

**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES - NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY -
PART THREE - CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE**

In chapter 1 before leaving the earth in bodily form, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to equip us to be those through whom He continued to do and teach. In the rest of chapter 1 there is one further reminder of the futility of trying to do His work without Him.

At the beginning of chapter 2 the great day in history, promised for over 1400 years, finally arrives. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit is poured out into all believers, men and women, young and old, regardless of social class, to equip them to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth.

At the moment God had chosen, there is a sound like a great wind from heaven, a reminder of the power, sovereignty and mystery of the Holy Spirit. Tongues of fire spread out to touch each of them, telling us that the Spirit is given to all believers to put the fire of love and the enthusiasm of the Lord into each of our hearts. They are filled with the Spirit for the first time, as wind fills the sails on a sailing ship so that the wind moves the ship in the direction it chooses and with the power it gives. Our lives are the ship; the sails our knowledge of the Lord Jesus in His word. The purpose of God is that we might allow the Spirit to have full control, moment after moment through every day which is the only way that a sailing ship or a Christian can fulfil what is planned for each day. At the same time we are to be discovering more of the sails that are stowed in the hold, the truth concerning Christ that is hidden in His word. Every discovery we make is to be exposed to the Holy Spirit, translated into action, so that every day the ship flies a little more sail and there is greater depth of meaning to our prayer, 'Lord live in me today the way you want to.'

The fourth thing that happened on the day of Pentecost was that they spoke with other tongues. Verses 6,8, and 11 make it quite clear that what happened was that the visitors to Jerusalem, who would not speak much Aramaic because they had grown up in far distant places speaking many other languages, would nevertheless understand the gospel as presented by the disciples. God blessed them that day by breaking through the language barrier which had been set up at the tower of Babel, in Genesis chapter 11. One of the exciting things that happens for us as Christians when we really learn to let the Lord live in us is that we too learn how to break through the barriers of language, ignorance, confusion and prejudice that prevent people understanding who Jesus really is, and what He wants to do in our lives. This is part of the process by which members of the body of Christ care for the needs of the body as a whole.(I Cor.12-14)

Peter demonstrates in verses 14-21 how what was happening fulfilled the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. He links two things together, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all believers with the dramatic events of the crucifixion. Together he says they usher in the last days which will conclude with Christ's final return.

In verses 22-36 Peter presents the great crowd that has gathered with three lines of evidence for his claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Saviour and the one who having returned to heaven has now poured out the Holy Spirit. His three lines of evidence are first the life, miracles and death of Jesus which many had observed.(2:22,23) The second line of evidence is the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead which only the disciples had seen.(2:24,32) Nevertheless the whole crowd could see how they had been changed by that event. The third evidence is the Old Testament which had promised in great detail what would happen when Jesus came as the Christ, the Messiah. Peter refers to three

Psalms, 16, 132, and 110 all of which promise that Christ having died on the cross would rise from the dead. These three arguments are tremendously compelling to a Jewish audience who knew and believed the Old Testament, had seen Jesus in person and could now see the changed lives of the disciples.

So compelling is Peter's message which 'pierced to the heart'(2:37), spoke so deeply to the whole person, that it is the congregation who appeal to know what to do not the evangelist who tries to push them into some response. Peter's explanation of the 'how' of becoming a Christian in verse 38 is repentance, a change of heart towards sin, self, and the Saviour on the basis of which he guarantees that the Holy Spirit will be given to them also. Three thousand people become Christians that day because the ground had been so well prepared and the message so clearly and compellingly given. The Spirit convinces them of their need of Christ.

The glimpse we are given of the first church in Jerusalem is immensely exciting. Their programme has four parts to it. The apostles teach them every day in homes and public places so that they continue to grow in their knowledge of all that Jesus Christ is and will be in their lives. Their fellowship grows because their understanding grows. They would have expressed this in worship, singing and praying, and at the same time their fellowship with each other grows as they become thoroughly practical in meeting each other's needs in a physical sense, in a social way, intellectually and above all spiritually. When they break bread together there does not seem to have been an artificial separation between their communion service and their fellowship at the table as they share hospitality in their homes. The final part of the programme is prayer in which they listen to what God has to say in His word, about the needs of one another, and respond thankfully, utterly available in their hearts to whatever He has in mind for them. Because their faith is sincere, whole-hearted and constant it is no surprise that every day more people are finding Christ.

3:1 Q.1 Why were Peter and John going to the temple at the hour of prayer? Did Christians still take part in temple services?(Jn.2:21; I Cor.3:16)

3:2 Q.2 If this lame beggar had been lying so many years at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, Jesus would have passed him many times. Why had Jesus not healed him before?

3:3-6 Q.3 This beggar has sometimes been described as the man who asked for alms and got legs. What does this story teach us about how to find opportunity to share Jesus Christ in the ordinary events of daily life?

3:7-10 Q.4 How does the New Testament use the idea of people walking in God's strength as a picture of a discovery we need to make spiritually?(Col.2:6,7; II Cor.5:7; Eph.4:17; 5:2) How will some people react when they see us living in Christ's strength?(Matt.5:16)

3:11,12 Q.5 How are people liable to respond to us if God uses us to do something miraculous? How did Peter deal with this problem? How do we need to do the same when people admire our Christian living?

3:13-26 Q.6 Show how in this next message which Peter presents he offers the same three lines of evidence for the truth of his claim regarding Jesus Christ as he does in chapter 2. How would these three ideas be so compelling to a Jewish audience? Look up the Old Testament references he uses and see how their contexts help to explain the points Peter is making.

3:19-21 Q.7 What does Peter indicate must be their response to the gospel if they are to benefit from what he says? How would you re-phrase verses 19-21 for an audience of young people in your own culture, who do not yet know much about the Bible?