

# Reversing Babel

*Pentecost and its Fulfillment from the OT*

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup>And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup>both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup>And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup>For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup>But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;

<sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

- <sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
<sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.  
<sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the  
Lord shall be saved.'

### Acts 2:1-21

## Pentecost: Reversal, Rehearsal, Covenant-Renewal

The **original Christian Pentecost** may just be **the most important event**—outside of the resurrection—in human history. Indeed, in the way Luke links his two books, Pentecost is a kind of parallel to the resurrection—the pairing of Jesus' own resurrection from the dead now come in power to his church. **Everything in world history began to change that day.** Things unseen and unheard of in all of human history until that morning began to transpire. And the entire world has never been the same since. And most Christians today have little to no clue about what I'm even talking about. So to appreciate it, we must go back to the beginning.

Classic Protestant and Catholic theology have greatly and rightly emphasized **Genesis 3** as the **most foundational**

text for what went wrong with the human race. God has created male and female by breathing into them by his Spirit, the breath of life. But then comes the story of the serpent deceiving the woman, her eating the forbidden fruit, her husband negligently and apathetically watching on, then taking a bite himself, thus plunging the human race and indeed the world itself into the consequences of his original sin. It is at this moment that human death and our sinful condition originates. The promise held out of eternal life was ruined. Our parents died spiritually. And eventually, they would die physically, all due to this new presence of sin.

Recently, however, scholars have begun to put a bit more attention on two more tragic-epics that take place in Genesis which complement, each in its own way, the problems the human race has found itself in for millennia.<sup>1</sup> The first is the Flood story which begins in Genesis 6:1ff. This story recounts for us the heavenly sons of God who, as Jude says, “did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling” (Jude 6), came down to earth,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Michael Heiser, “Not One But Three Falls – Jesus & The Three Rebellions,” *Ring Them Bells* (Dec 12, 2023). I do not share some of Heiser’s downplaying of the Genesis 3 event, including his denial of original sin (he does not deny that every single human is sinful, but gets there another way) or his belief that the Jews basically ignored this story in favor of the Watcher paradigm. He overstates his case.

took our women, and produced horrific offspring called Nephilim. It recounts how corrupt “all flesh” had become due to this event and how violent men had become. The Jewish traditions all lay part of the blame for this at the feet of these **Watchers** who taught us all manner of weapon making, soothsaying, enchantments, smiting the fetus in the womb, as well as cultural endeavors—beautifying the appearance, the writing of books, and the understanding of the seasons. For this transgression, God destroyed all flesh from the face of the earth in a great flood.

But there is one more story in the early chapters of Genesis that tell us a little bit more about our present condition. This is the story of the **Tower of Babel**, a kind of third-fall subsequent to the Garden and the Flood. At Babel, the one world settled into one place—the plain of Shinar. They attempt to **make a name** for themselves by building **a mountain-tower temple** that would reach up to the heavens, that is, to make contact with the gods just like before the Flood. But before they could complete their building, God came and **confused their tongues** and from there spread out all the nations of the earth—**scattered, confused**, and unable to communicate.

Deuteronomy then tells us that for their troubles, not only were they scattered, but since they so desired to contact them, God gave to each of the nations one of the “sons of God” (albeit a new batch, as the original instigators were imprisoned deep below the earth; [2Pet 2:4](#)) to rule over them ([Deut 32:7-8](#)). This ironically initiated a kind of sibling rivalry among the sons of God and the sons of Adam that would eventually lead to nation rising against nation in ever escalating attacks seeking world domination (hence Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medes-Persians, Greece, Rome, etc.). Heavenly princes and earthly kings conspired together against others, including against the Lord and his Anointed ([Ps 2:2](#)).

For a very long time, all mankind was given over to catastrophic [spiritual darkness](#). But one day, out of a family who worshiped other gods in the foreign city of Ur ([Josh 24:2](#)), God called a man named [Abram](#) and led him to a land he would promise him where he would [covenant](#) with him and change his name to Abraham—the [Father of Many Nations](#). And yet, for 2,000 years, it was only one nation that God would deal with in his saving grace: Israel—from the changed name of Jacob. All the other nations were left to those miserable fallen angels or to the mercy of Israel through whom they could alone come to know the Living God.

For hundreds of years, Israel had been in Egypt, after a famine drove the children of Jacob there in the days of Joseph. But **Egypt** had grown cruel and turned God's people into slaves. They cried out for redemption and God heard their cries. He delivered them from the Pharaoh and through a series of miracles, showed his power over both Egypt's gods and king. God drown the Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea while his people crossed over on dry land.

He led them in a **pillar of fire** and cloud to the foot of Mt. Sinai where *he* would *descend* rather than man ascend. The text says there were "thunders" which can be translated as "**voices**" (*qoloth*), and some like Philo of Alexandria interpreted this as "**a voice ... from out of the midst of the fire which had flowed from heaven, a most marvelous and awful voice, the flame being endowed with articulate speech in a language familiar to the hearers**" (**Philo**, *Decalogue* 46).<sup>2</sup>

God would come to Moses through whom he would give his law, his covenant. That law included the creation of **a house**, a **tabernacle**. When Moses had finished building it, God would **descend again upon the house and fill it** with his fiery Presence as a sign of a covenant being given. It also

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<sup>2</sup> **Charles Duke Yonge** with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 522.

included a series of **seven annual feasts**. Of these seven, the **central** (fourth) feast was called **Pentecost**, also called the “Feast of Weeks” or the “Season of the Giving of the Law,” for it not only celebrated the firstfruits of harvest, but was a festival **celebrating God coming to the Sinai temple<sup>3</sup> fifty days** (a jubilee) after their departure from Egypt.

