

Church Beginnings and the Arrival of the Holy Spirit

Passages: Acts 1–2

Memory Verse

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Water baptism is for the remission of sins.2. God has promised the Holy Spirit as our Helper.3. God wants the church to grow in love, in truth, and in unity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is Spirit.2. God is truth.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Rely on the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and help us as our personal Teacher.2. After baptism, we must say “no” to sin and put on Christ.3. We can be witnesses of the Lord by relying on the Holy Spirit.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Jesus’ Command, Promise, and Ascension (Acts 1:1–11)
- B. The Holy Spirit’s Arrival (Acts 2:1–13)
- C. Peter Speaks Boldly (Acts 2:14–41)
- D. The Church Grows (Acts 2:41–47)

Life Application

1. Why Do I Need the Holy Spirit?
2. Why Do I Need Water Baptism?
3. We Are All Witnesses of the Lord

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to perform many wonderful deeds to glorify God’s name, bringing many to know Him and receive baptism for the remission of sins.

Spiritual Teachings

A. Jesus' Command, Promise, and Ascension (Acts 1:1–11)

Has there ever been a time when your best friend was about to move to another city or change schools? Or perhaps someone close to you was getting ready to leave? If yes, how did you feel? Sometimes, it can be frightening.

The twelve disciples spent three years with Jesus, learning about the kingdom of God and witnessing many miracles performed by Him. Then, at the end, Jesus gave Himself over to suffer a painful death on the cross. But He had promised His disciples that He would return (Mt 26:32).

Three days later, Jesus did as promised and rose from the dead. Not only did He present Himself to His disciples alive, He remained with them for forty days after His resurrection, teaching them of “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Jesus also gave His disciples a very important task. Do you know what that is? Let’s turn to Luke 24:46–49:

Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

Jesus instructed His disciples to preach the remission of sins in His name to all the nations. But they first had to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. Let’s read Acts 1:8: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” When Jesus finished instructing His disciples, He ascended into heaven, and His disciples “looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up” (Acts 1:10).

Despite Jesus’ departure, His followers were not afraid, nor were they idle. Instead, they chose to obey His instructions and gathered in Jerusalem, praying and waiting for the time they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Soon enough, the Holy Spirit descended to be with them wherever they went, and to give them power to carry out the important commission Jesus gave them.

B. The Holy Spirit’s Arrival (Acts 2:1–13)

On the Day of Pentecost, all of Jesus’ followers were together, and “devout men, from every nation under heaven” had returned to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast (Acts 2:5). Suddenly a sound like a mighty wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where Jesus’ followers were gathered. Let’s read what happened in Acts 2:3–4.

The crowd of devout men were astonished. They marveled to each other, saying, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” (Acts 2:5–12). Amazed, yet perplexed, they wondered, “Whatever could this mean?” God had opened the ears of these devout Jews to let them hear the disciples speaking in their own language. But those whose ears had not been opened mocked the disciples and thought them drunk. At that moment, Peter stood and addressed the gathered crowd.

C. Peter Speaks Boldly (Acts 2:14–41)

This day was a turning point in the history of the church. Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, used the Scripture in his speech and quoted the prophet Joel before further explaining that they now, “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). He then continued to preach boldly of God’s plan for salvation through the death of Jesus Christ, saying, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Those listening were cut to the heart upon realizing they had killed the Messiah they had been waiting for. They immediately asked, “What shall we do?” Peter told them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Taking the message to the heart, about three thousand people were baptized and added to the early church that very day.

It was God’s plan that the Holy Spirit descend on the Day of Pentecost. He arranged it so that every devout man, in Jerusalem for the Pentecost, witnessed the downpour of the Holy Spirit. When the feast was over, they returned home to spread what they had witnessed, along with the gospel message.

Understanding the Promised Holy Spirit

From the very beginning of the church, God has promised that when we repent and are baptized, we shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are two important teachings regarding the Holy Spirit:

1. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:14)
2. Speaking in tongues is proof of the Holy Spirit’s abidance (Acts 10:45–47)*

*Receiving the Holy Spirit is something we can “see and hear” (Acts 2:33; 10:45–47). The event is audible and often visible.

Understanding Water Baptism

When we are baptized, the blood of Jesus washes our sins away (1 Jn 1:7). We are buried and raised with Christ (Rom 6:3–4), and we receive a new life (Jn 3:5).

D. The Church Grows (Acts 2:41–47)

The early church grew rapidly after the Holy Spirit’s descent. The Bible tells us that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Let’s continue reading verses 41–47 and examine what the early church did and how it grew.

- Gladly received the word (v. 41)
- Continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (v. 42)
- Came together in fellowship (v. 42)
- Broke bread together (v. 42)
- Prayed (v. 42)
- Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles (v. 43)
- Sold their possessions and divided among them, as anyone had need (v. 45)
- Gathered daily with one accord in the temple, and broke bread from house to house (v. 46)
- Had gladness and simplicity of heart (v. 46)
- Continually praised God (v. 47)
- Had favor with all the people (v. 47)

From these verses, we can see that there are many components to the growth of the church. Let's examine a few of these.

We know the apostles' doctrine is the complete gospel from Jesus (2 Tim 1:13; 1 Cor 15:1–3). The early church gladly received this gospel, and the believers were steadfast in the apostles' doctrine by studying the gospel and following its teachings. For both the early church and our church today, God's word is the foundation (Eph 2:20–21) and an incorruptible seed which "lives and abides forever" (1 Pet 1:23).

