

# Back to Bible Basics

**Issue 25**

## **The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

**Brett Rutherford**

Acts chapter two is an account of the establishment of Christ's church. It is also a record of the first converts to Christ. We are told that three thousand people obeyed the gospel of Christ on that occasion and were saved (Acts 2:41).

Before Peter rose up with the eleven other apostles to give instructions to the assembled Jewish multitude, the Holy Spirit had given the twelve apostles the ability to speak in different tongues or languages (Acts 2:4). These were not "angelic tongues" that no man could understand. These were the native languages of the various human kingdoms where the Jews had originated. This fact is made clear by the statement of those in the crowd who said; "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:8).

There were some present on that occasion who mocked the apostles, and wanted their fellow Jews to get the impression that the apostles were just uttering drunken gibberish (Acts 2:13). Peter stood up and put to rest the claims of his critics by making two arguments to defend what the apostles were doing. First, Peter pointed out that it was only the "third hour of the day." The third hour of the day corresponds to nine in the morning. Generally speaking, people do not drink alcohol at that time of the day. They are certainly unlikely to be drunk at 9 am. Most drunkards drink at night and are recovering from their previous night's binge by 9 am. The second argument Peter makes is that the miraculous ability of the apostles to speak in tongues

was the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel in chapter two verses twenty-eight to thirty-two of his book (Acts 2:16-21).

The prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 has often been misunderstood and misapplied by various religious groups of the present age. Many claim that when Joel stated that God promised to "... pour out His Spirit upon all flesh" in the last days, that this prophecy had no restrictions. Those who view the prophecy in this way suggest that all Christians through the ages are granted the ability to speak in tongues.

Sadly, these religious entities fail to consider the rest of what Joel said about the miraculous ability that God granted to those who accepted the gospel in Peter's day.

When Joel delivered God's promise to "...pour out His Spirit upon all flesh", he defined "all flesh" as all classes of mankind. In other words, both men and women would be recipients of the outpouring, and both young and old would receive it. This can be logically inferred by Peter's statement in verses seventeen and eighteen of Acts two. In other words, "all flesh" was not meant to be defined as all living things. Obviously, cats and dogs are flesh, but no one would suggest that cats and dogs receive an outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Quoting from Joel, Peter said; "'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 [males] and your daughters [females] shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'"

This statement made by Joel, and quoted by Peter, does not demand that one would logically conclude that every Christian from that day forward would receive a "pouring out of the Spirit" of God. In fact, Christians in the first century were baptized and saved without receiving an outpouring of the Spirit of God. Consider the example of the Samaritan converts in Acts chapter eight. In verse twelve the record shows us that many in Samaria were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. However, they did not receive the ability to perform miracles until the apostles came down to Samaria and laid hands on them (Acts 8:14-17). It is obvious that being able to perform miracles was not a sign that one was saved.

Finally, Paul made it very clear in First Corinthians chapter thirteen that the age of miracles ended in the first century. He told the Corinthians that there is going

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is a publication of the  
**Mersey Bluff church of Christ**  
232 William Street, Devonport, TAS 7310

**Email:**

**Brett: [brett@merseybluffcofc.com.au](mailto:brett@merseybluffcofc.com.au)**  
**Ian: [ianandmabel@iinet.net.au](mailto:ianandmabel@iinet.net.au)**

**All past issues can be downloaded at:**  
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to come a time when prophecies fail, when tongues shall cease, and inspired knowledge will no longer be given (I Corinthians 13:8-9). Paul goes on to explain in chapter thirteen when miracles would cease. He states that while he was writing the book of First Corinthians the inspired revelation of God was not complete, but Paul said when it was perfected then the miraculous gifts would "be done away" (I Corinthians 13: 9,10). The apostle went on to say that love, hope and faith would continue even after the miraculous age ended (I Corinthians 13: 13). Since God's revelation (the Bible) is complete that means miracles have ended, but we still have faith, hope and love (Revelation 22:18, 19). 

## Christ's Admonitions to the Seven Churches

Ian McPherson

In chapter one of the book of Revelation we see a vision of Christ standing majestically in the midst of the seven candlesticks (1:12-13). The last verse interprets the seven candlesticks as representing the seven churches of Asia. The fact that Christ is standing in the midst of the candlesticks shows that the message was meant to be applied to all churches for all ages. This is further emphasised in that there were seven churches mentioned. In the symbolism of the book of Revelation, the number seven is used extensively. For example seven Spirits represented the Holy Spirit (Rev. 5:6). There were also seven seals (5:1), seven trumpets (8:6), seven thunders (10:3), seven heads (12:3) etc. In every case the number seven represented something that is complete or perfect.

There are five identical phrases that Jesus repeated to each of the seven churches. Christ emphasises them in order to stress their importance. Let us consider the impact of each of these.

**"To the angel of the church ... write"** (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Every church was to receive their admonition in writing. The Bible was revealed first to the inspired apostles and prophets by miraculous revelation, but today He speaks only through His written word (Ephesians 3:1-5). God has never moved in man through feelings or impulses. Many churches today are relying on subjective feelings instead of objective truth. They are "giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). Anything we say, or any assumption we make religiously that cannot be verified from Scripture is a doctrine of the devil.

**"These things saith"** (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). In every instance it was the Lord speaking. If the Lord says something we must sit up and listen because He is the

Supreme Head of the church, and it is His words that will judge us on the last day (John 12:48).

**"I know thy works"** (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15) There is not a single thing we do, say or think that the Lord does not observe and know. Paul said, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). The thought of the Lord knowing everything we do can either be comforting or terrifying. "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Romans 2:7-10).

**"He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."** (2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6 13, 22). These verses show that the Spirit is the agent through which Jesus reveals His message to all churches. During His earthly ministry to the apostles Jesus said: "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. 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." (John 14:25-26).

**"To him that overcometh"** (2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5,12, 21). This encouragement was given to all the churches, even to Smyrna and Philadelphia who were without rebuke. Christ gave them this encouragement to make them aware that they will always be faced with challenges that need to be overcome. Smyrna was faithful, but was about to face persecution and be tested (2:10), and Philadelphia had to still "hold fast" to what they had in order to obtain their crown (3:11). We all need the strength to overcome, because apostasy is always imminent (2 Thess 2:3; 2 Tim 4:3-5).

In closing, it is significant that the five churches that were in error were admonished by the Lord to repent (2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). We generally think of individuals needing to repent, but notice that in some cases, the command was to the whole church.

This is a sobering thought for us all to consider, and it encourages us to examine ourselves as to whether our candlestick is still burning. Brethren, let us think on these things. 