

# THE DAY OF PENTECOST

by K. R. Blades

In the course of God's dealings with the nation of Israel, there have been a number of times when He has produced in her midst a grand and phenomenal event which was intended to make a big impression upon her. The extraordinary nature of the parting of the waters of both the Red Sea and the Jordan River would fall into this category. So also would the taking of Jericho, and the consuming of Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel, to cite just a few. These events were certainly remarkable in nature, and they were designed to make specific impacts upon the people of Israel in the outworking of God's program with them.

Another event which falls into this category is that which took place in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, not many days after the Lord Jesus Christ had returned to heaven. As is recorded in Acts 2:1 4,...

**"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they (the 12 apostles and other disciples) were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."**

Without a doubt, this was also a remarkable and phenomenal event. In fulfillment of what the Lord had promised before He returned to heaven, these apostles and disciples were at this time "*baptized with the Holy Ghost*" and received "*power from on high*" in connection with it. (cf. Acts 1:4 5,8) The Holy Ghost came upon them as so described, and they began miraculously uttering forth in other languages "*the wonderful works of God*". This was truly astounding and impressed the Jews from every nation which were then dwelling at Jerusalem. As verses 6-7 declare they were all "*confounded*" and were "*all amazed and marvelled*."

But as with other phenomenons that God had produced, this didn't occur simply to amaze or astound. This event on the day of Pentecost meant something. It signified something in God's plan and purpose.

## WHAT WAS GOING ON?

It is commonly believed that this remarkable event on the day of Pentecost signified the beginning of this present dispensation of God's grace in which we live. This is thought to be the case primarily because of the fact that the Lord's sufferings have just been accomplished, and the Holy Spirit has now come on this day. It is generally thought that with Israel's rejection of Christ at the cross, that at that time God set Israel aside and suspended His program and dealings with her, and began to turn to us Gentiles. Therefore, the coming of the Holy Spirit following Christ's return to heaven is assumed to be for the purpose of forming the "*new creation*", the church the body of Christ. Hence, the day of Pentecost is often called *The Birthday of the Church*, or *The Birthday of this Age of Grace*.

Though this is often thought to be the case, it is actually a misunderstanding of what was

going on at this time. In truth, it is in conflict with the testimony of the word of God concerning both what was happening on the day of Pentecost, and when it actually was that God ushered in this *dispensation of Gentile grace* in which we live today. In truth, as we need to note, God's program and dealings with the nation of Israel were still in effect on the day of Pentecost. The things which transpired at that time all had to do with the outworking of God's special program with His nation. It was not until later on, through the occurrence of another remarkable and phenomenal event the unexpected return of the Lord from heaven to raise up Paul as a brand new apostle that God ushered in this present dispensation of Gentile grace.

## **THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPELS**

There are a number of things recorded in the Gospel accounts which teach us that God's special program with Israel would be continuing and advancing on following their rejection of Christ. Notice the reality of this in the following examples:

Luke 24:13 27 In view of the Lord's sufferings on the cross, these two dejected disciples thought that Israel's hope was now dashed because of His death. But the Lord's words to them clearly show that His sufferings were NOT an obstacle at all to Israel's redemption and glory. They were NOT a *stunning blow* to God's program with her. But rather, the sufferings were necessary to accomplish their redemption and to give them the glory. Christ's sufferings were foreordained, planned for, and prophesied about. They were an essential step in the outworking of God's program with Israel so that the glory of their covenanted kingdom could be theirs. The prophets set forth the issue of "*the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow*". And now that the sufferings were accomplished, the program was ready to advance on to "*the glory*".

The Lord did not teach His disciples to look at His rejection as a hinderance to God's program and purpose with Israel. They were not taught to think that God, in view of it, was now going to set the nation aside. But rather, they were taught the prophesied necessity of Christ's sufferings in order "*to enter into his glory*". The hope of the glory wasn't dashed at all. But instead, now the way was paved for the glory to come.

The Lord's own testimony concerning His rejection, therefore, indicates to us that God's program with Israel would be continuing on in spite of it.

Luke 13:6 9 The Lord earlier on also gave evidence that this would be the case in this particular parable which He set forth. Against the background of Israel's failure to "*discern this time*" and their mounting negative response to the "*gospel of the kingdom*" and to Him as their Christ, the Lord described what their situation was soon going to be.

As the parable describes, Christ's three year ministry to His nation was not going to be received by them. They would not bring forth "*fruit*" unto Him. At the end of that time they would be in the position of deserving the Lord's day of wrath. The nation would then be like the fig tree worthy of being *cut down*. But, just as with the "*dresser of the vineyard*" in the parable, the Lord would request an extension of mercy and forbearance be given to the nation, during which time they would be *worked* and given the opportunity to yet bear the fruit.

As is recorded in Luke 23:33 34, when Christ hung upon the cross He did the very thing

He described in the parable.

**"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him,...Then said Jesus, FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."**

In praying for them, the Lord provided for the extension of mercy and forbearance to be given to His nation. Israel would neither be cut down nor set aside at this time. But rather, God's program and dealings with His nation would advance on, and the people of Israel would be given a further opportunity to change their minds and believe the "*gospel of the kingdom*". And this is what the opening chapters of the book of Acts goes on to record.

### **THE TESTIMONY OF ACTS 2 ITSELF**

The definitive explanation, though, regarding what God was doing on the day of Pentecost, is that which He Himself gave on that very day. In response to the multitude of Jews themselves "*saying one to another, What meaneth this?*", the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, stood up and explained what was going on. God had Peter explain exactly what the remarkable event was and what it meant. And God's own testimony is that He was still dealing with Israel.

