

# THE GRACE OUTPOURING!

(Acts 2.1-21)

## Introduction

It was in a disused warehouse in an unremarkable road in downtown Los Angeles. The year was 1906. Something unpredictable and uncontrollable took a small Christian community totally by surprise. That nondescript road was Azusa Street. It was the outbreak of the Pentecostal revival.

Today, the movement propelled by that event is the fastest growing expression of Christianity on earth. Pentecostals now number about 600 million, and counting. Before long, at current rates of growth, they will be the largest grouping of Christians in the world, surpassing the Roman Catholic Church.

Pentecostalism has flourished amongst ordinary, working people in a way that no other Christian church has. Pentecostals are noted for their evangelistic zeal, their enthusiastic worship and for the place of honour they give to spiritual gifts and miraculous signs in their church life.

Unquestionably, all other Christian groupings have been affected by this movement which took its name and inspiration from the event described for us in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Notice, it's the *Acts* of the Apostles, not their thoughts, or their dogmas, or their academic titles. This is a practical user's manual. It tells you the way things *work*.

## 1) What happened?

What actually happened on the Day of Pentecost? Was there a violent wind throwing the windows open? No. It was the *sound* of a rushing wind, we're told in v2.

Were there tongues of fire settling on the Apostles' heads? No again. When you read v3 carefully it says it was what *seemed to be* tongues of fire.

Then those in the upper room *who had been praying for days on end* you'll notice, were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in languages they hadn't learned and didn't understand.

There were foreigners visiting Jerusalem for the festival who were amazed that these uneducated Galileans were proclaiming the wonders of God in foreign languages. Some were, anyway. Others dismissed it, thinking it must have been the last dregs of an all-night booze up.

Actually, whenever there is a move of God, there are always some who oppose, who criticize, who excommunicate.

For the Methodist revival under John Wesley it was the Anglicans. For the Anabaptist renewal in Northern Europe it was the Calvinists. For the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards it was the Presbyterians. For the Camisard revival, in France, it was the Catholics. For the blood and fire outpouring of the Salvation Army, it was the Anglicans again. And for the Azusa Street outpouring it was the Southern Baptists.

May God deliver us from resisting what he is doing in our generation. And may he give to his Church the discernment to weed out what is false and hold fast to what is from him.

## **2) What did it mean then and now?**

But in v12, they don't ask "What's going on?" They ask "What does this mean?" What was the meaning of the outpouring of the Spirit then and what does it mean for us now?

Verse 5 says that God-fearing Jews from around the world were staying in Jerusalem at that time. Verse 7 says this; "Utterly amazed, they asked, 'Aren't all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?'"

If you were there that day and someone asked you, 'What does all this mean?' how do you think you might have answered?

I think it *means* three things.

Firstly, it's a defining moment in the outworking of God's great plan, that the nations of the entire earth should see the radiance of God's glory. As it says in Psalm 96,

*Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.  
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."*

And in Psalm 105 it says "*make known among the nations what he has done.*"

It's about God taking his involvement with Jewish people and changing it into a multi-ethnic, global movement.

Kurt Koch in his book *Revival Fires* writes about revival that came to parts of Canada in 1972. A pastor arrived at Winnipeg airport after hearing reports of strange goings on. He asked a taxi driver to take him to church and this is what the taxi driver told him:

"The town is all upside down. The most extraordinary things are happening. Criminals are giving themselves up to the police. People don't want to do anything but sit in church. We are called out at night to take people to church in the early hours of the morning."

This book *Touched by Heaven* documents many similar outbreaks of God's power in places as diverse as India, Congo, USA, Indonesia, China, even Wales, amongst others. God's glory is for the nations.

But it also means something else. Pentecost also means a reversal of Babel. Remember the story in Genesis 11? When out of vain ambition they built the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages. But at Pentecost he unscrambled them.

Babel was about ego and arrogance building a Tower that reached the sky. But Pentecost came after a humble prayer meeting.

At Babel, people wanted to make a great name for themselves. At Pentecost, they proclaimed only the name of Jesus.

Babel was a scene of God's curse on a small community. But at Pentecost God's blessing went out to all the peoples of the earth. Pentecost is Babel undone.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3.6 that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Pentecost brings us into the new era of grace.

At Pentecost, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, God removes from our hearts all terror of an angry God and replaces it with the consolation of a loving father who has adopted us into his family. That is why he sent his Spirit.

I don't think that those people gathered in Jerusalem at that time would have been aware of all that. For them, the key is in what they say in verse 11, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God *in our own languages*." Nobody had to translate in their minds the gist of what was being said. No one had to make an effort to understand.

You might say, "Well, that's all well and good. But why doesn't God do something amazing like this in our day?" The answer is that he is. There are two extraordinary revivals happening today in China and Iran.

In the last 25 years, more Iranians have become Christians than in the previous 13 centuries put together since Islam came to Iran.

In fact, last year the mission research organisation Operation World said that Iran is now home to the fastest-growing church in the world. The second-fastest growing church is in Afghanistan - and Afghans are being reached in part by Iranians.

In 1979, there were an estimated 500 former Muslim converts to Christ in Iran. Today, there are hundreds of thousands, some estimate over a million. And the revival has swept out to Iranians abroad as we know from what is happening in the centre of our own town.

Ask God to send a new Pentecost, a great revival on this land, that sinners would be convicted of sin and turn to God, that the Church would wake up and be the Bride of Christ; glorious, radiant, holy and perfect in beauty. Pray that the lame will walk, that the blind will see, that the deaf will hear and that the dumb will shout for joy!

## **Conclusion**

Just as in Jerusalem in 33AD, there is a huge spiritual vacuum in our land today. A great spiritual thirst too. Back then, some were amazed and believed, but others scoffed and dismissed it. That's what would happen today I'm sure.

Pray with all your heart, and work with all your strength, that this church, your church, will be that place where desire to know God is stirred.

Only the breath of God can fan into flame that desire and only the fire of God's Spirit can burn away that fear.

Let's pray...