

Small Group Notes 4 June 2017. Theme: “The Gift of the Holy Spirit”

Key Words: Pentecost, Holy Spirit, Power

To the leader: To answer question 6 you may need to approach someone, not in your group, who doesn't speak English as a first language and ask them the questions. I recommend a short chat with Vuyelwa.

Welcome

- How many languages do you speak? Have a go at saying the first line of the Lord's Prayer in the other languages represented in your group or in one of RSA's official languages you don't know.

Worship

- Read John 20:19-21. Through prayer and worship open yourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Word Read Acts 2:1-21, 37-39.

1. Without looking at your bibles retell the story to one another. Ensure all the “what, where, how, when” aspects are covered. The leader can challenge with questions like “*name all the nations represented?*” ☺ and “*what prophet did Peter quote?*” and “*what were the prophet's words?*”.
2. Read the notes on **Pentecost** and **Babel** (attached) to deepen the group's understanding of some of the background.
3. Peter says “*In the last days...*”? Read the note attached about Joel.
4. It is clear from Acts 2:38 that God's gift at Pentecost involved both judgement and salvation. In Joel's day the sins of “*Judah and Jerusalem seem primarily to be sins of complacency, and the summons takes the form of a wake-up call*”¹. How is God calling you out of complacency? It will be useful at this point to interrogate how heavily invested we are in our the current “*world*” – therefore discuss: “*By ‘end of the world’, we usually mean the end of our world. What we don't tend to ask is who gets included in the ‘we’, what it cost to attain our world, and whether we were entitled to such a world in the first place.*”²
5. The previous question might be deeply disturbing. So read again Acts 2:38b-39. How do you feel knowing that the gift of God's own self is given to each one – even if our world ends God is with us!
6. You will may have noticed that at the 09:30 service and the 18:30 service we sung in languages other than English to acknowledge the diversity in our congregation and to honour the Spirit's inclusivity at Pentecost. (We may do the same at 08:00 when we have folk who can lead the singing). Ask someone whose first language is not English what language they usually pray in. Ask them what it means to hear someone who doesn't know their language use it in the context of worship and prayer.

Works

- In Acts 2:43-47 we see that the Holy Spirit liberated people from their possessions, enabling them to share materially, in fellowship, prayer and worship. Commit to opening your heart to the Spirit this week through one activity in each of these categories (sharing, fellowship, prayer and worship).
- Give thanks for the SACC “unburdening report”, the “Betrayal of Promise” report and pray for those who have the difficult task of leading the way toward justice.

¹ Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour (p. 218). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² <https://aeon.co/essays/the-human-world-is-not-more-fragile-now-it-always-has-been>

Notes

Pentecost

For a first-century Jew, **Pentecost** was the fiftieth day after Passover. It was an agricultural festival. It was the day when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop, and offered it to God, partly as a sign of gratitude and partly as a prayer that all the rest of the crop, too, would be safely gathered in.

For the Jew, neither Passover nor Pentecost were simply agricultural festivals. These festivals awakened echoes of the great story which dominated the long memories of the Jewish people, the story of the **Exodus** from Egypt, when God fulfilled his promises to Abraham by rescuing his people. Passover was the time when the lambs were **sacrificed**, and the Israelites were saved from the avenging angel who slew the firstborn of the Egyptians. Off went the Israelites that very night, and passed through the Red Sea into the Sinai desert. Then, **50 days after Passover**, they came to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the **law**. **Pentecost**, the fiftieth day, isn't (in other words) just about the 'first fruits', the sheaf which says the harvest has begun. It's about God giving to his redeemed people the way of life by which they must now carry out his purposes

From Wright, T. (2008). Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12 (p. 21). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Babel Reversed

In Gen. 12:3 God promised Abraham: 'In you, and in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.' And this promise to Abraham comes directly after the dramatic and comic chapter in which the people of Babel are building a tower, thinking arrogantly to make a name for themselves. God's response, as always, to human pride and arrogance is to overturn the project and ridicule the people, which he accomplishes by confusing their languages so that they cannot understand one another and cannot therefore work together on creating a human society which would have no need of the creator God.

From Wright, T. (2008). Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12 (pp. 28–29). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Joel

At the heart of Joel's message is "***the day of the LORD***," a concept that had been used by the prophets for some time before Joel came on the scene (see Amos 5:18–20; Isa 2:12–18; 3:7, 18; 11:10–11; Jer 30:7–8; Zeph 1:7–2:2). Its earliest mention in Amos indicates that Israel had a sanguine view of this day—that it was a day in their future when God would come to their aid because they were his. But Amos turned that understanding on its head, because Israel's covenant disloyalty has placed them at enmity with Yahweh, and Amos is followed in this by all the other prophets, including especially Zephaniah. Isaiah and Jeremiah further explain it as cutting both ways—a day of judgment on those whose sins deserve such, but followed by a day of salvation for God's gathered remnant. As you read Joel, you will see that he fits into this pattern of describing it. For him, the locust plague has set God's day in motion as **judgment** on Judah and Jerusalem, but its consummation clearly lies in a great future eschatological event of judgment on the nations and ultimately the **restoration** of God's people.

From Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. K. (2002). How to read the Bible book by book: a guided tour (pp. 218–219). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan