

Gospel Unity

Acts 2:1-47

Acts chapter 2 records the birth of the New Covenant Church, which the New Testament refers to as the Temple of God. The old stone temple at Jerusalem had just been made obsolete when Christ died on the cross, even though it continued functioning until it was Divinely swept away in A.D. 70. And so this morning we are going to look at the beginning of the new and greater temple of God – which is formed by people in union with Christ – which means Christ is in us and we are in Him. Christians are the Body and Bride of Christ. Please follow as I read Acts 2:1-13, which took place ten days after Christ’s ascension,

“When the day of Pentecost came, they [Christ’s disciples] were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting [that special sound effect was designed by God to draw a crowd]. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them [in Isaiah’s vision of God, a live coal touch his lips to purify him]. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit [meaning they were controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit] and began to speak in other tongues [languages] as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven [referring to Jews from all over the Roman Empire who came to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Pentecost]. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language [Greek was the universal language, but most people also had a mother tongue spoken in their homes]. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? [Luke, who wrote Acts, now lists 15 language groups] 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’ 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’”

The false claim that the disciples were drunk was made because the many languages being spoken all at once – were undoubtedly confusing for those who did not understand any of those languages. And so in verses 14-20, Peter quickly shows that the charge of drunkenness was ludicrous, and then he goes on to explain the real significance of this event,

“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel [Peter now quotes Joel 2:28-32]: 17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people [young and old, male and female]. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [Let me pause and explain that prophecies, visions and dreams were the means by which God gave us the Old Testament Scriptures. The reason God was again giving prophecies, visions and dreams was because He was about to give mankind His revelation for the New

Testament, which God faithfully completed during the lifetime of the Apostles. God's Word brings great blessings to those who receive it, but it also brings judgment to those who oppose it. Peter now quotes Joel 2:30-31, in order to warn his Jewish kindred of judgment coming upon those who rejected Christ and went on to persecute His followers. Through Joel God says]. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.'"

There are two critically important phrases Peter uses in Acts 2:17-20. One phrase is "last days" and the other is the "day of the Lord." Let's begin with the "day of the Lord." It surprises many people when I tell them there were numerous "days of the Lord" recorded in the Old Testament. A "day of the Lord" was a time of severe judgment upon the wicked, which at times brought relief to the righteous, who were suffering at the hands of the wicked. An example of a "day of Lord" appears in Joel chapter 1. God brought judgment upon the wicked Jews of Joel's day by means of an enormous locust plague. Ezekiel 30, speaks about a "day of Lord" upon Egypt at the hands of the Babylonians. Isaiah 13 speaks of a "day of the Lord" upon Babylon at the hands of the Medes. We should note that the "days of the Lord" which came upon Egypt and Babylon included language of the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light. There are times in Scripture when the sun, moon and stars represent the leaders of nations. Why? Because Genesis 1 speaks of the sun as the ruler of the day and the moon and stars as the rulers of the night. And so the sun being darkened and the moon not giving its light is speaking of rulers of nations being taken out – darkened.

When Peter was speaking to that Jewish crowd in Acts 2, a "day of the Lord" upon unbelieving Israel was less than forty years away. God's judgment upon that generation of Jews was carried out by the hands of the Romans, and it resulted in the permanent destruction of the obsolete temple at Jerusalem. The sweeping away of that temple in A.D. 70, is what marked the official end of Old Covenant Israel. That is an important point – so I want to explain why I say that.

Christ's death on the cross both fulfilled and brought to an end the Ceremonial Division of God's Law. This was the part of God's Law that included such things as animal sacrifices, offered by Levitical Priests at the stone temple. None of those regulations were necessary after Christ became the perfect sacrifice for sin. At the moment of Christ's death, God indicated that the stone temple had served its purpose by sending an earthquake, which ripped apart the veil in the temple from top to bottom. However the unbelieving Jews quickly repaired the damage and kept right on sacrificing animals in spite of Christ's perfect sacrifice for sin. The "day of Lord" that Old Covenant Israel suffered in A.D. 70, put an end to that practice. The Jews who rejected Christ hated the loss of their temple because that temple had made them unique among all the nations.

Let's now think together about the phrase "last days" – which by the way does not appear in the book of Joel. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter says that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, occurred in the "last days." An obvious question is – the "last days" of what? Friends, the age that was functioning when Christ came to earth was the Old Covenant

Age, which required animal sacrifices. Jesus came to put an end to that age and to inaugurate the glorious New Covenant Age through His perfect sacrifice for sin. And so Jesus began the New Covenant during the last days of the Old Covenant. Are we all clear on that?