Of course, we know that the long sad history of Israel is that it would never become what God had told it to be, **a mountain-temple** to which all the nations would flock (e.g. **Isaiah 2:1-5**). And so it started to happen that God would whisper through the prophets words of something in the future, something that would come by God’s power, something that would come through **his Name**—his only begotten Son who would inherit all the nations (**Ps 2:8, 82:8**).

There are many of these, but a few are worth noting here. **Isaiah** predicted that the Name of the Lord would come in *his* fury. The Name is a *him*! The Name would descend **from his temple**, appearing in “**dense ... smoke .. His tongue like a consuming fire**” and “**the LORD will cause his voice of authority to be heard**” (**Isa 30:27-30**). Alluding to the Sinai theophany (appearance of God on the mountain),

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<sup>3</sup> On Sinai as a temple and it’s importance see **G. K. Beale**, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 204-08.



it also predicts a future coming both in judgment *and in mercy* to those who will believe, as a song in the night when a holy feast is kept (29).

Ezekiel would see an army of **dry bones** being given life by the wind of God (**Ezek 37**), immediately after the promise of a new covenant where a new heart and a **new spirit** would be put within his people (**Ezek 36:26**).

The **prophet Joel** would see a day when God would **pour out his Spirit** on all flesh, when sons and daughters would prophesy, old men would dream dreams, young men would see visions, upon even male and female servants God would pour out his Spirit (**Joel 2:28-29**). With wonders in the heavens, everyone who would call upon **the Name** of the Lord would be saved (**30-32**).

And **Zephaniah** would foresee a day when all **the gods of the earth would starve** while to Yahweh everyone would bow down, “each in [his] place, all the lands of the nations” (**Zech 2:11**). Meanwhile, on God’s holy mountain (**3:11**), “At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord” (**3:9**).

These are **but a few** of the things we find in type and shadow and prophecy in the OT about our passage today,



but we should also see that Luke has been predicting this seminal moment in human history since he began his **Gospel of Luke**. Luke 1 anticipated the parallel in Acts 2 when the angel answered Mary, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*” and his announcement of the Son of God (**Luke 1:35**). Luke 2 did when it referenced the special **house** (Bethlehem—House of Bread; **Luke 2:4, 15**). It foreshadowed Simon Peter’s speech about all the families of the earth being blessed in Acts 2 when **Simeon** full of the Holy Spirit preached about the little baby Jesus that he would be a revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Israel (**2:30-32**). Luke 3 foreshadows Acts 2 when Jesus is **Baptized** and the Holy Spirit descends upon him (**Luke 3:22**). And Luke 4 prepared us to hear Peter’s sermon as Jesus’ ministry **opens with a sermon** (**Luke 4:16-30**). We should also remember the end of Luke when Jesus is offered wine (**Luke 23:36**).

## **ACTS 2 : Context and Structure**

The passage this week was difficult to decide upon. It is the story of **the first Christian Pentecost**. In one way, it makes sense to end it in **vs. 13**, because in **vs. 14**, Peter stands up and begins to address crowds who are accusing them of

drinking “new wine.” The ESV has a new heading here called “**Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost.**” In another way, however, one could argue that his sermon doesn’t really begin until vs. 22 with the language, “**Men of Israel, hear these words...**” In fact, there is a structure that takes us from **Acts 2:1-21.**

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| A. <sup>2:1</sup> When the <b>day of Pentecost</b> arrived, they were all together in one place.   | Day of Pentecost                                  |
| B. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came <b>from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind</b> , and it filled the entire <b>house</b> where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided <b>tongues as of fire</b> appeared to them and rested on each one of them.   | Wind from Heaven Fills the House, Tongues of Fire |
| C. <sup>4</sup> And they were all <b>filled with the Holy Spirit</b> and began to speak in <b>other tongues</b> as the Spirit gave them utterance.   | Filled with Holy Spirit                           |
| D. <sup>5</sup> Now there were <b>dwelling in Jerusalem</b> Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were <b>bewildered</b> , because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.  | Bewildered in Jerusalem                           |
| E. <sup>7</sup> And they were <b>amazed and astonished</b> , saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”   | Amazed. Galileans.                                |
| F. <sup>8</sup> And how is it that <b>we hear</b> , each of us in his <b>own native language</b> ?   | Hear our own Language                             |
| G. <sup>9</sup> <b>Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—</b>  | <b>The Nations Gathered</b>                       |
| F'. <b>we hear</b> them telling in <b>our own tongues</b> the mighty works of God.”  | Hear in our own tongues                           |
| E'. <sup>12</sup> And all were <b>amazed and perplexed</b> , saying to one another, “What does this mean?”<br><sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”  | Amazed. Filled with New Wine.                     |
| D'. <sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who <b> dwell in Jerusalem</b> , let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.<br><sup>15</sup> For these people are <b>not drunk</b> , as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.   | Not Drunk, Jerusalem.                             |
| C'. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will <b>pour out my Spirit</b> on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall <b>prophesy</b> , and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will <b>pour out my Spirit</b> , and they shall <b>prophesy</b> . | Spirit Poured Out                                 |
| B'. <sup>19</sup> And I will show <b>wonders in the heavens</b> above and signs on the earth below, blood, and <b>fire</b> , and vapor of smoke; <sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,  | Wonders in Heavens, Fire                          |
| A'. before the <b>day of the Lord</b> comes, the great and magnificent day. <sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be <b>saved</b> .’ <sup>4</sup>  | Day of Salvation                                  |

