

## “Jesus Poured Out the Holy Spirit”

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*Acts 2:32-36*

<sup>32</sup> *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.* <sup>33</sup>  
*Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.* <sup>34</sup> *For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

“ *The Lord said to my Lord:  
“Sit at my right hand  
35 until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet.”* ’

<sup>36</sup> *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*<sup>1</sup>

Do you know that there’s a new Star Wars movie coming out at this end of this year? It’s called *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*. A little over a week ago, the second trailer for the movie was released. In that preview, we hear the voice of Luke Skywalker saying, “The Force is strong in my family. My father has it. I have it. My sister has it. You have that power, too.” If you’ve seen the original Star Wars movies, you know about the Force. Luke Skywalker learned to use the Force for good. Darth Vader used it for evil. Obi-Wan Kenobi described it this way: “The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, it penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together.”

That description almost—*almost!*—sounds like the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers Christians to believe in Jesus, to obey him, to persevere in their faith, and to bear witness to him. The Holy Spirit dwells within Christians and he is at work all around us. Yes, the Holy Spirit is a he. And that’s the big difference between the Holy Spirit and the Force. The Holy Spirit isn’t some impersonal energy field. And the Holy Spirit isn’t a created being. The Holy Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Trinity. He has a mind and a will. He can speak and he can act, and he certainly can’t be used for evil. Of course, the Holy Spirit isn’t fiction, either. Apparently George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars, developed the idea of the Force from eastern religions. But the Holy Spirit is something—no, some One!—very different.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

Unfortunately, some Christians understand the Force better than they understand the Holy Spirit. It's easier for us to understand the Father and the Son. I think we understand the concept of God the Father fairly well, because we have fathers. And I think we understand Jesus, God the Son, rather well, because Jesus added a human nature, and we can at least imagine a human being who is also God. But I think we have a hard time understanding the Holy Spirit. He's the more transparent person of the Trinity. We don't see him. And he doesn't draw attention to himself. But as Jesus says, he is like the wind. We don't see the wind, but we see its effects. And that's true of the Holy Spirit.

Today, I want to show what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, and how he sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples and how he poured the Holy Spirit out on the church. But first, I want to take a quick look at what the Old Testament says about the Holy Spirit.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis 1. Right at the beginning, we see that the Spirit played a role in the creation of the universe. Genesis 1:1-2 says, "<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Other passages in the Bible speak of the Spirit's role in creation. Psalm 33:6 says, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." The word that is translated as "breath" is the same Hebrew word that is translated as Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Job 33:4 says, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life." So the Holy Spirit is God. He, along with the Father and Jesus, created the universe and all that is in it.

In Genesis 1, we notice that first, God creates spaces, and then he fills them with things. He creates days and night and he fills them with the sun, moon, and stars. He creates the waters and the sky and he fills them with sea creatures and birds. And he creates the land and he fills it with animals and people. When God creates the first man, Adam, we are told that God breathed "the breath of life" in him "and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). It's possible that this language indicates that God created the first man by means of the Holy Spirit. The statements in Job and in Psalm 33 indicate that the Holy Spirit must have played a role in creating humans. So the Spirit was at work at the creation of the universe, the world, and human beings. God created

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<sup>2</sup> רוּחַ (*ru'ah*).

a place for humans to live, and then he created Adam’s physical body, and then his soul and spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, when Adam and Eve sinned against God—when they didn’t accept their limits as created beings and attempted to be God by ignoring his rules—they lost access to the tree of life. They became spiritually dead, in need of redemption. The same is true of all people who have come after them.

As we move through the Old Testament, see that the Holy Spirit comes upon certain individuals for a time to enable them to do God’s will. The man who built the tabernacle, Bezalel, is said to be filled with the Spirit of God (Exod. 31:3; 35:31). Apparently Moses had the Spirit of God at work in him (Num. 11:17). The Spirit of God even came upon Balaam, a false prophet, in order that he could bless Israel instead of curse her. Joshua was filled with the Spirit (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9) and the judges who led Israel were empowered at times by the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The Spirit came upon the first King of Israel, Saul (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6), as well as the second king, David (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 23:2). Nehemiah said that the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets (Neh. 9:30; see also Ezek. 11:5; Mic. 3:8). The Spirit was active in the life of Ezekiel, a prophet and a priest. But the Spirit did not dwell in every Old Testament believer all the time. He came and went. He empowered special people, usually prophets, priests, and kings.

