

"Watchman, what of the night?"



"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!" Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

**"THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST
INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER
LOOK INTO VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL
BIBLICAL TRUTH"
- 4 - (Part 1)**

Editor's Preface

With this bimonthly Issue of WWN, we will focus on a facet of the Savior's heavenly ascent that is more comprehensively acknowledged and known throughout Christendom - the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. While this event is well attested in the book of Acts, its overall importance and meaning in the larger context of the total salvific work of the Lord Jesus Christ is often, like other "aspects" of His heavenly work that were examined in this series of articles on the ascension, overlooked. There is generally a large amount of concentration on the gift of "[speaking] with other tongues" (Acts 2: 4), along with corresponding expositions that are one way or another, in various degrees, erroneous. Sadly, the tendency to 'sensationalize' the descent of the Holy Spirit in this manner has spread in more recent times beyond the borders of the classical neo-Pentecostal type of churches and into more traditional faith communities of all classes. In a growing number of professed Christian circles, speaking in tongues, in whatever form it is perceived as manifesting itself, is the determining factor on whether or not a person 'has' (or is 'filled with') the Holy Spirit.

In this installment of WWN, the biblical view of the coming of the Spirit will be set forth primarily in the context of its relationship to the ascension of Christ into the heavenly realm.



THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST INTO HEAVEN: ANOTHER LOOK INTO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THIS ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL TRUTH - 4 -

The Pentecostal Descent Of The Holy Spirit (Part 1) -

Shortly after His resurrection from the dead, on "the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." (John 20: 19). It was during this appearance before them that Jesus reminded them:

"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24: 44-48).

From this time forward Jesus would repeatedly continue appearing "unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion *by many infallible proofs*, being seen of them *forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1: 2-3, emphasis added).

It is highly significant that throughout the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, Christ directed the attention of His disciples toward the Scriptures as the author-

itative proof to confirm the fulfillment of all that they had seen, heard and experienced in their association with Him. The "many infallible proofs" regarding His resurrection and the instruction He spoke to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," were all "written aforetime" (see Romans 15: 4) as a supreme testimony to the absolute truthfulness of the events predicted therein - events to which the disciples themselves had been (and would be) "witnesses of [those] things." (Luke 24: 48). Earlier, Christ Himself attested to the infallibility of the Scriptures by declaring that "the scripture cannot be *broken*" (i.e., "to annul, subvert; to do away with; to deprive of authority, whether by precept or by act") ¹ - John 10: 35, emph. added.

Shortly before His ascent into heaven, "Jesus came and spake unto [the disciples], saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28: 18).

He also "commanded" them: "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24: 49).

The Scripture continues: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Mark 16: 19; compare with Luke 24: 50-51 and Acts 1: 8-9).

In obedience to the command of Christ, for the next ten days, the apostles along with other followers of Jesus ("about an hundred and twenty"), "were continually in the temple (at Jerusalem), praising and blessing God." (Luke 24: 52-53; compare with Acts 1: 12-15).

These were days of heartfelt "prayer and supplication." And as they reflected upon all that had transpired, repentance and confes-

sion of sin brought them into close sympathy and union with one another as they in deep sorrow and humility sought forgiveness of the Lord for their transgressions against Him and their fellow man.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind ... And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together ... And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? ... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" (Acts 2: 1-12).

The Holy Spirit's outpouring upon the waiting disciples signified that the enthronement of Jesus "on the right hand of God" and "the promise of [the] Father" to endue (them) "with power from on high" had been fulfilled. The Writings further testify:

"Christ's ascension to heaven was the signal that His followers were to receive the promised blessing. For this they were to wait before they entered upon their work. When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was *enthroned* amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this *ceremony* was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. *The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven's com-*

munication that the Redeemer's inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, *as priest and king*, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people." (AA, pgs. 38-39, *emph. added*).²

The inauguration (enthronement) of Jesus "as priest and king" involved a ceremony, before all "the angels" of heaven, which consisted of Christ's anointing of the heavenly sanctuary/temple (Daniel 9: 24) along with the anointing/coronation of the Savior Himself "at the right hand of the throne of God," as "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110: 1, 4; see also Zechariah 6: 12-13 and Hebrews 5: 1-10; 12: 2).

