

Introductory

Most of the Acts text (vv. 1-13) is appointed to be read on the Sunday after the Ascension in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, it is appointed for Pentecost in Series A, and the rest of the second chapter of Acts is appointed for B and C. In LSB, this is the Epistle reading for the Day of Pentecost every year in both the three-year and one year series.

Luke ends his gospel with the Ascension of Jesus, after which the Apostles went from Galilee back to Jerusalem “with great joy,” where we find them “all continually in the Temple, εὐλογοῦντες τὸν Θεόν – blessing God.” This does not mean that they camped out in Temple. It means that they went to regular morning and evening service regularly.

Luke begins the Acts of the Apostles by referring to his Gospel, and he picks up where he left off with a little bit of overlap, about eleven verses in all. In those verses he addresses Theophilus (it means “friend of God”), likely his benefactor, reviews briefly, then backs up to prior to the Ascension, to an exchange between The Apostles present and Him.

The conversation as recorded begins with an inquiry to Him if the Kingdom is now going to be restored to Israel. The question of timing is – as usual – answered with the truth that they don’t know and can’t know the timing. Par for the course as well, He redirects them to another subject; that they will be “witnesses” to Him in locations near and far.

He had recorded the same command in the Gospel (24:48), along with a command to go to Jerusalem and wait. Beginning with verse twelve in Acts, they do return to Jerusalem, as per those orders, and besides going to church they gathered in an “upper room,” presumably to wait, like Jesus had told them to wait. They replaced Judas with Matthias.

Textual Notes

1. Their waiting lasted only several days, “Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό – and on the coming of the day of Pentecost they were all together in the one place,” presumably that “upper room” (13). The sentence structure emphasizes their togetherness, and they were not scattered – yet.

The scattering comes in the eighth chapter, as the murder of Stephan ushered in a time of persecution of Christians, and many of them fled Jerusalem, “they were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles” (8:1). It is noteworthy that the Apostles are singled out as *not* joining in the exodus from Jerusalem.

2. While they were there, seemingly out of the blue, “καὶ ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος ὥσπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας – and suddenly there came from heaven a sound like moving of a spirit.” The adverb “ἄφνω” occurs only three times in the NT, all in Acts; here, when an earthquake hits (16:26), and when a person is expected to drop dead (28:6),

They had no notice, except for the plethora of notices Jesus had given them over a period of several years, no gentle breeze leading to rushing, just minding their own beeswax and boom! The adjective “βιαίας – violent” is a hapax logomena; it occurs only once in the Bible. Its cognate noun “βία – violence” occurs four times in the NT, all in Acts.

The first three times (5:36, 21:35, 24:7), it refers to people on people violence. The last time (27:41), it is used in reference to a storm at sea. The verb “πνοή” is the cognate of the more familiar noun “πνεῦμα – spirit,” and it occurs only here and later in Acts (17:25) in the NT. It is not “ἄνεμος”, the common (31 times) NT word for “wind.”

The word “πνεῦμα – spirit,” is very common in the NT (383 occurrences), and it’s hard to look at all of them, but except for the exchange of Jesus with Nicodemus (John 3), they all seem to mean “spirit” and not wind. Thayer calls it first “a movement of air (gentle) blast;” and quotes Herodotus, John 3:8, and several OT references in support of that.

Other meanings are given as “breath of the nostrils or mouth” and “the breath of life” and the spirit that animates a living thing, et several al (<https://biblehub.com/greek/4151.htm>). The latter use of “πνοή – wind” in Acts is during Paul’s sermon at Areopagus, where he references “God who made the world...gives to all men life and breath and everything.”

I have translated the object in question as being like “moving of a spirit,” and a literal translation would be something like “the spiriting (breathing) of a spirit,” i.e. a “spirit” doing what a “spirit” does, whatever that might be. But surprisingly, inexplicably, the Commentators like “wind,” except for Ellicott, who puts it well at biblehub.com.

