

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

We praise You Great Lord of all Creation  
You are the One who makes all things perfect!  
You are the One who knows what is right and wrong!  
You are the One who graciously forgives our sin!  
You are the One who liberates us for Glory!  
Alleluia – AMEN!

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

**1. For yourself**

*Reflect on your own attitudes towards the things you have and confess your sins, especially of greed and of covetousness*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Place before the Lord your feelings about the comparative wealth or otherwise of those you know and love. Seek the Lord's heart and mind about those things the devil can use to control or damage relationships*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Find out what your church has 'in the bank', and also what it plans to do with this. Confess the sins of your church and pray that its wealth will be always be used for the work of the Kingdom*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Switch on the news and listen for the concerns of those who are poor. Pray for their needs, and ask the Lord to bless those who seek to distribute the wealth of nations with godly equity.*

### Meditation

I see the marks of faith in the lives of others  
The saints of God who constantly witness to my spirit

A smile on the face of one who suffers  
Which shows faith held high in the midst of hardship

A truthful word inspired by the Spirit  
Which demonstrates integrity of faith and purpose

A hymn or psalm sung with spiritual beauty,  
Which lifts the heart to the heights of God's throne

A helping hand offered timely and trustworthy  
Which opens up the soul in love and generosity

A life lived through trials, but surely ascending  
Which shouts freedom from Satan's spiral of despair

I see the marks of faith in the lives of others  
And I thank my Saviour for all the saints of God

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Acts 2:5-13

<sup>5</sup> Now in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven had come to stay. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered, bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked:

‘These people speaking, are they not all Galileans? <sup>8</sup> How is it then that each one of us hears them speaking in his own native tongue? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and converts to Judaism, people from Crete and Arabs; we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages!’

<sup>12</sup> They were all amazed and perplexed, and asked one another what it might mean. <sup>13</sup> Some, however, made fun of them and said,

‘They are too full of wine!’

## Review

***Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples rushed into the Temple praising God, but found that they were speaking in ‘tongues’, moreover, their words were all understood by people of different nationalities! What a wonderful sign of God’s intention to break down communication barriers between people!***

The first four verses of Acts 2 are amazing, but they pass by all too quickly and we are left wondering what they mean. Why does God send His Holy Spirit in wind and fire? Why is it that God comes to bless not curse, and what really is this blessing? Is this what Luke means when he says earlier that Jesus will ‘baptise in the Holy Spirit? This extraordinary event leads us to ask many questions, but more than this it challenges us to the core. What happened on the first Pentecost demonstrably changed the lives of the early disciples and energised the church; so are we to believe that each one of us today must accept a similar baptism in the Holy Spirit as God’s chosen servants?

One thing is certain, the story in Acts 2 divides people between those upon whom the Holy Spirit has come and those who are left asking questions. This may be for some an uncomfortable thought, but it cannot be avoided. The first four verses of Acts 2 describe the thrilling arrival of God’s Holy Spirit, but our reading today describes the baffled response of onlookers to these dramatic events. Like so many since it first happened, they are left bemused at what God has done.

To understand this passage, we need to remember that Luke assumes we know what Jerusalem was like at Pentecost. In those days, more Jews lived in the cities of the Roman Empire beyond Israel than within it, a fact that persists to this day. As long as Israel remained within the Roman Empire there was free movement between all its cities, and Jewish people made the most of it. So at festive times, Jerusalem swelled to many times the size of the normal population with visitors, and every possible room within the city walls was let out (see Luke’s description of the disciples *‘having a room’* in Jerusalem - 1:4). As a city, Jerusalem was economically dependent upon these festivals, and food and drink, especially wine, were bought and sold at a premium, but more of this later.