However, the prophets spoke of a time when God’s people would have the Spirit within them. God promised to make a new covenant with his people. This wouldn’t be like the covenant made with his people at Mount Sinai, through Moses. That covenant, which includes the Ten Commandments and many laws, was broken because the people couldn’t obey. Laws have the power to restrain people somewhat, and they reveal our sin. But laws have no power to save us. They have no power to change us. So God promised he would do something new. He would change his people so they would know him and obey him. He would forgive their sins and he would give them the Holy Spirit.

To see this, we have to look at two passages. The first one is Jeremiah 31:31-34:

<sup>31</sup> “The time is coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when I will make a new covenant

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<sup>3</sup> Soul and spirit are sometimes used interchangeably in the Bible. Some people debate whether they are separate entities. I won’t enter into that debate here.

<sup>4</sup> Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14) had the Spirit come upon them.

with the house of Israel  
 and with the house of Judah.  
<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant  
 I made with their forefathers  
 when I took them by the hand  
 to lead them out of Egypt,  
 because they broke my covenant,  
 though I was a husband to them,”  
 declares the LORD.  
<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel  
 after that time,” declares the LORD.  
 “I will put my law in their minds  
 and write it on their hearts.  
 I will be their God,  
 and they will be my people.  
<sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
 or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’  
 because they will all know me,  
 from the least of them to the greatest,”  
 declares the LORD.  
 “For I will forgive their wickedness  
 and will remember their sins no more.”

God promised to put his law in their minds and on their hearts. He promised that all his people would know him, so that they don't have to teach each other, "Know the LORD." This may indicate that every member of the new covenant had the knowledge that only priests had under the old covenant. Everyone member of this new covenant would have that special knowledge. God also promised the forgiveness of sins. But how would God do this? We know that God made the forgiveness of sins possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus said, at the Last Supper, that the cup of wine represented "the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Jesus' death on the cross paid for the sins of his people. He died so they can live.

But what about having the law of God within us? And how do we know God? I think we have to look at a similar passage in Ezekiel. This is Ezekiel 36:24-28:

<sup>24</sup> “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will

put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.<sup>28</sup> You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

The people of Israel had been exiled from the Promised Land because of their idolatry. They worshiped false gods instead of the true God who made them and delivered them out of Egypt, where they had been slaves. God promised he would bring his people back into the land. He promised that he would clean them from their sin. He promised them he would give them a new heart and the Holy Spirit, which would “move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

In the next chapter in Ezekiel, chapter 37, God promised that he would bring dead people to life. It’s a long passage, but it’s worth reading. This is Ezekiel 37:1-4:

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ ” <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’ ”

There are some key things to see in that passage. God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. The prophecy will be the word of LORD, which says, “I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.” Later, God says “I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.” So the “breath” is the Holy Spirit, which will cause these dead people to live. The dead people are the people of Israel, which is to say, God’s people. They will come back to life, and they will enter the Promised Land. I think we’re supposed to see echoes of God creating Adam (Gen. 2:7). God breathed the breath of life into Adam, and then God placed him in a special land, the garden of Eden. Likewise, here God will breathe new life into his people and put them into the Promised Land.

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that Jesus said he would baptize his disciples in the Holy Spirit. In that message, I mentioned some other Old Testament passages that talk about God pouring out the Holy Spirit at the end of time, to restore Israel and the world.<sup>5</sup> There’s another passage that talks about God gathering his people, bringing them to their land, and pouring out the Holy Spirit on them. We see this in Ezekiel 39:28-29:

<sup>28</sup> Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. <sup>29</sup> I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

So, the coming of the Spirit was a pretty big deal. The Spirit would come and bring new to life to dead hearts. The Spirit would enable people to obey God and to know him in a deeper way. The Spirit would bring restoration.