A rushing mighty wind.—Better, *a mighty breath borne onwards*, so as to connect the English, as the Greek is connected, with St. Peter’s words that, “holy men of old spake as they were moved (literally, *borne on*) by the Holy Ghost” ([2Peter 1:21](#)). The Greek word for “wind” is not that commonly so translated (*anemos*), but one from the same root as the Greek for “Spirit” (*Pnoè* and *Pneuma*—both from *Pneô*, “I breathe”), and rendered “breath” in [Acts 17:25](#). It is obviously chosen here as being better fitted than the more common word for the supernatural inbreathing of which they were conscious, and which to many must have recalled the moment when their Lord had “*breathed* on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” ([John 20:22](#)). Now, once more, they felt that light yet awful breathing which wrought every nerve...and it filled “the whole house,” as if in token of the wide range over which the new spiritual power was to extend its working, even unto the whole Church, which is the House of God ([1Timothy 3:15](#)), and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Indeed. But they mostly seem to acknowledge that something supernatural is going on here, “καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι – and it filled the entire house where they were staying,” and there you have it. When Luke uses the term “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” he means that somebody is about to proclaim the Word of God.

Shortly (4), “they” will be “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and then they will begin to proclaim the Word of God. You could read the filling of the house as happening at the same time as, or almost simultaneous to the filling of the people with the same “spirit.” In between those two things, Luke relates to us the familiar tongues of fire.

3. The tongues of fire sat on each of them. Sounds supernatural to me.

4. If you want to confirm what I’m saying about being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” take a gander at *Phrase Concordance of the Bible*. It’s copyrighted (1986) by Thomas Nelson, I can’t find it online or in digital form, or online, let alone for free, but you can get it at Amazon, hardcover prime for \$15, or stride into the mine field of used books.

The phrase “filled with the Holy Spirit,” not to be confused with “filled with the Spirit,” occurs nine times in the NT, all from Luke (4 in Luke, 5 in Acts). The term is used only by Luke in the NT, and it means what I said it means, and that’s crucial to understanding exactly what is going on at Pentecost especially, the filling of the house and the people.

Still in the house, “καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες Πνεύματος Ἁγίου – they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Luke has been talking about “they” since the beginning of this pericope, and before, so just who are “they”? The Apostles are listed by name, “together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (1:13-14).

Then “they” speak, “καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς – and they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving to them to declare,” and we must narrow “they” down to the Apostles. To think otherwise would be to think that Pentecost went against the entirety of Scripture.

The verb “λαλέω” is a common generic word for talking or speaking. The verb “ἀποφθέγγομαι – to preach” is rare in the NT, occurring only three times, all in Acts. Towards the end (26:25), it is used of Paul preaching to Festus. Coming up later on in this reading (2:14), it is used to introduce Peter’s Pentecost sermon.

The Apostles were personally chosen by Jesus to do His work after He ascended. They and none else had been “sent out” once to preach and do miracles, they were present for and at the Ascension, and of course they would be the ones to preach the Gospel from Pentecost on, and in fact it’s the primary subject matter of the Acts of the *Apostles*.

5. We shift gears now, as Luke introduces us to other people, “Ἦσαν δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι – Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews” and that means they were residents of the city, and like any other resident, you are permanent until you move away. The word for visitor or “sojourner” is not the word used here.

Speaking still of residents of Jerusalem, he describes them as “ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν – pious men from every nation of those under (the) heaven.” The description here indicates a people who have roots in other places, and who have moved to Jerusalem, probably for reasons of religious devotion and Temple.

As is the case today, there were other reasons as well for Jews to move to Jerusalem, and many of them sort of had a thing about being buried in the Holy Land. The practice goes back at least to Jacob, whose family embalmed him and held onto his body during the entirety of bondage in Egypt, so that he could be buried in Canaan, and he is.

The Cave of Patriarchs is in Hebron and contains the bodies of several OT giants. Modern Jews will not uncommonly have a funeral in their own country, then ship the corpse to Israel for proper burial. At any rate, for whatever reasons, Luke wants us to know that there are a large number of Jewish people who immigrated from other places.

And he has already told us that it's Pentecost (2:1), so we know that because of Pentecost there are many temporary Jewish visitors in the city as well. Contrary what Barclay, for example, says, this was not a group who spoke one of only two languages. This will become clear in the coming verses, where Luke lists the different languages represented.