Against this background, Luke describes the disciples worshipping God (2:5,6), mostly likely in the Temple, and speaking out loud in their new languages or ‘tongues’. Many years were to pass before Paul would warn the Corinthian church not to use tongues in worship because incomprehensible words could not communicate the Gospel (1 Corinthians 14); but for now, God’s purposes were served by this extravagant manifestation of spiritual power. Remarkably, those who heard the disciples did not just hear incomprehensible words, they heard distinct languages. People in Jerusalem came from throughout the world, and as Luke reports *‘each one heard them speaking in his own language’*. Their amazement was compounded because for whatever reason, perhaps because of dress and manner, those speaking in tongues were recognised as Galileans, people who were regarded as somewhat lower in intelligence!

The list of nations given is difficult to analyse (2:8-11); it is a surprising list of cities and nations from within the Roman Empire. It begins with nations of the East (Parthians, Medes 2:9), and turns closer to Jerusalem (Judah ... Asia, Phrygia 2:9,10) before mentioning nations to the west of Israel, in North Africa (Egypt, Libya 2:10); the list ends with Rome, and surprisingly, people from Crete, and ‘Arabs’. There were Jews, of course, but also proselytes, those who so admired the Jews that they accepted circumcision and became official ‘converts to Judaism’ (1:11). It is most likely that the list is of cities or regions where Jews lived, but no one can be sure.

Luke describes the confusion created by these monumental events in verse 12, and he puts into the mouths of the people there the great question, *‘what does this mean?’* (2:12). Of course, this gracious work of God

clearly energised and emboldened the early disciples, but some dismissed this work of God as mere drunkenness (2:13). In truth, such scurrilous accusations have always followed manifestations of God's power, throughout the ages. We should understand that Luke's story is always on the side of the disciples, suggesting that this newfound baptism of God's Spirit is something for all disciples, while those who merely observe the phenomenon are left with too many unanswered questions

Today many of those who attend church remain on the outside of this story. They do not recognise here anything that connects with their faith, and are left with questions instead of being caught up in the love, wonder and praise of receiving the Holy Spirit. But the truth is that God's church has always been made up of those who have been swept up by the Holy Spirit and baptised into God's power. They are released from the world's bondage into the exciting prospects of doing God's will. Let all God's people remain open to receive the Holy Spirit, to be caught up in the exciting flow of what God is doing in His world!

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- The unique nature of the miracles performed on the first day of Pentecost
- 'God-fearing' Jews and proselytes (2:5,11), and the languages they spoke
- 'Too full of wine!' (2:13)

### **Notes on the translation of the passage**

#### **V5 'God-fearing Jews from every nation had come to stay'**

##### Other translations:

*'devout men living in Jerusalem' (New Jerusalem Bible)*

*'there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews' (NIV)*

There are two things to be sorted out in this phrase. Most Bible versions open with a phrase similar to mine, 'God-fearing Jews'. The new Jerusalem Bible is an exception, speaking of 'devout men'. The reason for the difference is to be found in the ancient versions of the original text. In some, the word 'Jews' is missing, and scholars must try to work out whether this is by accident, or whether this was the original version of the text. It is only a small thing, but for those who believe that every word of the Bible is important, it matters. I believe that the original text must have included the word 'Jews', because it makes most sense in the context of what Luke says here, as you can see from the study above.

The second matter is this. The Greek word I have translated 'come to stay', is an entirely general word meaning 'living'. It is my belief that the word also covers the idea of someone living somewhere not permanently, but on a temporary basis. You will see from the study that this, in general, is what Luke is speaking about here, so this has affected my translation, 'come to stay'. You will see that the NIV has done the same.

### **The unique nature of the miracles performed on the first day of Pentecost**

The background to our passage today is that of the disciples, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in 'other tongues', as the Spirit led (2:4). Now if we read the passage carefully, what Luke says in verse 6 is simply this; when the people in Jerusalem heard the sound of 'speaking in tongues is', they miraculously heard *'each one of them speaking in his own language'* (2:6). The question must therefore be this; was there just one miracle in which the disciples spoke foreign languages and were heard by the people, or were there two miracles of grace, one by which the disciples spoke in 'tongues', and another by which the tongues were miraculously heard as other languages. The question must at least be asked, and strictly, either is possible according to Luke's report here in Acts. It is only when we look further afield in Scripture that we can form an opinion about whether there is one or two different gifts of 'speaking in tongues' (see Application).