Now, let’s jump ahead to the New Testament. We’ll look at some of what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit.

The first passage we’ll look at is John 3. This is a rather famous passage, but it’s not one that’s always understood well. In this passage, Jesus talks to a Pharisee, one of the Jewish religious leaders. This man, Nicodemus, assumed that because he was born an Israelite, he was already a part of God’s kingdom. Jesus told him that in order to be a part of God’s kingdom, one had to be made into a new creation by the Holy Spirit. We see this in John 3:1-8:

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you

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<sup>5</sup> See Isa. 32:15; 44:1-5.

are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

<sup>3</sup> In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

<sup>4</sup> “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Jesus tells Nicodemus one can’t even see the kingdom of God unless one is born again.

Nicodemus clearly doesn’t understand, so Jesus spells it out for him. Being born again means being born of water and spirit. I think he’s referring back to the passage in Ezekiel 36, where God says that he will cleanse his people with water and give them the Holy Spirit. That’s what being born again is. It’s being forgiven of sins and being given a new heart and the Holy Spirit. (It’s strange when people talk about being a “born-again Christian,” as if there’s another kind of Christian.)

Notice also that Jesus says, “The wind blows wherever it pleases.” The “wind” is the same word translated as “Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> It’s a bit of a play on words. We don’t see the Spirit, just like we don’t see the wind. But it certainly has an effect. Of course, Jesus is saying more than that. The Spirit is the one who causes spiritually dead people to come to life. He is the one who causes people to have faith in Jesus. He initiates a new life of faith. Paul says in one of his letters, 1 Corinthians, that “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). God created people by means of the Holy Spirit, and God recreates people through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus says later in John, “The Spirit gives life” (6:63).

On the night that Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested, he told his disciples what would soon happen. Though he would leave them, he would send someone else to help them in his absence.

In John 14, Jesus tells them about the “Counselor” whom he would send. We find this in John 14:15-17:

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<sup>6</sup> πνευμα (*pneuma*).

<sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Jesus says that he will ask the Father to give his disciples “another Counselor.” The word translated here as “Counselor” is παράκλητος, which is sometimes transliterated as “Paraclete.” The word has a range of different meanings. It can mean mediator, intercessor, or helper. In 1 John 2:1, the same word is sometimes translated as “advocate” (as in the English Standard Version) or “one who speaks . . . in our defense” (New International Version). So, if Jesus is our Paraclete, the Holy Spirit is another Paraclete. He speaks in our defense. He counsels us. He mediates for us. This word, Paraclete, also has the sense of “helper.” In the physical absence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit carries on his mission. The Spirit helps Christians while Jesus is in heaven.

It is clear from Jesus’ words that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He guides Christians to the truth. In the Old Testament, he was with God’s people, though he didn’t permanently dwell in them. In the case of the disciples, he was with them, because Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit in all that he did. But Jesus promises his disciples that the Spirit would soon be in them.

Jesus then tells his disciples that the Spirit would come to teach them. We find this in John 14:25–26:

<sup>25</sup>“All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Notice again that Jesus says the Spirit will be sent by the Father in the name of Jesus. The three persons of God work together. God sends the Spirit through Jesus. And Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit would teach them “all things” and remind them of what he had spoken to them. I believe that means that the Spirit would empower the apostles to preach the gospel. I also believe it means that the Spirit would use some of them to write the New Testament. In that group of disciples were Matthew and John, who wrote Gospels, biographies of Jesus. John also wrote three letters and the book of Revelation. Peter was another one of the disciples. He wrote two letters and Mark’s Gospel is supposed to be based on Peter’s recollections. Paul wasn’t there when Jesus was saying these words, but he was an apostle, one commissioned by Jesus, and Paul wrote thirteen letters. The other writers of the New Testament were Luke, who wrote his Gospel and the book of Acts; two of Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude; and the book of Hebrews. Luke



used the Gospel of Mark and eyewitness testimony to write his books. He also knew Paul (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11). James saw the resurrected Jesus and he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15; Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:7). Jude may have used Peter's second letter as a source and he certainly knew Jesus well. We don't know who wrote the book of Hebrews, but the message of the book matches the rest of the New Testament, and the author knew Timothy, Paul's associate (Heb. 13:22). The Holy Spirit worked through all of these men to write the New Testament, just as the Holy Spirit worked through the people who wrote the Old Testament. That's why we claim that the Bible isn't merely another book. Instead, the Bible's ultimate author is God.