Most who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Pentecostal festival were in consternation as they beheld this magnificent event, questioning "one to another, What meaneth this?" That "every man" among the multitude heard the followers of Jesus proclaim "the wonderful works of God" in their native "tongue" (language) denoted that the Messianic era - the prophesied "last/latter days" of the former pre-Christian era - had now arrived. The confusion of languages that God had brought upon a rebellious, unified humanity bent on defying the Lord at the tower of Babel shortly after the Noachian flood during the previous age (before the first coming of Christ - see Genesis 11: 1-9), was now to be reversed in this latter age by the "[gathering] together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1: 10) through the proclamation of the Gospel with the Holy Spirit's power (signified by the "cloven tongues like as of fire" that "sat upon each of" the believers. (see Acts 2: 3).

However, "Others mocking (undoubtedly incited by the malice of the Jewish priests) said, These men are full of new wine." (Acts 2: 13). This attempt to explain the just witnessed supernatural occurrence by the natural means of drunkenness brought about (supposedly) by the festivities of the Pentecostal celebration was promptly answered by "Peter, standing up with the eleven, [lifting] up his voice" and saying, "these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day." (Ibid. 2: 14-15). The accusation was baseless in light of the fact that "they that be drunken are drunken in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5: 7), not at the third hour of the day (9 o'clock in the morning). The utter improbability of *all* the followers of Jesus being intoxicated together at *mid-morning* during a solemn festal observance was extremely unlikely. Even those known to be enslaved to alcoholic beverages would have normally shunned appearing imbibed personally at such a time and place because even they were generally aware of the denunciation: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink" (Isaiah 5: 11) stated in Scripture, along with the societal disdain that accompanied such practice, especially on the Sabbath and during feast days.

Having discredited such a groundless supposition, the apostle Peter then confidently proclaims to the people the real meaning of the wondrous incident they had just beheld:

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those

days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2: 16-21; compare with Joel 2: 28-32).

The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy was Heaven's confirmation that "Jesus of Nazareth," as the promised One, had indeed been "received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3: 16) thus signaling that the Messianic age had now arrived. The demonstration of God's power just witnessed testified to the truth that with the coming of the New Covenant era God would Himself, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, provide His people with the necessary blessings to bring them into an effectual covenant relationship with Himself:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel *after those days* (the former, pre-messianic dispensation), saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.* For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrews 8: 10-12, *emph. added*; compare with Jeremiah 31: 33-34).

The new era ushered in "the ministration (dispensation) of the spirit" (see 2 Corinthians 3: 5-11), the time when all of God's people, no matter who or where they were, would all through the indwelling of the Holy

Spirit "know the Lord ... from the least to the greatest":

"For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called ...

"And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children ...

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD." (Isaiah 54: 5, 13, 17, emph. added).

Commenting on this, the messenger of the Lord writes:

"During the patriarchal age the influence of the Holy Spirit had often been revealed in a marked manner, but never in its fullness. Now, in obedience to the word of the Saviour, the disciples offered their supplications for this gift, *and in heaven Christ added His intercession*. He claimed the gift of the Spirit, that He might pour it upon His people ...

"The Spirit came upon the waiting, praying disciples with a fullness that reached every heart. The Infinite One revealed Himself in power to His church. It was as if for ages this influence had been held in restraint, and now Heaven rejoiced in being able to pour out upon the church the riches of the Spirit's grace. And under the influence of the Spirit, words of penitence and confession mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven. Words of thanksgiving *and of prophecy* were heard. All heaven bent low to behold and to adore the wisdom of matchless, incomprehensible love. Lost in wonder, the apostles exclaimed, 'Herein is love.' They grasped the imparted gift ...