<sup>4</sup> Modified from **Bob Reid**, “[Pentecost Sunday](#),” *In The Beginning*, 2; **L. J. Hooge**, “[Acts 2:1-21 – Pentecost](#),” *Biblical Chiasmus* (March 28, 2011).

The benefits of looking at this extended portion of the Pentecost story are numerous. Here are three. 1. It will show us **God's purpose** for what happened that miraculous day as the story weaves back in on itself. 2. It will connect us directly to **the Name** of the OT that we have just seen mentioned in several prophecies. 3. It will give us **a center** which will reinforce the biblical theology that Luke is drawing upon, which is essentially, the reversal of the Tower of Babel.

## That First Pentecost Day

The story takes place “**When the day of Pentecost arrived**” and “**they were all together in one place**” (**Acts 2:1**). Again, we've seen that Pentecost (The Feast of Weeks) is the central feast of the feasts of Israel. It “**was celebrated with sacrifices and feasting seven weeks and a day after the firstfruits of the grain harvest had been offered. It was one of three great agricultural festivals, held annually to acknowledge God's goodness in the cycle of the seasons and the fruitfulness of the earth.**”<sup>5</sup> That extra day makes is fascinating in light of the **first-eighth-fifteen-fiftieth** “sabbath” days all found in these

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<sup>5</sup> **David G. Peterson**, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 131.

feast laws, for like the resurrection of Jesus, it takes place on the **first day of the week**.

In light of this, the interesting word “arrived” (*symplēroō*) can also mean “**fulfilled**.” This could be in reference to the annual fulfillment of the fifty days (hence the translation “arrived”), and/or it could be talking about some kind of **eschatological fulfillment**, the way Jesus’ days were “fulfilled” when he was “taken up” (**Luke 9:51**). Given what Peter says in the parallel **vs. 21 as we will see**, this seems to be forefront in Luke’s mind, and this is important because it means that what Pentecost looked forward to has been fulfilled. We no longer celebrate the feasts of Israel as they did, not only because we have no temple and cannot offer sacrifices, but because they are types and shadows, but we live in the light of Christ.

It then says they were *all in one place*. What is this place? Commentators are almost evenly divided that it was either the **upper room or the temple**. In actuality, we don’t have to choose, because it could have been that it *began* in the upper room and then they quickly *went over* to the temple, which was but a short walk away.<sup>6</sup> Both settings are instructive as they have not left Jerusalem, but were obeying Jesus when he

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<sup>6</sup> **Craig Keener**, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* vol. 1, *Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 796-97.

told them to await the coming of the Spirit (**Luke 24:49**). The temple is especially interesting in light of the fact that what is about to take place will be a demonstration of great power that God is about to **raise up a brand new temple**, using the same signs he always has on such occasions in the OT.

These signs are **threefold**.<sup>7</sup> **First**, “**And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind...**” (**Acts 2:2**). “**Wind**” (*pneuma*) is the same word for “**spirit**” in Greek, and the same holds true of ruach in Hebrew. And this is not an accident, for just like in Genesis when the Spirit or Wind was hovering over the waters (**Gen 1:2**), God was about to make **a new creation**. And **God breathed into Adam the breath of life by his Spirit** (**Gen 2:7**). This same kind of symbolism is used by Ezekiel when he sees the **valley of dry bones** that are brought to life by the breath-Spirit of God and made to become a mighty army. And thus, “**I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live**” (**Ezek 37:14**). And in the larger context, this was promised in the giving of the **new covenant** (**36:26-27; 37:26**; cf. **Jer 31:31-40**). The fact that it “**filled the entire house where they were sitting**” (**Acts 2b**) is a signal that

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<sup>7</sup> See **Dennis E. Johnson**, *The Message of Acts In the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 57-60.

a new *temple* is about to be created, for this is what God did at Sinai, in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple of old.

The second sign is **tongues**. “**And divided tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them**” (**Acts 2:3**). We are going to see tongues a lot in this book. But for now, recall that this was **one of the things associated with Mt. Sinai by the Jews**. Let’s also recall that tongues is a major theme found in the **Babel** story. The first is God coming down to us on the mountain. The second is man going up to the gods on their own man-made ziggurat-mountain! The first is God’s creating a new people. The second is God scattering the people in judgment.

Now, an allusion to Babel is here in another way via the word “**divided**.” What is **a divided tongue**? There was a curious tradition that at Mt. Sinai God gave the Law which was **divided up into seventy languages** (**b. Shabb. 88B**), but that from the midst of the fire there sounded forth a voice which became articulate speech in the language familiar to the hearer (**Philo, Decalogue 46**).<sup>8</sup> Seventy languages, of course, refers to the **number of nations in the Table of Nations** in Genesis 10 and to **the seventy sons of God** that were given to them in

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 131.