If the Holy Spirit empowers Christians, if the Bible is his words, if he is the Spirit of truth, and if God's word is true, then it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit will guide Christians to believe the Bible is indeed God's word and that it's true. All Christians should understand this. Unfortunately, some Christians want to pit the Spirit against the Bible. This doesn't make any sense if we understand that the Spirit produced the Bible. It also doesn't make sense to pit Jesus' words against Paul's, since the entire Bible is the word of God.

In John 15:26, Jesus told the disciples, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father to his disciples. The Spirit of truth will testify about Jesus. That's a significant part of the role of the Spirit: he brings people to a proper understanding of Jesus. He points people to Jesus.

In John 16, Jesus told the disciples that he couldn't send the Spirit unless he first went to heaven. He said this, in John 16:7-11:

<sup>7</sup> But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Jesus couldn't send the Spirit until after he died on the cross, rose from the grave, and ascended into heaven. Jesus needed to die to pay for our sins. And he needed to rise from the grave to show he paid for them. He needed to ascend into heaven to intercede for us. But I think he also

needed to ascend to heaven in order to send the Spirit from the Father. We also see from this passage that part of the Spirit's role is to put the world on trial. He will convict the world of its sin, its lack of righteousness, and its affiliation with Satan, the so-called "prince of this world."<sup>7</sup> Some people will realize their guilt and turn to Jesus and some will not.

And then Jesus continues, in John 16:12-15:

<sup>12</sup> "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup> He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. <sup>15</sup> All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Again, the Holy Spirit guided the disciples into truth. We should remember that Jesus said that he himself is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). The Spirit continued the teaching ministry that Jesus started. But what the Holy Spirit taught them wasn't different than what Jesus would say, because the Holy Spirit only speaks what he hears from Jesus. And whatever Jesus speaks comes from the Father. Again, the entire Bible is the word of God. It is Jesus' word to us. It is authored by the Holy Spirit through humans.

After Jesus died and rose from the grave, he appeared to his disciples. At that time, we see him impart the Holy Spirit to them. We find this in John 20:19-23:

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Exactly what happened here is debated. Some theologians think that the disciples didn't have the Spirit until the day of Pentecost. But nothing in the Bible says that. I think Jesus actually gave

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<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 210: "Here the Paraclete plays the role of a prosecuting attorney." Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 526: "He will convict and reprove the world because it fails to see the truth in Jesus. The world does not realize that disbelief in Jesus represents the fundamental sin of humanity (16:9). The world also lives under the illusion of its righteousness, for it does not perceive and behold Jesus or realize that he resides with God (16:10). Nor does the world grasp that its judgment is certain because the ruler of the world, Stan himself, was judged at the cross (16:11).

the disciples the Spirit at this time, just as he promised he would. That doesn't mean that the disciples weren't believers in Jesus until this time. They believed, however imperfectly. But now they had the indwelling Holy Spirit, who would assist them in their mission of bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think this action also shows that the church is now the temple of God, where sins are forgiven. The reason the church can be the temple is because it is filled with God's presence. The church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16).

All of this leads up to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. At that point, Jesus has ascended into heaven and the disciples are still waiting in Jerusalem because Jesus told them to wait until he baptized them with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). I should say now that there are different ways that people relate to the Holy Spirit. Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (Eph. 1:13-14). But at times they can be especially filled with the Spirit to achieve some task (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; 9:17; 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18-19). And then there are baptisms of the Spirit. Baptisms of the Spirit in the book of Acts occur when the Spirit falls on a new group of believers, signifying a significant advance in the gospel's progress. We see that in Acts 2, at Pentecost; Acts 8, when some Samaritans come to believe in Jesus; Acts 10, when Gentiles become believers; and Acts 19, when some followers of John the Baptist become followers of Jesus. Each of these advances is significant, but I only want to focus on the one that we see in Acts 2.

