

A summary of Acts 2:14-36

- 1. Corporate prayers and fellowship result in the Lord's leading for the church (Acts 1:13-14, 24-26; 2:14).** If we go back to chapter 1, we will recall an odd exercise that the 120 or so disciples engaged in, namely casting lots to determine who would be the twelfth apostle to replace Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus, and subsequently hanged himself. Several Bible readers have questioned the practice of casting lots, saying that it was an Old Testament practice and should no longer be practiced by New Testament believers who now should rely on the leading of the Spirit. While such a position is true, it would be helpful to consider the background of such a practice, and in so doing, we will find a valuable lesson that we may learn in our church life. Acts 1:13-14 tells us that about 120 disciples prayed together in one accord, devoting themselves to the corporate prayers. At some point during those prayers, Peter stood up and, through his exposition of the Old Testament, fellowshiped the burden of choosing a brother to replace Judas Iscariot's ministry, specifying the two prerequisites: that he must have accompanied Jesus and His disciples during the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry, and that he must have seen Jesus after His resurrection. Following Peter's fellowship, the other disciples proposed two names, after which there was further corporate prayer directed to the Lord to reveal to them His choice. Finally, they (all the disciples) cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias who then became the twelfth apostle, being numbered with the other eleven. Such a sequence of events has tremendous meaning and application to us, and the result proves that such a practice of "casting lots" was not an arbitrary dependence on "chance," but rather the outcome of the leading of the Holy Spirit. The opening words of Acts 2:14 show us the Spirit's confirmation: "But Peter, standing with the eleven..." Matthias was counted among the eleven, and thus his appointment, and the method by which he was appointed, are fully endorsed or approved. Therefore, we see the great significance of first the corporate prayers, secondly the fellowship, begun by Peter but continued by the others, thirdly more corporate prayers, fourthly the proposal of two names, fifthly the decision made, led and blessed by the Spirit, and sixthly the stamp of approval by the Spirit of such a decision. Some brothers and sisters today desire to know what the church should do concerning a certain matter, for example, where should the church go apple picking, or what will be the arrangements of an upcoming conference. All such matters need the church's (our) corporate prayers and fellowship. Do we have any questions? Let us participate in the prayers. Most decisions are arrived at by means of corporate prayers and fellowship and the casting of lots, through the sweet functioning of a service team, and not by any individual or select group of individuals. How can we apply the casting of lots to our church life situation? Obviously, it is not a literal practice. Spiritually speaking, after prayer and fellowship, if it is still not clear what decision to make, we may seek each brother and sister's feeling concerning the matter, and then decide, based on the general consensus. What a sweet service team church life we see in Acts 1 and 2, and may we follow such a model.
- 2. The Spirit's outpouring, and our being filled with the Spirit, will result in three things (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17).** Peter, in his message to the people on the day of Pentecost, quotes from the prophet Joel in the Old Testament in order to explain the extraordinary phenomenon that the people had just witnessed. In his exposition of Joel, he enumerates three outcomes of the outpouring of the Spirit: the sons and daughters shall prophesy, the young men shall have visions, and the old men shall have dreams. Prophesying is twofold. One is to predict the future, which is what the prophet Joel did, and what many prophets did in the Old Testament. The other is to expound or interpret the word of God, which is what Peter does in Acts 2, by telling the people that what had been predicted several centuries earlier had now been fulfilled by the death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of Christ as the Spirit. Such a prophesying is the most common today. Do we prophesy? In our prophesying, do we focus on Christ? Do we have a testimony? Has the word (the Bible) written more than 2000 years ago spoken to us? How does it relate to our daily life and our church life? What steps have we taken, or will we take, to obey the word and carry it out? The second and third outcomes are visions and dreams. If the Lord has spoken to us through His word, does that speaking eventually become a vision or a dream or a revelation? In other words, do we see it and do we live by it? For example, a brother has been visiting at least three localities in Western Canada for the last three years, and has been praying almost every week during the corporate prayers (not to mention his individual prayers) for the Lord's testimony to spread in that region. The same brother, for the sake of the gospel, has been praying for the door to PEQ students to remain open, and has taken active steps to encourage saints traveling to different countries to visit the French departments of various universities to attract their students to come to French speaking Quebec. Such a response to the Lord's speaking may result in a vision that controls our living, our prayers and our church life. If we say that we are filled in Spirit, then we should demonstrate these three outcomes in our living. It is not a light thing to claim that we are filled, or to discern if others are filled or not. We need to ask ourselves if we manifest, to a greater or lesser degree, such outcomes.