**Deut 32:8** (see the targum). And in that verse, it says the most high “*divided*” (*diamerizō*, LXX) the nations. That’s the same word Luke uses here of divided tongues. In this way, Luke is continuing the “seventy” divine council theme that we saw throughout his Gospel. But now, the divine council is beginning to shift from heaven **to earth**, from angels to men.

It further says that these tongues of fire appeared **to rest on each one of them**. This is very similar to the **pillar of fire resting on the tabernacle** in the days of the wanderings. The difference is that he is not resting on *a structure* made of wood and metal, but upon *people*. It also reminds us of John the Baptists’ prediction that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (**Luke 3:16-17**). And, of course, we will see both the word “Spirit” and “Baptism” appear in Acts 2. When God rests like this, it is a striking symbol, for our God is not one to be trifled with. Rather, he is **a consuming fire**, and as Peter says, “**If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you**” (**1Pet 4:14**). In other words, this is a profound act symbolizing that God is setting his people apart as holy in the same way that the tabernacle was set apart as holy. But now it is people, not a place.

The **third sign** is that these **tongues begin to be spoken** through those upon whom the tongues rested. “**And they were**



all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Let’s think about two things here. First, notice the language of them being filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, this is the language used of the cloud and fire filling the tabernacle and temple. God came down and filled it, thereby setting it apart as holy. This was not salvific, but *sanctifying* and the means by which Israel could be cleansed of its ongoing sins and ritual impurities.

The same is true here. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ. When someone is saved, by they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus is teaching Nicodemus in John 3. But this was *always* the way that it was. People in the OT were also regenerated, brought to life by God’s Spirit through faith in the God of Israel—the Son of God. Adam being given physical life by the Spirit is a picture of the Spirit’s work of salvation. There was no such thing as an unregenerated believer in the OT. Nor was there such a thing as a believer whom God’s Spirit did not regenerate.<sup>9</sup>

Now, the *filling* of with the Spirit is different *for these disciples* and was a logically subsequent thing. We need to ask why? It was because God had not yet provided a way where he could

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<sup>9</sup> For a biblical theology of all this see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006).

dwell *within* sinful creatures in this sanctifying way without them being destroyed. This was the entire purpose of the priestly tabernacle system. God could fill *the tabernacle* and then through the shadowy sacrifices, he could allow them to draw near to his special presence. It had nothing to do with their salvation. That was by faith alone. It had to do with how they were sanctified.

But [something has now changed for these disciples](#). Jesus' blood has been shed, thus providing once-for-all forgiveness for their sins, taking care of the problem that began in the Garden. Their sins are now totally taken care of. There is no more sacrifice needed. Their problem is two-fold. The problems caused by the Flood and Babel had not yet been taken care of and they lived both before and after this world-changing event of the crucifixion. So Pentecost was God's way of powerfully demonstrating that Jesus' death was doing something new. And what is that?

It is the [setting of people apart now to be his holy Temple](#) through the beginnings of the reversal of the curses brought at the Flood and Babel. The temple in the NT is not a place, but a people. The shadow of the OT building has given way to the eschatological reality in the *ekklesia*, the assembly-

church. This was the function we saw of the 120 gathered together in **ch. 1**. 120 is a temple number. These signs are all temple manifestation signs. And what's occurring is that **God's promised new covenant is now coming in great power**, changing the place of residence of the Spirit from building to people. This is how we are then sanctified in the NT, not by going to a temple with an animal sacrifice all the time, but by understanding that God's Spirit now fills us as it did the temple of old. We are God's temple. And **you and I do not need a Pentecostal experience** like they had, because as Peter said, the Spirit now rests on *all believers*. We take this by faith because God says it is so and proved it here.

But let's think about the sign itself. They "**began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance**" (**Acts 2:4b**). This was a sign, **a public marker** to show the people that indeed something powerful and new is occurring. Signs are not needed on a regular basis to prove this. This kind of sign is like the signs of the Exodus. That's why the day of Pentecost **only happened one time**. This hints at the function of tongues throughout Acts and on, perhaps into today. But we will address this at a more appropriate time.

Let's notice what these tongues are here. “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (2:5). So we have Jews assembling for Pentecost and they've come from all over the world. This will end up being how the Gospel first spreads to the nations, even before official missionary journeys are undertaken. For, these Jews did not stay in Jerusalem, but went back to their homes sometime after the day of Pentecost. And they went back profoundly changed by what transpired that day.

But look at what it says next. “And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were *bewildered*, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language” (6). Luke has chosen a very specific word here for “*bewildered*” (*syncheō*). It is one that reminds us of that infamous event so many centuries earlier when all the nations were also gathered in one place to build their tower. They all spoke one language, but for their evil efforts, God *divided* their tongues and forced them not to understand one another. And the LXX uses the same word as here. They were *bewildered* and confounded (Gen 11:7) and this is why it was called *Babel*. In fact, there are many common elements with Pentecost and the Babel story (see chart next page).