Pentecost was one of the three major festivals that Jewish people observed in Jerusalem. We are told that people came from all over the Roman Empire. Suddenly, a wind from heaven blows, tongues of fire descend on the disciples, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They started to speak in other languages, languages that the Jews from different nations could understand (Acts 2:1-12).

I believe just that bit of information signifies two things: one, when the Holy Spirit arrives, he draws believers from all kinds of nations—"every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5)—to Jesus. This is the gathering of God's people that was promised in the Old Testament. But another thing that is significant is that this is a reversal of the effects of the tower of Babel. Some of you may know that story from Genesis 11: The people of that day tried to make themselves look great, so they started to build a massive tower. This is really a symbol of human pride. God thwarted their plans, however, by confusing their language. Instead of speaking one language, God gave them many different languages. They couldn't communicate with each other—their

languages sound like so much babbling—and the building project was abandoned (Gen. 11:1-9). That story shows that sinful humanity is fractured. But God is creating for himself one people from different nations. He is making them into one giant temple, where he dwells with his people.

Why does this matter?

One, if you are a Christian, God is remaking you into a new person. Yes, your outer self may be wasting away, but you are being made into a new person from the inside out (2 Cor. 4:16). When God created the world, first he created a land, then he created a body, and then he created the inward life of that body. When we are saved, the reverse happens: God recreates us spiritually. However, unless Jesus returns before we die, our bodies will age and weaken and die. But when Jesus returns, we will have resurrected bodies. And Jesus will recreate and renew the physical world.<sup>8</sup> The renewal process starts within.

Two, only the Spirit can save and give new life. No amount of rules, no amount of laws, can ever change someone the way that we need to be changed. This is an important part of the gospel. Jesus died to pay for our sins, and he rose again. But if Jesus didn't give us the Holy Spirit, we would remain the same kind of people we've always been. We need the Spirit to make us into new creations. We need the Spirit to make us more like Jesus. Consider this: when God gave the law at Mount Sinai, it was the time of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover. What happened right after the Israelites received the law? They made a golden calf and worshiped it. And what happened then? Three thousand of them died (Exod. 32:28). What happened when God gave the Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, when Jesus died? Three thousand people were saved (Acts 2:41).

That means that we should be careful about being legalists. If we truly understand the gospel, we can't give people the impression that Christianity is primarily or only about obeying rules. Yes, there are rules in Christianity. Some of them are more serious than others. But none of us are saved by keeping rules. None of us remain Christians by keeping rules. We become Christians and we stay Christians only because of God's grace. And God's grace is manifest by the Spirit's work in our lives. The Spirit guides us. Yes, the Spirit has given us some rules in the

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen J. Wellum in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 713: "In the old creation, God first made the place where we live, and then he made the creatures to live there. In the new creation, however, God first will make his new people, and then he will make the home where they will live."

Bible. But if you read the New Testament, you often see that these rules are expressed in broad principles. At any rate, we must never give the impression that Christianity is like all the other religions, which say that if you obey all the rules, you will earn your way to God.

Three, the Holy Spirit empowered the first Christians to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Peter was filled with the Spirit, he proclaimed who Jesus was and what he did (Acts 2:22-36). The Spirit still empowers Christians to share the gospel. We are temple of the living God and we are royal priests (1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). We represent the King. We “prophesy” by speaking God’s word to people.

Four, we can pray that God would send us the Holy Spirit. If you don’t know that you’re a Christian, ask for the Spirit. Ask him to make you born again. If you’re a Christian and you feel you’re not growing, ask the Spirit to produce good fruit in your life. Ask him to point you once again to Jesus. If you’re not sharing the gospel with others, ask the Spirit to empower you. Pray that God would fill you with the Spirit so you would do his will.

Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit so that God’s presence would be with us always. Let us call on the Spirit to give us new life, to fill us, to change us, and to empower us to be Jesus’ witnesses.