When I ask people when did the Old Covenant Age officially end, the response is that it ended when Jesus died on the cross around A.D. 33. But Hebrews 8:13, written around A.D. 65-68, does not agree with that answer,

“By calling this covenant ‘new’, [the New Covenant Christ inaugurated through His blood], he has made the first one obsolete [Christ accomplished that at the cross when He fulfilled the Ceremonial Law]; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”

When Hebrews was written, the obsolete temple at Jerusalem was still functioning. It was Divinely swept away in A.D. 70, which is the official end of Old Covenant Israel and the Old Covenant Age. Why is that important? Because the “last days” in which the writers of the New Testament lived, were the last days of the Old Covenant Age. I believe we get ourselves in trouble when we say the “last days” spoken of in the New Testament refer to the entire New Covenant Age. The writers of the New Testament were unique in that they lived in the “last days” of the Old Covenant, and in the very, very beginning of the glorious New Covenant. In contrast, none of us in this room have spent even a nano second in the Old Covenant Age. We are strictly New Covenant people. This means the perilous “last days” that the Apostle Paul warned Timothy about were the last days of the Old Covenant Age, which ended in a “day of the Lord” – a horrible bloodbath for Old Covenant Israel.

In light of the awful judgment coming upon apostate Israel, what Peter says in verses 21-40, was essential for that Jewish crowd to hear,

““And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 22 Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men [the Romans], put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him . . . 36 Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do [is there any hope for us?] 38 Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized [which is the outward sign of being in the New Covenant], every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for [because of] the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation’” [which was the last generation of Old Covenant Israel and the Old Covenant Age].

Some of the people listening to Peter in Acts 2, had fifty days prior, defiantly declared at Christ’s crucifixion, “Let his blood be upon us and our children.” Peter is proclaiming the good

news that even those people could repent and be saved. Praise God for what we read in verses 41-47,

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day [the majority of whom had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost from countries all over the Roman Empire. Verses 42-47 speaks volumes about the early Church]. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [which is recorded in the New Testament] and to the fellowship [the glorious union between Christ and His people], to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles [II Corinthians 12:12 states that the ability to perform wonders and miracles was one of the marks of being an apostle]. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods [which included property and houses], they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

There is a historical setting for this passage that we must keep in mind if we are to properly understand what was going on. The first historical fact is that the church at Jerusalem was the only church in the world at the time of Acts 2. The majority of the people who repented and believed in Christ, after Peter’s sermon, were from other countries and they had only come to Jerusalem for a short visit. Most of them were not financially able to stay for more than a week. But because they were new Christians, they needed to stay at Jerusalem in order to get grounded in the faith before returning home – where there were no churches. This reality helps us to understand verses 44-45, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

The believers who could not afford a prolonged stay at Jerusalem, were helped financially by fellow believers – so they could stay long enough for the Apostles to get them established in the faith. This urgent need also explains verse 46, “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.” [These new believers were receiving intensive training in the faith]. From the rest of verse 46, we also learn that the followers of Christ who lived at Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, opened their homes for small group gatherings, where people could break bread together [eat] and ask questions about the faith – which the Apostles were daily teaching them at the temple. And so God arranged for His new temple on earth to have its beginnings in the obsolete temple at Jerusalem. The greatest glory for that stone temple at Jerusalem was that the Lord Jesus Christ entered that temple and the New Covenant Church, had its beginning in that temple.

Let me mention how greatly God blessed the sacrificial measures by the believers at Jerusalem and Judea. Because the new followers of Christ from every nation under heaven were established in the faith, when they went back to their homelands, they could effectively share the good news of the gospel; which is why the Apostle Paul in A.D. 60, could write in Colossians 1:23, “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” [to all the people living in the Roman Empire].

A truth we should take away from this passage is the importance of helping new believers to become established in their faith. Do all of you have an assurance of your salvation and could you help a person understand what is involved in being a Christian?

There is something else about the historical setting of Acts 2 we need to understand. Let me explain it this way. It was shocking for Jewish people who lived in Jerusalem and the nearby areas to see lands and houses being sold by Jewish Christians that had been in their families for hundreds of years. One of the reasons why the Jewish Christians were willing to sell their property is because the Lord Jesus had taught that within a generation, a 40 year period of time, not one stone of the temple at Jerusalem would be left standing. And of course Jesus was right. The generation of Jews who originally heard that statement realized that the nation of Israel was not going to allow their temple to be destroyed except over their dead bodies. This is why Jesus gave His Jewish followers these important instruction in Luke 21:20-21,

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out . . .”

The nation of Israel was going to be decimated. Which means that people who owned houses and property in Judea were not going to be able to keep them. We know from history that hundreds of thousands of Jews became trapped inside of Jerusalem because of the siege conducted by the armies of Rome. Thousands died by disease and starvation. Myriads of others were killed because of the three warring factions which developed within the city. And the Jews who did survive the intense years of suffering inside Jerusalem, ended up being slaughtered by the Roman soldiers when they finally broke through the wall – or they were carried off to the salt mines.

By selling their properties, the believing Jews gave up what they could not keep – AND tangibly testified to the unbelieving Jews that they believed what Jesus said. Judgment was coming upon that generation of Jews.

An application for Christians today is that if our nation behaves just like the nation of Israel in Peter’s day, then we too can expect judgment. Another application is that we should hold lightly to our possessions – because we take nothing with us at death – except our character and our rewards for honoring Christ and helping His Kingdom to be extended upon this earth. Let’s pray.