- Babel:** At Babel we are told that one world settled into one place, the **plain of Shinar**. (11:1-2)
- Pentecost:** On that remarkable morning we are told “*they were all in one place.*” (Acts 2:1)
- Babel:** (The following is a parenthetical parallel from the Sibylline Oracle on the Tower of Babel):  
At Babel, there were winds.<sup>10</sup>
- Pentecost:** A mighty wind filled the house (2:2)
- Babel:** Is the story of confused **tongues**, where God makes one tongue become many. (11:1, 9)
- Pentecost:** **Tongues** of fire came to rest on each of them. (2:2)
- Babel:** Took place in **Babylon** [Babel is anti-Jerusalem].
- Pentecost:** “They were staying in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5)
- Babel:** “From these **the nations** spread out over the earth after the flood.” (10:32)
- Pentecost:** “God-fearing Jews from **every nation** under heaven” (2:5)
- Babel:** When God came down, he **confused** their **language** and their name became Babel, Confusion/bewilderment. (11:9)
- Pentecost:** When they heard the **sound**, they were **bewildered** (6), **utterly amazed** (7), **amazed** (12) and **perplexed** (12). In other words, Luke tells us four times in this short passage that they were **confused** at what was happening.
- Acts 2:6** Συγξέωμεν (from *syncheō*) = confound/bewilder (NT)
- Gen 11:7** συγξέωμεν (from *syncheō*) = confound (LXX)  
בלבל (bll) = MIX, MINGLE, CONFUSE (Hebrew)
- Gen 11:9** Σύγχυσις (from *syncheō*) = confusion  
בלבל (bbl, Babel) = confusion
- Babel:** They are building their own **kingdom**.
- Pentecost:** They are building God’s **kingdom**.
- Babel:** Their kingdom was trying to open a **gateway to heaven** (this is what **Babel** meant to them) via their own methods and accent to God.
- Pentecost:** The kingdom was established by God himself and the **gateway to heaven** (Babel) was opened via the Holy Spirit and God’s decent to us.
- Babel:** The **one language is turned into many** and they do not understand one another (1:9)
- Pentecost:** The **one language of Peter is heard and understood by everyone, even though they spoke different languages.** “How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?” (2:8)
- Babel:** Want to stay together and are **scattered**.
- Pentecost:** They are gathered together in order to be **scattered**.
- Babel:** They want to **make a name for themselves**, while God is busy making a **name** for himself.
- Pentecost:** God have made a Name for himself. Peter says, “**And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved**” (Acts 2:21).

<sup>10</sup> **The tower of Babel (Sib.Or 3.97-109):** “But when the threats of the great God are fulfilled | with which he once threatened men when they built the tower | in the land of Assyria ... They were all of one language | and they wanted to go up to starry heaven. | But immediately the immortal one imposed a great compulsion [Josephus, saying he cites the Oracle, has “gods”] | on the *winds*. Then the *winds* cast down the great tower | from on high, and stirred up strife for mortals among themselves. | Therefore humans gave the city the name Babylon. | But when the tower fell, and the tongues of men | were diversified by various sounds, the whole | earth of humans was filled with fragmenting kingdoms. | Then was the tenth generation of articulate men, | from the time when the Flood came upon the men of old.”

Luke does this to show us in a very clever way that God is [beginning to reverse the curse of Babel](#). Now, it's not that he is somehow eliminating the nations or ethnic distinctions. Some scholars have failed to grasp what this reversal is actually doing. And what is that? It is the reversal of *the curse* of Babel.<sup>11</sup> It is a reversal of the darkness brought on by God giving the nations over to the evil sons of God. This is something Paul will draw out very concretely in his sermon at Athens in Acts 17.

We can see how this works as we keep reading. “[And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’](#)” ([Acts 2:7-8](#)). Notice that these tongues were *known languages*. They were not tongues of angels, though even that idea is interesting given that the angels are the sons of God who were given to the nations at the dispersion at Babel. In other words, tongues of angels could very well be the tongues *of the nations*. Tongues of angels ([1Cor 13:1](#)) might simply be a way of referring to other known languages via the Babel event.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> One example of a scholar denying that Babel is being reversed here is [Mark R. Kreitzer](#), “[Ethnic Solidarity, Babel-Pentecost Relationship, and the New Covenant](#),” *Global Missiology* (2006).

<sup>12</sup> The Talmud strangely teaches that Gabriel is the one angel who knows all seventy languages. The other angels presumably each only know one. E.g. [b. Sotah](#) 7:1; 33A.



So the scene is this. You have all these Galileans who only speak either the Aramaic dialect of Judea or perhaps are speaking Greek (likely not Hebrew). But we have all these Jews from the surrounding nations who do speak other languages (and probably also Aramaic or Greek). But as the disciples are talking, every individual hears their own language in their head. Can you see that this is a reversal of Babel? In that story, everyone spoke one language, and the nations were scattered as they all started talking different languages and they couldn't understand each other. But now, one person speaks, and through one language, the many languages are somehow comprehended.

