

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Acts 2:1-21

Verses 1-4

When the day of Pentecost arrived they were all alike in the one place. It happened suddenly: from the sky a sound like a wind driving violently, completely filling the house where they were staying. There appeared on them tongues of fire-like flame fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit was granting them to speak out confidently.

Pentecost was the Jewish festival occurring seven weeks after and including the Sabbath of Passover Week, hence 50 days. **They were all in one place** because the risen Lord had told them to remain together in Jerusalem (4) and the actual place is described as an upper room (1:13). About 120 people comprised the group of disciples (15). Pentecost was a convenient time to be together but it was not Sunday, the Lord's Day, but Saturday, at 9 in the morning (15). We can only presume it was some time after Jesus' ascension that the Spirit came and it may have been during morning prayers (1:14).

Suddenly ἀφνω indicates that there was no prior warning of the Spirit's arrival. Sky is a translation of **heaven**. I think Luke is giving a physical description of the phenomena and so he is talking about the fire falling from the sky rather than something sent from God's kingdom. The first thing noticed was the **sound like a wind driving violently, completely filling the house**. Jesus described the Spirit as a wind in Jn 3:8; **Spirit** πνεύματος has its roots in the word for **wind** πνοης. This was no gentle breeze but something expressing the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke goes on to say that the sound was like **a wind driving violently**. Like a sudden gust of wind but having a driving force, it was able to penetrate the room, **completely filling the house**. No part of the house avoided this filling, which was like a presence of movement, noise and power.

Appearing on them, fire, distributed on each other as tongues [of flame]. This sentence follows the Greek reasonably closely in order to convey what was happening. First the sound, like a violent wind. Next, accompanying the sound, **fire appeared on them**. What Luke relates is the appearance on them of fire, but as it neared their heads, it began **dividing on each of them as a tongue**. Each of the disciples received the Spirit who came first like a wind then a **tongue of fire**. Why fire? One could speak of Old Testament theophanies: fire on Mt. Sinai, Elijah ascending to heaven in a fiery chariot, the lips of Isaiah touched with a burning coal. But more immediately, we should look to Jesus' prediction: **he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire** (Matt 3:11; Lk 12:49). Fire speaks of separation and judgement, of the believers being winnowed from the wicked and the chaff being burned in fire (Matt 3:12; Lk 12:49,51). But we must not skip over the gospel; fire is the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings the power to believe and create a people for God for **all were filled with the Holy Spirit**. Christ said that the Spirit was the greatest gift, after his salvation, for he made it possible to enter his kingdom (Lk 11:13; Lk 12:32).

Here, fire has to do with the power to know the Lord and communicate his salvation through Christ. Thus, the fire separates and rests on each of them as **tongues**. The next thing to happen was each of them speaking in **other tongues**. Clearly, the Spirit arrived for each of them as a violent wind, a filling, a tongue of fire, and an audible tongue or language. The two tongues of language and flame employ the same word: γλωσσαι. Now, each of these phenomena were connected and found their unity in the Holy Spirit. **The Spirit was like a wind, he filled, he came as fire and he spoke, that is, he made a people filled with his sound, the sound of speaking and the knowing that must precede it, the confident speaking and breathing out of the word, and the powerful speaking that captures the attention of the other. Word and power come together as wind and fire.**

Verses 5-13