As we read on, we see that the crowd includes some “residents” of certain places (9) and “visitors” from Rome. All of this is to say that the people gathered for Pentecost were not by any means a homogeneous group. They were a very heterogeneous mix, and Luke waits until almost the end of his list before dropping this bombshell; some are proselytes.

6. It was upon hearing “τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνῆλθεν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ συνεχύθη – this sound the crowd gathered, and they were confused.” I'll bet. It was not the sound of howling wind that got their attention, but it was “ὅτι ἤκουον εἰς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν – because they each one heard speaking in their own language.”

When studying the Bible, you don't do a word study on every word, but you do a word study when it's necessary or expedient. The meaning “διάλεκτος” is important to understanding exactly what this heterogeneous group was hearing. Were they hearing people speak with a different accent; British, American, Australian, or Canadian, eh?

Was the British cockney or aristocratic? Was the American Standard Mid-West or Southern, and was it Georgia Southern, or Alabama Southern, or Texas Southern? Or were they hearing complete separate languages? Yes, they were. Firstly, if you wanted to talk about what we would call a language, “διάλεκτος” is the word you would use.

To say that they were speaking several versions of the same language seems pointless. What would be the big deal of me speaking Mid-Western, then adding a Southern accent, then switching to British – which I can do. Actors do it all the time. Unless you're a fan, you probably didn't even know that Georgian Rick Grimes is played by an Englishman.

The idea that everybody spoke one of two languages is great in theory, but in practice it breaks completely down. English today, like Koine Greek in that day, is the “bridge” or “universal” language. So, in theory I can go to England and Ireland and speak English to the people who live there, and you can. But I have yet to master Cockney.

But if you go to Germany, most Germans in the western part of the country prefer English to your stilted German, but over east the youngsters mostly speak English, but people my age and over not so much. As a youngster in Erfurt explained it to me, they all grew up in the GDR and learned Russian, and how’s that working out for you?

Go to Italy, and it’s best to start with my high school Spanish than English. So you can say that everybody knew Kione Greek in the time of Jesus, but not everybody actually knew Kione Greek in the time of Jesus. Finally, nobody would have been “confused” if they had heard those people speaking Kione Greek with different accents.

7. But they were, and additionally they were “ἐξίσταντο δὲ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον – amazed and marveled.” The first adjective is fairly common (17 appearances), and the Brits might say “gobsmacked” and the Americans might say “bowled over.” More accurately, we should say they were “beside themselves,” unable to make any sense of this new thing.

Thayer says, “literally, “to remove from a standing (fixed) position,” put out of place; i.e. “beside oneself,” showing someone as flabbergasted (completely stupefied); at a total loss to explain or account for something; overwhelmed, astonished (amazed).” There is a hint in the word of an actual physical response, otherwise commonly known as “emotion.”

It makes some Lutherans uncomfortable, and sends many LCMS Pastors to become beside themselves with angst. Emotion is part of who we are as God’s creation – the dog does not get depressed – and it happens all the time, and not all emotion is equally good or bad, and it can be misused, but Jesus had a lot of emotions during His earthly life.

The second adjective is the more common (44 times) word for marveling and being amazed at things. They expressed their emotion, “λέγοντες Οὐχὶ ἰδοὺ πάντες οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι – saying, ‘see, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’” The rhetorical question – as usual – expects a positive answer, “Yes, they are Galileans.”

How much Hebrew or Aramaic would the crowd have known? Probably not much, and that would have been mostly all they heard around Jerusalem, like English is mostly all you hear around here. As such, they would have felt a bit on the outside, like I always felt on the outside when I was in Italy. I think the Italians want me to feel that way.

For the first time, while in Jerusalem, they heard people speaking their own language, and they must have felt like I felt when I ran into the occasional fluent English-speaker in Italy. You can tell people – like Jesus told people – that Christianity is for all people of all nations, but here God shows that truth by using men speaking my own language.