To put a bow on this, [the center of the structure](#) is [vs. 9](#). It is [a list](#) of as many as 18 different groups, depending on how you count them: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Pontusians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylians, Egyptians, Libyans, Cyrenians, Romans, Jews, Proselytes, Cretans, and Arabians ([Acts 2:9-10](#)). What are we to make of this list? Heiser explains that because Luke is so clearly recalling the Babel story,

[Genesis 10 provides the context for understanding this list just as Gen 11 serves as the necessary background for the](#)



symbolic reversal of the confusion of language in Acts 2. The nations listed in Gen 10 represent the known world—a spreading out of humanity that resulted from God’s dispersing in Gen 11. At the time Genesis 10 was written, the known world included Mesopotamia, the lands beyond it to the east, Asia Minor, the Levant (Syria and Canaan), Arabia, Egypt and North Africa, the areas of eastern Africa along the coast of the Red Sea, and a few other points around the Mediterranean Sea. Tarshish was the westernmost point of the known world.

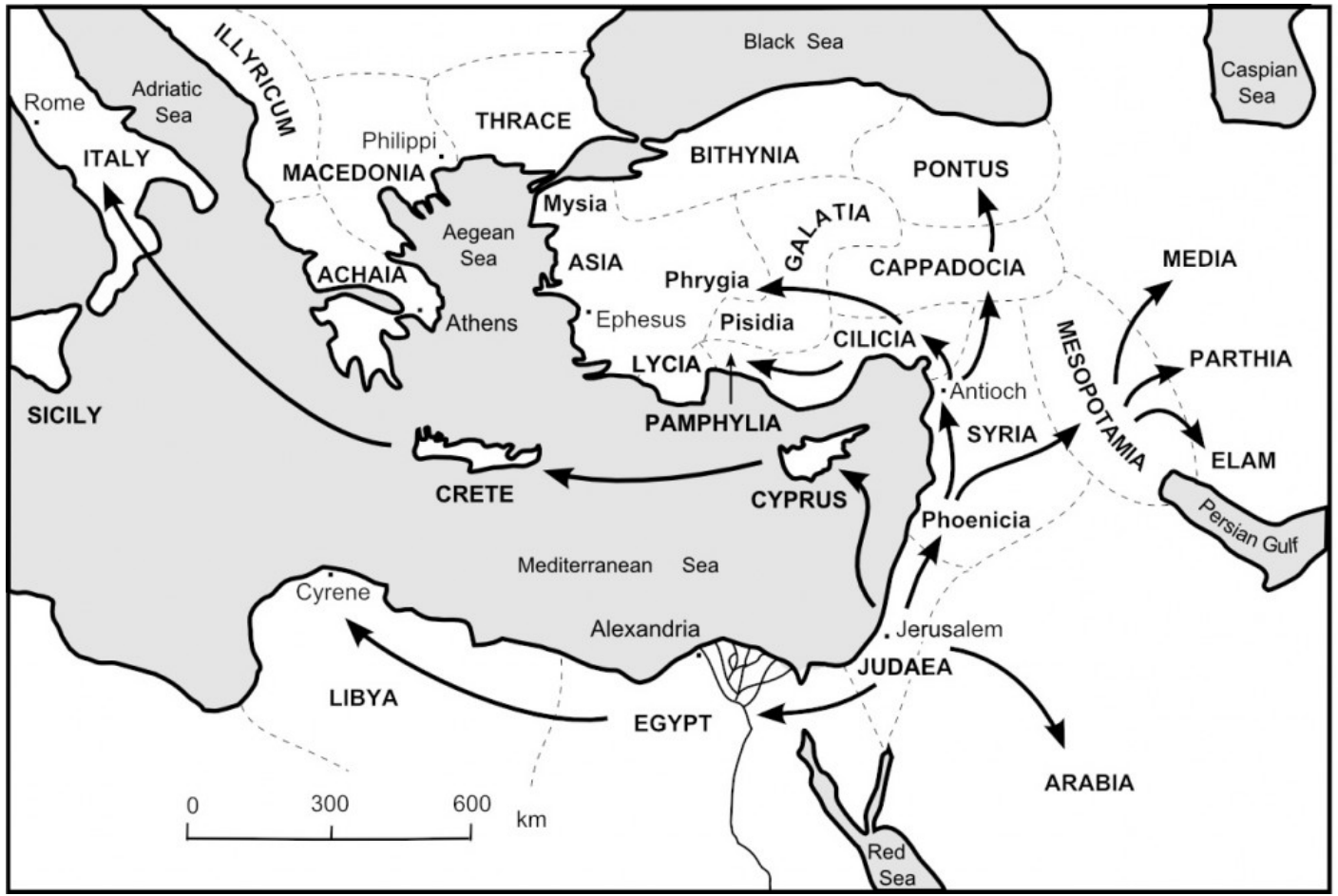
While the places named in Acts 2 and in the Table of Nations from Genesis are different, the lists serve the same purpose—to outline the extent of the known world of their times. In Acts 1:8, the disciples are commissioned to take the gospel to the whole world—“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” In the first century AD, they likely thought of the end of civilization—the furthest extent of Roman rule—as the “end of the earth.”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, both lists are similar in another way in that they list their nations from east to west.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 172–173. He also discusses this in the

<sup>14</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 300–301.



