples. In other words, with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the new exodus is complete and a new stage of history begins!

Old Dwelling Place (Tabernacle/Temple)	<u>Pentecost</u>
New Dwelling Place	Jesus/Spirit (union with Christ/fellowship with God)

Jesus, through the Spirit, fulfills the Promise a new Dwelling Place where God and His People could enjoy restored fellowship together

So lets move to the final question: why does the Spirit come upon the people as "flaming tongues" (foreign languages)?

The Disciples witness to the crowd by speaking in their respective languages

I realize that there is a lot of controversy surrounding the phenomena of speaking in tongues. We will get to some of that later on in our study. But right here in Acts 2, its fairly straightforward that the ability to speak in tongues is do exactly that: speak in foreign languages you didn't previously know. It's a supernatural activity signifying that the promised Holy Spirit is being poured out on God's people, although in a surprising way no one could have foreseen (a crucified/risen Messiah, and a band of no-name merry disciples that seem like drunkards). But, as we shall see, God intends to glorify Himself and bring salvation to the people in a way that is fully in line with the Old Testament, but not in a way that anyone could have imagined.

Main Point: *The coming of the Spirit reminds us that Jesus is an everfaithful, promise-keeping God*

Application:

By way of application, I want to offer you two very simple but profound truths that I believe the Lord Jesus would want to communicate to us today. The first is this:

The giving of the Spirit during Pentecost demonstrates that the Lord Jesus is trustworthy

The giving of the Spirit during Pentecost demonstrates that the Lord Jesus desires to be personally known