How exactly did that play out? It clearly is a miraculous thing that the Apostles were speaking all those languages that were presumably foreign to them. There would be no miracle if they all knew different languages, but that seems highly unlikely, there is no evidence of any kind to suggest that, and why and how would have Galileans done that?

8. Clearly, the crowd had no such thoughts, “καὶ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν – how are we each hearing our own language in which we were born?” The last word in that sentence, puts to rest any remaining doubts about what was going on here; they were hearing the language into which they had been born.

Noam Chomsky put forth the idea that there is a “language gene” unique to humans and had by no other living thing. We are built to learn a language, and the language app is very versatile. It can adapt to German and Chinese as well as American, so whatever the language into which you were born, that’s your basic language, and always will be.

It's probably, if you are multi-lingual, the one you think in. You can learn other languages, and Melania is fluent in five or six, but you will probably always be most comfortable in your First Language. You learn that language in the early years, and the older you get, the harder it is to learn new languages well, and it’s like pulling teeth.

How exactly did that play out? We note that the crowd is drawn to them because of the cacophony of various languages, and if you heard that multi-lingual proclamation, to which speaker would you be drawn? When we were eating at the restaurant in the castle in Tuscany, there were many other people there, but with whom did we converse?

The dairy farmer from New Zealand, who spoke English, and so did his wife. So the people speaking in different languages got the attention of that crowd in Jerusalem, who for the life of them could not figure it out. They were drawn to that upper room, and each of them would have been drawn to his own language because that’s how it is.

9 - 10. The commentaries spend a lot of ink on the regions listed, noting that it is clearly made by a trained historian, it omits several areas one would expect to find, and includes others that ought to surprise us. Ellicott says, “There is a kind of order, as of one taking a mental bird’s-eye view of the Roman empire, beginning with the great Parthian kingdom,”

Expositor thinks Luke has the Jewish Diaspora in mind,

Of the Jews of the Dispersion there were four classes: (1) Eastern or Babylonian Jews, corresponding in the list to Parthians, Medes, Elamites; (2) Syrian Jews, corresponding to Judæa, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia; (3) Egyptian Jews, corresponding to Egypt and the parts of Libya over against Cyrene; (4) Roman Jews. (1) Parthia, mentioned here only in the N.T., is placed first, not only because of the vast extent of its empire from India to the Tigris, but because it then was

the only power which had tried issues with Rome and had not been defeated,

That's probably enough time spent on places and peoples most of which your people have never heard of, of which they know little, and they don't have to. Make the point – Luke's point – that people were there from all over the place, and they spoke a lot of different languages, and then the Apostles did what they did and that was a miracle.

11. Speaking of the visitors from Rome – or did it include those from other places as well? – Luke identifies them as “Ἰουδαῖοι τε καὶ προσήλυτοι – Jews and Proselytes,” i.e. converts to Judaism. Those would be the people – no matter from what geographical region – who would have been interested in Passover, and to them it was a big deal.

The commentators note that “Κρήτες καὶ Ἀραβες, - Crete and Arabia” seem to be added almost as an afterthought, Expositor quotes,

Belser, who...supposes that St. Luke obtained his information from an eyewitness who added the Cretans and Arabians supplementarily, just as a person might easily forget one or two names in going through a long list of representative nations at a festival.

Perhaps there was a significance known to the 1st Century reader but lost to us.

I could see twelve or more – were the Seventy there – clusters of people gathered around the various preachers who were each speaking in each of their own various languages, and they all said, “ἀκούομεν λαλούντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ – We hear them speaking in our own tongues the great works of God.”

It's what we do today when we translate the Bible into many different languages. It is my understanding that when the missionaries go to a new place, one of the first things they do is learn the language and how to write it. The Hawaiians, like a lot of people, did not have an alphabet, so they made one up, so the Bible and the like can be put into writing.

To speak of “the great works of God” is not specific, but we can presume that these people already knew about things like Creation, the Exodus, and OT works of majesty and power done by God. The new “works of God” would have been things like the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the miracles of Jesus, His Resurrection and Ascension.