Indeed, Luke is signaling to us in many ways that Pentecost is “**nothing less than a reversal of the curse of Babel.**”<sup>15</sup>

We will see more of this as we go along, including all the way to our last verse today. After this center with all these nations, as Luke’s story **begins to unfold** itself, we are taken back first to everyone “**hearing**” them telling “**in our own tongues**” the mighty works of God (**Acts 2:11b**). **The num-**

<sup>15</sup> **F. F. Bruce**, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 59. I first came across this idea years ago in Johnson’s *Message of Acts*, 60.

ber of languages being heard through one voice is astonishing. There is Aramaic, Parthian, Iranian, Hebrew, Phrygian, Pisidian, Lydian, Carian, Lycian, Celtic, Lycaonian, Coptic, Latin, Numidian, Greek, Nabatean, and Arabic.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently, the communication taking place was not chit-chat or even surprised talk about the tongues. No. The disciples began telling everyone there about “**God’s mighty works.**” The disciples don’t seem surprised at all. As Peter’s sermon moves into its more formal address (**vs. 22**), Luke repeats this phrase so that we will understand it isn’t talking about the Red Sea or something like that. Rather, they were talking about **Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension.** **But we’ll get to that next time.**

Again, repeating that they were “**amazed and astonished**” (7), he says, “**And all were amazing and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’**” (12). It’s a **great question!** I can’t imagine what the people were thinking. Their question will be answered by Peter and we will look at it in part today and the rest next time.

But **not everyone was as curious.** Some had already determined that something else was going on. “**But others**

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<sup>16</sup> See the chart in **Clinton E. Arnold**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts.*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 233.

mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (13). Calvin is worth hearing here on the mocking.

Hereby it appeareth how monstrous as well the sluggishness, as also the ungodliness of men is, when Satan hath taken away their mind. If God should openly (and visibly) descend from heaven, his majesty could scarce more manifestly appear than in this miracle. Whosoever hath any drop of sound understanding in him must needs be stricken with the only hearing of it. How beastly, then, are those men who see it with their eyes, and yet scoff, and go about with their jests to mock the power of God? But the matter is so. There is nothing so wonderful which those men do not turn to a jest who are touched with no care of God; because they do, even upon set purposes, harden themselves in their ignorance in things most plain. And it is a just punishment of God, which he bringeth upon such pride, to deliver them to Satan, to be driven headlong into blind fury. Wherefore, there is no cause why we should marvel that there be so many at this day so blind in so great light, if they be so deaf when such manifest doctrine is delivered, yea, if they wantonly refuse salvation when it is offered unto them.<sup>17</sup>

Erasmus is worth hearing on the wine.

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<sup>17</sup> John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 81.

Of course, extreme intoxication is very much like madness ... But no madness enables all to understand what you say. [Some in the crowd], indeed, said this in derision, but nothing forbids the truth sometimes to be spoken even in jest. They were completely filled with the new wine which the Lord did not want entrusted to old skins. The old wine of the Mosaic law failed at the wedding of the church, and the cold and tasteless sense of the Law was changed into new wine through Christ. Whatever is carnal is tasteless and weak; whatever is spiritual is lively, effective and appealing to the taste.

(**Erasmus**, *Paraphrase of Acts 2:13*)<sup>18</sup>

While both of these are helpful, Peter has **the God-inspired answer**. “But Peter, standing with the eleven, listed up his voice and addressed them...” (**Acts 2:14a**). This will soon become **the first sermon** in Christian history. “**Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words**” (**14**). He does not speak gibberish, but plain truth in easy to understand words that they then heard in their own languages! And he’s quite bold about it, unlike his actions during Jesus’ trial and crucifixion.

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<sup>18</sup> In **Esther Chung-Kim** et al., eds., *Acts: New Testament*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 22.



Peter is a changed man. “For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (14b). The third hour is about 9:00am. It’s always been funny to me that Peter didn’t respond like Erasmus did, because that seems so obvious. How can getting drunk make each of you hear in your own tongue? But Peter doesn’t say that. He also doesn’t say, “We’re Christians and we are not permitted to drink alcohol.” He responds with a brief mention of the time of day and that no one gets drunk that early.

But the real meat gets to the point and addresses the curiosity of those not so hard-headed as to think such a dumb thing as being drunk. He takes us to the Old Testament. We’ve seen that he could have chosen texts from Isaiah, from Ezekiel, or from Zephaniah. But he chooses still another prophet. “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel” (16). He then proceeds to quote Joel 2:28-32, nearly identically from the LXX, save for a couple of important details.

<sup>28</sup> “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

<sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

<sup>30</sup> “And I will show wonders in the heavens

<sup>17</sup> “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

<sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

<p>and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.</p> <p><sup>31</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.</p> <p><sup>32</sup>And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on                      the name of the Lord shall be saved.</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;</p> <p><sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, <b>the great and magnificent day.</b></p> <p><sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'</p>
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The first is something that has **the potential to change everything you know about eschatology**. Eschatology is the study of “**last things**.” Joel says, “**And it shall come to pass afterward**.” Peter says, “**And in the last days it shall be...**” Peter interprets “afterward” to be “the last days.” But his point is that **the last days are right now!** To all those people wondering who look out at the world and rightly wonder whether or not we are in the last days, the answer is yes! However, we have been in them since this day of Pentecost. This is simply undeniable given what Peter says. It is a tremendously important interpretation that he gives to us and you must take it to heart.