Nevertheless, as far as Luke is concerned, the important thing is that on the first day of Pentecost, people from throughout the world hear the Gospel. They may have been amazed and perplexed (2:12), and some people are 'made fun of them' (2:13), but the word of God was delivered to the world by people who previously had been scared to identify themselves as followers of Jesus. In the days after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples kept themselves to the one room in Jerusalem where Jesus appeared to them, and some of the Gospels tell us that they also spend some time in Galilee where they also met Jesus. Now, in this one dramatic events, the complete good news of Jesus Christ, being the message of salvation from God to all humanity, breaks forth from its Jewish confines and is declared to all people.

However important it is to try and understand exactly what the gift of tongues entails, it seems that Scripture is here recording something of a reversal of what happened in Genesis chapter 11. In that famous story the people of the earth all joined together to try and build a building that would reach high enough into heaven to touch God. They failed, of course, and God both destroyed their building, and also scattered them throughout the earth as people with different languages, so they would not get together and try to do the same thing again (Genesis 11:8,9's). Now, on the day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues signifies the end of this earthly confusion, for through the gift of tongues, the Gospel is made comprehensible to all people!

For this reason, whenever we talk about the gift of speaking in tongues today, it would be wise to do so in the context of its value in the proclamation of Gospel. This is why Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14 that when tongues are spoken in public, they must be accompanied by a prophetic interpretation of God's Word, just as God added to the gift of tongues on the first day of Pentecost the miracle of people hearing the Gospel in their own languages. Anything less is a misuse of the gift.

### ***'God-fearing' Jews and proselytes (2:5,11), and the languages they spoke***

In the first century A.D., many people throughout the Roman Empire I admired the Jews and their religious heritage, all were attracted to the fact that the ancient faith was protected by Roman law. For this reason, non-Jewish people came forward to accept the Jewish faith, and become what is called a 'proselyte'. Such people were circumcised and were partially accepted in Jewish circles, although they would never wholly accepted as fully 'Jews' because they had no heritage linking them into the line of Abraham.

Luke's comments about '*God-fearing Jews from every nation*' and '*both Jews and converts to Judaism*' in verses 5 and 11 suggest that there were large numbers of such proselytes as well as Jews throughout the Roman Empire, and they all wanted to come to Jerusalem for the great festivals of Judaism. Of course, all such people would have spoken the common language of 'common Greek', a version of Greek used throughout the Roman Empire as a common language in the first century A.D. For many, this would have been an easy language to use, but for some it would have been difficult. The miracle Luke records is the fact that all these barriers of language were broken down when the people listened to the disciples praising God. The disciples may have been praising God, but the people heard '*the wonders of God*' (2:11). The implication is that they heard more about the God they worshipped Judaism and they were intrigued by it; it would have been the first step for some of them in hearing the Gospel.

### ***'Too full of wine!' (2:13)***

Luke records this casual comment as a dismissive remark made by those who had no time for the miracles of God. The scurrilous remark is somewhat inconsequential, because as Luke later records, Peter says that it is too early in the morning for people to get drunk (2:15).

The word used by Luke for 'wine' is a specialised Greek word referring to what is now called grape 'must', the first pressings of juice from the grape after harvest. Grape 'must' was indeed drunk by some, but it was an extravagance; records for indicate that it was sometimes drunk by emperors and those in authority. It is difficult to understand why people thought that the disciples had drunk it; perhaps it was a throwaway remark of disdain, understood by the people of the day but lost to us.