If you look at the content of preaching in Acts, they kept to the basics adapted to their audience, like any good speaker does. The second half of this pericope is Peter's sermon on Pentecost, and we might conclude that what he says there is what they were saying here. Peter's sermon may be seen as an example of what all the preachers were saying.

12. Again, “ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες καὶ διηποροῦντο, ἄλλος πρὸς ἄλλον λέγοντες Τί (ὅν) θέλει τοῦτο εἶναι – they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to each other, ‘what this

want to be?” The same phrase is used later by Luke (Acts 17:18), when Paul is on Mars Hill. Upon meeting Stoics and Epicureans, they ask the same question of his teachings.

Not all the manuscripts have “ὅν – an adverb incapable of translation by a single English word...” (Little BAG), and NA 26 does not even include it as a possible variant, and it appears to be easters. I don’t know what manuscript Meyer was looking at when he says,

The optative with ὅν, in order to denote the hypothetically conceived possibility: *What might this possibly wish to be? i.e.* What might—if this speaking in our native languages, this strange phenomenon, is designed to have any meaning—be to be thought of as that meaning? Comp. [Acts 17:18](#)”

Expositors, “διαπορεῖν – perplexed” is a term used a lot in the medical profession, and the phrase, “τί ὅν θέλοι τοῦτο εἶναι—θέλω was constantly used in this sense in classical writers.” *House* taught us that medical conditions can often be hard to diagnose, and you sometimes need somebody like him or Conrad Hawkins to deal with the hard cases.

If you play this out in real time, this was their first experience of Pentecost, a thing with which we are very familiar, and we hear about it on an annual basis. Playing this out in real time, you are enjoying the Festival, doing what you do, and you look around and hear groups of people being spoken to in different languages from all around the world.

In this case, the crowd is probably questioning whether even the speakers of different languages know what’s going on here. It would have been the first question I would have asked if I were a part of the crowd; so just what’s going on here anyway? But by the end of Peter’s (et al) sermons and thereafter, the converts will be counted in the thousands.

13. Some of them thought they had it figured out, “ἄλλοι δὲ διαχλευάζοντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Γλεύκους μεμεστωμένοι εἰσίν – but others, mocking, said that they are full of new wine.” The word “χλευάζω -to mock or jeer” is found only here and later on (17:32) when the philosophers on Mars Hill “mock” Paul for speaking of such a silly thing as resurrection.

The word “γλεύκος – sweet wine,” not “new wine,” is a hapax logomena in the NT; this is the only time it is used. (You may recognize the etymological root of “glucose” in the word.) It wasn’t the time of the year for “new” wine. Ellicott says this wine is, “stronger and more intoxicating than the lighter and thinner wines that were ordinarily drunk.”

And what sort of mocking would it be to accuse them of being drunk on unfermented (new) wine? We see here a continuation of the pattern observed in the miracles of Jesus; some people believe the miracle to be from God, and some people don’t. We get the same response to The Miracle of Resurrection. Nobody is neutral about these things.

14. Peter is standing “σὺν τοῖς ἑνδεκά – with the eleven.” He’s the one to speak, directing his words to, “Ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἱερουσαλὴμ – men of Judea and

living in Jerusalem,” to those who had no need of a translator, and who were evidently the ones doing the mocking. He is not addressing his words to the ones on the list.

15. Their mocking makes no sense, “οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε οὗτοι μεθύουσιν, ἔστιν – it is not as you suppose that these men are drunk.” The English have an idiom, “you’ve got the wrong end of the stick,” to say that you just really have no idea what’s really going on here, “γὰρ ὥρα τρίτη τῆς ἡμέρας – because it’s the third hour of the day.

16. Actually, there is a better explanation for these goings on, emphatic “ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ – but this is the saying having been spoken by the prophet Joel,” and then he quotes a highly eschatological section of Joel, (2: 28-32), speaking of the Day of the Lord and right after that of the restoration of Judah.

It’s things like that quotation from Joel that led the first Christians to believe that the Day of the Lord was upon them, and it was. The first two verses (17-18) were playing out even as Peter speaks. The other things (19-20) sound a lot like what Jesus said about signs of the Kingdom coming. They also sound like things that haven’t yet happened.