The beginning of these last days, Joel said, would be **marked by precisely the signs** they are seeing right now. The signs mark that God is pouring his Spirit out on all flesh. This echoes something God did in the days of Moses. Seventy elders (there’s that number again) were appointed to



help lead Israel. These men actually went up onto the mid-mountain of Sinai and beheld God and ate ([Ex 24:1-10](#)). But in Numbers it says, “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders” (there’s the divided idea again). “As soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it” ([Num 11:25](#)).

In that story, a couple of men named Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp and it makes some Jealous so that Joshua ends up asking Moses to tell them to stop it ([28](#)). But Moses’ response is fascinating. “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” I believe Moses was uttering a prophecy here about Pentecost and may not have even realized it (we’ve alluded to this story in Luke as well, see sermon on [Luke 9:49-50](#)).

It isn’t just seventy now, but all flesh, though “70” is the numerical representation of this. This, quite shockingly, includes sons and daughters, young men and old men, male servants and female servants, recalling the language of the Commandments. Luke loves to tell us how God’s kingdom

is not like the kingdoms of men. God is no respecter of people (**Rom 2:11**). He does not show favoritism. All are welcomed, by faith into his new temple, and he generously gives his Spirit to all.

We might ask here, **what does it mean to “prophecy?”** It could be that there was some kind of future-telling going on, but that doesn't seem to fit the context. Rather, they are all simply **telling about the wonders of God**. This is called “forth-telling,” a bold proclamation of the truth of the Gospel, like Isaiah the Prophet might have done. But we'll see “prophecy” again in Acts and deal with it more at a later time.

Notice how Joel and Peter refer to *wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below*. Many people read apocalyptic language like this and automatically go to the most outlandish of future interpretations. Many also think that such things can't happen unless they happen in the way they think they must happen. This is Revelation kind of language, but Peter says it *is being fulfilled now*. The signs here are blood and fire and vapor and smoke, the sun being turned dark and the moon turning to blood. How should we interpret this?

Michael Horton gives us the simplest answer. “This whole series of events is encompassed, according to Peter, in Christ’s crucifixion and exaltation to the right hand of God with continuing effects in the present.”<sup>19</sup> Remember that the sky grew dark? The sun and moon are also heavenly bodies, which are somehow related to the gods. God is judging them. How? Through Christ’s blood. Through the fire of Pentecost. Through the descent into hell and the descent of the Spirit, changing the divine council from the seventy heavenly beings to the symbolic seventy now encompassed in his whole church. We now become the divine council; we inherit that function. Ever wonder how we can bind and loose and discipline in the church? That’s how.

It is important to keep reading that this is “the day of the Lord” which comes (Acts 2:20). The “Great and magnificent day.” This refers to the Second Coming, but before it comes, signs will attend to signal that the new age has dawned. As Marshall has said, “The intention of the change is to emphasize that the events of Pentecost do belong to the activity of God in the last days: a new age has arrived.”<sup>20</sup> It is not a new

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 939.

<sup>20</sup> I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 534.

age of Aquarius of the new agers, but of Christ. It is the new covenant.

**Vs. 21** is tremendously important for seeing this. It says, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” We’ve seen **the Name**, that is it actually a “him” in Isaiah. That Isaiah passage takes place both in judgment and mercy and in God’s holy temple. Now, the Name of Christ has come in human flesh and his name is Jesus Christ. Anyone who calls upon him will be saved. That’s the promise.

But there’s something more here and it is related to the reversal of **Babel**. The Genesis story has this remarkable dual play on the word “name.” At Babel, they seek to **make a name for themselves** (**Gen 11:4**). But God caused their plans to come to nothing, scattering them over the face of the earth. But another story line is to be read simultaneous to Babel. This is the **genealogy of Noah**. While the Table of Nations (Gen 10) gives us the seventy nations, we end up after Babel getting the genealogy of Shem, the son of Noah. Why is this relevant? Because “**Shem**” means “**Name**.” And it is through Shem that God will begin to make a name for himself, first through calling Abraham, then through saving Israel, and finally by sending the New Israel, Jesus his Only-Begotten Son who is the Name of God.

In finishing this literary unit on the Name, Luke is bringing us full circle to the **whole point of Pentecost**. This is about God doing what he promised to do long ago and make Abraham the father of many nations. It is about the promise to Noah the nations would come to him through the tents of Shem (Gen 9:27). The darkness of Babel has begun to be eradicated in the light of Christ through the proclamation of his Gospel. The sons of god are being judged. The divine council is beginning to be transformed from angelic princes to God's children—his people, the church. That's the new covenant. That's what Pentecost did. That's how everything began to be changed on that day and still is to this, each time God takes someone out of the kingdom of darkness through his Gospel and saves them to be Children of Light.

**Call upon the Name of the Lord** and you too shall be saved. Then pray with John Donne, the old Anglican cleric and poet who reflecting on this text wrote,

O Holy Ghost, whose temple I  
Am, but of mud walls, and condensed dust,  
And being sacrilegiously  
Half wasted with youth's fires, of pride and lust,

Must with new storms be weatherbeat;  
Double in my heart thy flame,  
Which let devout sad tears intend; and let  
(Though this glass lantern, flesh, do suffer maim)  
Fire, Sacrifice, Priest, Altar be the same.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts: New Testament*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 21.



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