- 3. Does our prophesying focus on Christ? (Acts 2:22-36).** In John 7:39, the Spirit was not yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified, that is He had not yet died and resurrected. Now, in Acts 2, Jesus had already died, resurrected and ascended, and He had outpoured the Holy Spirit. Peter's speaking focuses on Jesus Christ's human living and the miracles and wonders that He performed (v.22), His crucifixion (v.23), His resurrection (vv.24-32), His ascension or exaltation (v.33), His outpouring of the Spirit (v.33), His position and ministry (vv.34-36), and His second return (v.35). Such an accomplishment, culminating in the outpouring of the Spirit, was uniquely achieved by the crucified and resurrected Christ, and not by any human agent, neither Peter nor any of the other apostles. For example, v.36 says that because Jesus went through death and resurrection, God made Him Lord (referring to His position and authority) and Christ (referring to His heavenly ministry). This was entirely God's doing. Jesus is Lord and Christ, not because of us, but because of Him alone. Yes, we need to acknowledge Him as our Lord and our Christ, but even if we do not, that does not make Him any less Lord and Christ. For example, our prophesying should bring out an aspect of Christ (either His person or His divine attributes or His human virtues) that exalt and magnify Him, as well as our response to Him, and our steps to live out such a vision or revelation. In every prophesying, in every testimony, even if we fellowship concerning our cooperation, or our response, Christ must be the focus, and God must gain the glory.
- 4. We need to pay attention to the Old Testament (Psalm 16; Acts 2:26-35).** Peter's fellowship in chapter 1 and 2 of Acts is rich in the Old Testament, which was then the "Bible" to the New Testament believers at the time. The same is true for us today, even though we have the New Testament which they did not have yet. We must pursue the Old Testament to be rich in experiences of Christ. For example, when David quotes Psalms 16:11 in Acts 2:28 ("You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore"), He is referring to the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, as the Spirit, but more specifically, the Spirit of joy, or the joyful Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, there is the joy of the Spirit. Psalm 16:9 refers to the death and burial of Christ, but expresses the joy that Jesus Christ experienced, even in the grave, knowing that the Father would not abandon His soul in Hades. What a Christ we have! Even in His crucifixion and His death and burial, He was full of joy. This is the way or path of life (Psalm 16:11) for us that we have to live. If we live such a life, as a witness or martyr (Acts 2:32), the Spirit will pour out experientially on us. Our living will be a denial of ourselves, a carrying of our own cross, to be the Lord's witnesses. Yet such a living will be filled with joy, even in the self denial, because we experience the Spirit of joy. Such a living as a witness is not just to speak or prophesy for the Lord, but to praise and thank the Lord joyfully, with a joyful spirit. That is why the bread breaking meeting should be filled with joyful praises and thanksgivings. Why do we hold our peace (remain quiet) during the bread breaking gathering? If we learn from David in the Old Testament, we will see that he experienced many trials and hardships, yet he praised and thanked the Lord with a loud voice (2 Samuel 6:15). That is one reason why the Old Testament is so crucial to us.
- 5. Any blessing or sign or wonder in the church life, whether it be an answer to prayer or salvation of people, is because of God's power, not our ability (Acts 2:22).** The Greek word for "power" or "miracles" in 2:22 is *dunamis*, or dynamite. This power is God's power, not our power or ability. Anything positive that occurs is because of His power. The Lord decides what happens to us, according to His power and ability. We can have no boast or share in that kind of power. Peter, in explaining to the people what had just happened, never mentions his role, or the role of the others in engaging in the corporate prayers. Rather, he attributed the outpouring of the Spirit entirely to the *dunamis* of God. The most that he said concerning the disciples role was that they were witnesses (v.32). No doubt we must continue to offer our prayers and petitions, but it is God alone who answers and blesses.
- 6. We need to raise up pillars (brothers and sisters who can be witnesses) (Acts 1:8).** When Jesus was on the earth, He preached the gospel. He also raised up the twelve apostles (including Matthias). They were His witnesses. After Jesus' ascension, they went out and preached the gospel and raised up churches. The book of Acts is about the acts or actions of the apostles or pillars. What about today? Pillars need to be raised up. During our corporate prayers, we need to pray for the pillars to be raised up in order to carry out Christ's heavenly ministry. The pillars are even more important than the number of people in the church life. Of course, we need to preach the gospel much more so that many more can believe in Jesus and be saved. But amongst so many, there must be more pillars raised up in order to continue and spread His testimony to the uttermost parts of the earth. May the Lord have mercy and grant us such corporate prayers.