"In answer to the accusation of the priests Peter showed that this demonstration was in direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, wherein he foretold that such power would come upon men to fit them for a special work." (AA, pgs. 37-38, 41, emph. added).²

The supplications of Christ's disciples on earth for the gift of the Holy Spirit was effectively answered and given through the *added* intercessory work of Jesus in heaven. Primarily, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in 31 A.D. was in "direct fulfillment" of Bible prophecy. Being filled with the Spirit at this time, the disciples spoke "words of thanksgiving and of prophecy" in the hearing of the assembled multitude. And though "the prophecy of Joel" was especially singled out by Peter on this occasion, a short while later, in like manner before the people gathered in the temple "at the hour of prayer," Peter again publicly declared the prophetic fulfillment of the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Spirit:

"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." (Acts 3: 24, emph. added).

Notice that "all the prophets," from Samuel down through the wonderful manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost, had *inclusively* ("likewise") "foretold of [those] days." Simply put, prophetically all the prophets of the former era (before the first advent of Jesus) looked successively forward to the inauguration of the New Covenant age and foretold the events that would accompany this era of the "ministration of the spirit." Later still the apostle Peter, yet again, writes in confirmation of this truth:

"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.

Searching what, or what manner of time *the Spirit of Christ* which was in them did signify, when it *testified beforehand* the sufferings of Christ, *and the glory that should follow*. Unto whom it was revealed, *that not unto themselves, but unto us* they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*; which things the angels desire to look into." (1 Peter 1: 10-12, emph. added).

Throughout the former age, it was "the Spirit of Christ" Himself who, by "the prophets," foretold both "the sufferings of Christ (His life/ministry on earth culminating with His sacrificial death), and the glory that should follow" (His victorious resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven - where He was exalted and enthroned as King/High Priest with all authority at the Father's right hand). The Scriptures had clearly revealed that the way to the "crown" (the heavenly exaltation of Christ), would be preceded by the way to the "cross" (the humiliation and death of Christ). In fact, it was only *through* the cross that the crown would be achieved. It was by this 'way' that Christ became "the author ("pioneer," RSV)³ and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12: 2), because Jesus is the very personification of "The Way." At Pentecost, shortly after the Savior's ascent into heaven and in accordance with the promise of God, the Holy Spirit was "sent down from heaven" upon Christ's disciples thereby signifying that the glorification of the world's Redeemer had been accomplished. His *earthly* work had been successfully completed and was finished. His *heavenly* work was now beginning. The long anticipated dispensation of the Spirit had arrived!

Jesus also, on the day of His resurrection,

had pointed this out to two disheartened, disillusioned followers of His that He joined in their walk to Emmaus. Grief stricken, unaware that the "stranger" was their resurrected Lord, and after relating to Him events surrounding His crucifixion, He chided them saying:

"... O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*" Continuing, "... he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24: 25-27, emph. added).

Again, following His sufferings, the "glory" that Christ (Messiah) would "enter into" at His ascension into heaven was, first and foremost, written in the Word of God. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and the aftermath of events that would follow were all foretold in "the scriptures" along with all the other "things concerning" Jesus.

Regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in connection with His ascent into heaven, the Savior's instruction to the apostles just hours before His crucifixion provides further pertinent testimony:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; *because I go unto my Father ...* And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you *another Comforter*, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless ("orphans" - marginal reading): *I will come to you ...* He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I

will love him, and *will manifest myself to him ...* But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you ...

"But now *I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him to you ...* Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: *and he will shew you things to come ...* All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he (the Spirit) shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father ... I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, *I leave the world, and go to the*

Father." (John 14: 12, 16-18, 21, 26; 16: 5-7, 13-16, 28, *emph. added*).

The unfolding of all the events surrounding the rapid approaching death of Jesus, which He was relating to the apostles the final evening before, had "filled [their] heart" with "sorrow." Christ "nevertheless" declared "the truth" of the matter regarding His departure into heaven. He pointedly told them that it was "expedient" (Greek, συμφέρει, *sympherei* - ("bring together, be expedient, be profitable/good/better for, be beneficial") for them "that [He] go away" (ascend to His Father in heaven). » *To be Continued.*

1. Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., *The New Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon Of The New Testament With Index* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Copyright 1979, 1981 by Jay P. Green, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance # 3089), 384-385.
2. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 38-39, 37-38, 41.
3. *The Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1952, 1971).

*All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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