**"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. BUT THIS IS THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL; 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 AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS: AND ON MY SERVANTS AND ON MY HANDMAIDENS I WILL POUR OUT IN THOSE DAYS OF MY SPIRIT; AND THEY SHALL PROPHECY: AND I WILL SHEW WONDERS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, AND SIGNS IN THE EARTH BENEATH; BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOUR OF SMOKE: THE SUN SHALL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS, AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THAT GREAT AND NOTABLE DAY OF THE LORD COME: AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, *THAT* WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." (Acts 2:14 21)**

Peter's declaration here lays all conjecture to rest. As he says, "THIS IS THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL." The day of Pentecost with its remarkable events, therefore, was NOT the beginning of a new dispensation. It was NOT the commencing of this present dispensation of God's grace to us Gentiles, which, as the apostle Paul testifies, was a "*mystery*"; "*hid in God*" in ages and generations past, and not made known to the sons of men. (cf. Eph. 3:1 12; Col. 1:25 27) But rather, what God was doing on the day of Pentecost was something He had made known in the past. He hadn't kept it "*hid in Himself*". But instead, He foretold of it and had Joel declare to Israel that it was coming. Obviously, the events of the day of Pentecost, which God had long foretold would come, were not the ushering in of this present dispensation, which God before kept "*hid in Himself*".

Also notice that what Joel foretold were the things which would be transpiring in "*the last days*" of God's program and dealings with Israel. As Joel set forth in his entire prophecy, God's dealings with Israel were advancing on to the time when He was going to have *His day* with them and this world. The "*day of the LORD*" was coming, as Joel 1:15 warned, and as 2:1ff described. By it God would purge Israel of all the rebellious ones. Also, He would avenge His cause with them upon the nations, and judge this world, and establish His kingdom in Zion.

As Joel 2:28ff states, when God's dealings with Israel came down to their "*last days*" and the "*day of the LORD*" was, therefore, "*at hand*", certain things would take place which would signify the arrival of those "*last days*", and the progression of them. First of all, God would be doing certain things by His Spirit in connection with *Israel's 'sons and daughters'* which would signify to the nation the arrival of "*the last days*". Then as those days progressed on to their end, God would '*show wonders and signs*' in heaven and earth which would intensify and culminate in "*the great and notable day of the Lord*".

According to God's testimony through Peter this is what was going on on the day of Pentecost. God's program and dealings with Israel had advanced on to the arrival of the prophesied "*last days*", and this is what the remarkable and phenomenal events of that day signified. The disciples' baptism with the Holy Spirit was designed by God to produce the fulfillment of the initial signs which Joel foretold would indicate to Israel the arrival of those "*last days*".

God's own answer to the question, "*What meaneth this?*", settles the issue as to the significance of the day of Pentecost. God does NOT say He has set Israel aside and that He is beginning a new dispensation. But rather, He declares quite the contrary to be the case. He is not only still dealing with Israel, but He has advanced His program with her and He has announced to her that her prophesied and expected "*last days*" have now arrived.

## **REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL**

In view of the Lord's prayer for His people on the cross, an extension of God's mercy and forbearance was being given to Israel as their "*last days*" dawned upon them. In view of this, after announcing the arrival of what Joel had foretold, Peter indicted the people of Israel for the crime of rejecting their Christ, and he exhorted them to change their minds concerning Jesus of Nazareth. In so doing, they would be constituted part of the remnant that God was calling out of Israel. They would "*save themselves from this untoward generation*", and would be provided for in the Lord's day of purging wrath. (See Acts 2:22 40; also Mt. 3:1 12)

This merciful offer of repentance to Israel with the dawning of their "*last days*" was repeatedly announced to the nation, as is evidenced by the record of Acts 3ff. (e.g. 3:19 26; 4:8 12, 23 30) In fact, as is recorded in 5:30 31, Peter declared to the elders of Israel that this was exactly what God was doing at this time.

**"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, FOR TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL, AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS."**

Obviously, the program of God in the opening chapters of the book of Acts is still His

program with the nation of Israel. The day of Pentecost with its remarkable events signified to Israel that her program had now advanced on to the arrival of her "*last days*". It was NOT, therefore, *the birthday of the church*, or *the birthday of this present dispensation of grace*.

## THE PRESENT DISPENSATION

Along with describing the advancement of Israel's program and God's mercy unto them, the opening chapters of Acts also describe how that the nation spurned God's mercy. As chapters 4-7 relate, the elders of Israel rebelled against the testimony of the 12, and they climaxed their rebellion against God with the stoning of Stephen. It was at that time, just as Stephen declared in connection with the vision given unto him, that the extension of mercy and forbearance was over. The Lord was ready to "*make his enemies his footstool*". He was ready to begin to administer the forewarned day of His wrath and purging of His nation.

But, as Acts 9 sets forth, instead of the administering of the expected wrath, another remarkable and phenomenal event occurred. The Lord Jesus Christ unexpectedly came back from heaven and raised up a brand new apostle Paul. In so doing, the Lord commissioned him as the "*apostle of the Gentiles*", and sent him out with the message that God was holding back His day of wrath; and that He was temporarily suspending His program and dealings with Israel; and that He was bringing in a new dispensation a dispensation of His grace to us Gentiles.

As God has Paul declare, for example in Ephesians 3:1-7, the revelation of this present dispensation was given unto him.

**"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME TO YOU WARD: how that by REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power."**

God ushered in this present dispensation when the Lord Jesus Christ came back from heaven and raised Paul up as a new apostle. But before that, God's program with Israel was in effect, with the day of Pentecost announcing to Israel the arrival of her *last days*".