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## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

- Are there different types of speaking in tongues?
- Pastoral concerns about the gift of speaking in tongues

### ***Are there different types of speaking in tongues?***

This passage is undoubtedly about the gift of tongues, and its use. It is common for people to believe that the gift of tongues given at the first Pentecost was something quite different to the gift of tongues Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians, and experienced by many Christians to this day. It is suggested that the gift given at Pentecost was a specific gift, in which people were understood as speaking, unknowingly, in other foreign languages, whereas the normal gift of speaking in tongues sounds more like an incomprehensible babble, which is nevertheless a spiritual language that speaks to God.

I am more persuaded by the idea that to the one who speaks in tongues, the gift is one thing, it is speaking in what to the user is an incomprehensible language. It seems to me that the disciples who first spoke at Pentecost experienced just this gift, and it was the same gift as that experienced by Christians in the life of

the early church and today. What God did on the first day of Pentecost was to add to this gift of tongues a second and most remarkable miracle, by which the people who heard the 'tongues' understood them as their normal native languages. So the gift is one thing for those who receive it and stick it, and God gave another miracle to those who first heard this gift the very first time it was used.

Personally, I believe that the apostle Paul understood this very well. If you read one Corinthians 14, you will discover that Paul teaches that while the gift of speaking in tongues is one thing, what is done with it when it is heard is something else. In the life of the church, he identifies the gifts of interpretation and prophecy as gifts that supplement the gift of speaking in tongues so that when this gift is heard it can be understood for the common good of all. This completely makes sense, and even more so, if we assume that on the first Pentecost Sunday, God gave not only the gift of speaking in tongues, but the supernatural gift of understanding it to those who first heard the gift.

### ***Pastoral concerns about the gift of speaking in tongues***

There is much debate amongst some over whether the gift of speaking in tongues is intended for all those who follow Christ. Some believe it is, some believe it isn't. Our passage of Scripture today is often cited as part of the argument for believing that it is, because here, the Holy Spirit appears to give the gift to all the disciples.

We should be careful, for although it is reasonable to assume that all the disciples spoke in tongues on the first day of Pentecost, there is absolutely nothing else in Scripture to tell us that this is a fixture amongst God's intended blessings. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 12, which speaks about the different gifts available to God's people, suggests that it is one of a number of different gifts to be shared in the body of Christ, not a 'special case' of a gift everyone should have.

Because of this, it is surely most unwise to suggest that everyone should have the gift. We can all seek the gift, but God will give it according to the measure of his grace and his intended purposes for his servants, individually. In this light, we rejoice with all who have received this gift and use it either in private devotion or in public worship (suitably constrained by the scriptural requirements of interpretation, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14). Then, on the basis of God's provision in the first Pentecost, we can commend tongues to all disciples, but knowing that not everyone will receive it. However, there is no hierarchy of gifts, and woe betide any church fellowship in which people assume that the gift of tongues confers spiritual status. Such ungodliness is utterly unworthy of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Questions for groups

1. What does this passage of Scripture teach us about how people respond to God's miracles and 'signs and wonders' either within society as a whole, all within the church?
2. As far as you can determine from this passage of Scripture, why does God give the gift of tongues to the disciples on the first day of Pentecost?
3. What experience do you have within your group of the gift of 'speaking in tongues'? Is it right to argue from this passage of Scripture that this gift is an essential feature of Christian life?

### Discipleship challenges

- *You may or may not have received the gift of speaking in tongues. If you have, I encourage you to use the gift as much as possible in your daily prayer life. If you have not, then I encourage you to talk with the Lord in prayer about the gifts of the Spirit, and seek to be open to the riches of His grace.*
- *Pray for the church of which you are a part, and especially for those who are divided over things like the gift of tongues and its use. Pray that your church will have as many people who have the gift of interpreting tongues or prophesying as can speak in tongues, for the good of all (see 1 Corinthians 14)*

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## Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, Lord of all and divine inspiration of everything that happens for good within this world, come and blow through our lives like a fresh wind, giving new life, and stirring us into action to do the work of the Gospel. Bless us we pray as we yield ourselves to you, and grant us peace this day, we pray, AMEN