Another key component is that the early church not only studied the truth, but also abided in it. The Bible says that they had fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:3) and partook of the Holy Communion in accordance with Jesus' command (Jn 6:47–58; 1 Cor 10:16–17). They also shared all they had with those in need, were in unity with one another, and were even held in favor with all the people around them. To dwell in unity and fellowship with others requires hearts of love and of prayer. We not only grow in character and faith through prayer, but God will also open the doors to the gospel, opening our hearts and minds to His will and His purpose so that we can dwell in unity (Col 4:2–4).

Check for Understanding

- 1. After Jesus' resurrection, how many days did He stay to show Himself to the disciples?** Forty.
- 2. What was Jesus Christ's promise to the disciples?** He promised the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be His witnesses.
- 3. What happened on the Day of Pentecost?** Jesus Christ's followers were together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a mighty wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. The Holy Spirit filled them, and they all spoke in tongues.
- 4. What are the two important teachings from the Holy Spirit?** The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:14). Speaking in tongues is proof of the Holy Spirit's abidance in us (Acts 10:45–47).
- 5. Why were the people cut to the heart after listening to Peter speak? What did they ask Peter?** They realized they had killed the Messiah whom they had been waiting for. They humbly asked Peter, "What shall we do?"
- 6. Name five ways the believers grew after receiving the Holy Spirit and water baptism.** They gladly received the word (41); they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (42); they came together in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer (42).

Life Application

1. Why Do I Need the Holy Spirit?

From the moment we are cleansed through water baptism, we must follow God's commands to remain clean and obey Him. But it is a struggle to walk in Christ's footsteps when those around us are walking in the opposite direction. Determination alone will not help us overcome our sinful nature, which is why the Lord sent us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets us apart as God's holy people, sealing us for salvation until the day we enter God's heavenly kingdom (Eph 1:13–14). There are many functions of the Holy Spirit, but we'll focus on just two today.

The Holy Spirit Is Our Helper and Teacher

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the "Helper" or "Counselor" or "Comforter" (Gk. *parakletos*).

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows

Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. [...] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

(Jn 14:16–18, 26)

Jesus has promised that the Spirit will dwell with us and in us, abiding with us forever. Isn't it comforting to know that God is with us every step of the way? More than that, He is much like our personal Teacher. When we study the word of God, He helps us understand its meaning. Further, when we are in need – when we are trying to make a decision, are talking to others about God, or are perhaps caught facing temptation – the Spirit will “bring to [our] remembrance” God's words. Whenever we are in need, He is ready to aid us as our Helper and Teacher.

The Spirit is a necessity for us in this world of chaos and confusion, where there is no absolute truth. We must allow the Holy Spirit not only to dwell in us, but also to help us so that we can grow in His grace and knowledge, and become equipped to do every good work.

Discussion: Share a time when you experienced the Spirit's guidance in your spiritual journey.

The Holy Spirit Strengthens Us

In Ephesians 3:16, Paul asked that the believers be “strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.” Is your “inner man” strong or weak? Sometimes, it can be weak in the face of our own desires. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to overcome temptations, but we must pray and let Him grow within our hearts. We may be sealed with the Holy Spirit the moment we receive Him, but do we allow Him to guide us so that we can live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh? Let's turn to Galatians 5:16–17. “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we let Him dwell within us, but only through prayer do we actually let Him fill and strengthen us. Then, through the Spirit's strength, we are able to overcome the desires of our flesh to serve God and to share the gospel with others. We can even change our own selves and control our negative emotions like anger or fear. All of this can only be done if we submit to the Spirit.

Testimony: Remembrance and Guidance Through the Spirit

When I was in high school, I was going through a rough time. My walk with God was not stable. There were times when I did well (especially after attending SSC) – I was filled with the Holy Spirit and praised God constantly. But there were downtimes, especially when I didn't have time or was too lazy to pray. I could see the vast differences.

One time, I was tempted to cheat on a test. I was about to cheat, but right then the Holy Spirit reminded me, “You're a child of God. God has bought you with a high price, so honor God with your body!” I didn't hear any voices nor did I see any visions. But a still, small voice kept echoing in my heart and reminding me of His words. I was totally taken aback by how powerful the remembrance of His word was. Because I feared God, I quickly gathered all my strength, said a prayer, and asked God to forgive me. Not only did I ask God to forgive me, I asked Him to strengthen me so that I would do well. Indeed, something miraculous happened. I was filled with the wisdom from above and was able to finish the test with a level of unknown strength.

This experience taught me an invaluable lesson: the Holy Spirit is indeed my Helper and Teacher. I could have chosen to ignore the voice of God, but I embraced it, and as a result was filled with joy and gladness. May God continue to strengthen me and help me in times of weak moments. All glory to God!

– Anonymous

2. Why Do I Need Water Baptism?

The Bible calls baptism the “washing of regeneration” (Tit 3:5) because it is a spiritual transformation. Our sinful being dies and is buried, and we are clothed with a new life—the life of Jesus Christ (Col 2:11–13). The Bible speaks of this as “putting on Christ” (Gal 3:27). The Lord Jesus takes off our filthy clothes and puts a robe of righteousness on us—a robe that is clean because of His perfect, sinless life. Water baptism has the following effects:

- a. Forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:6–7)
- b. Regeneration (Tit 3:5; Rom 6:3–4; Jn 3:5)
- c. Baptism into Christ (Gal 3:27–29; Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 12:13)

Say “No” to Sin

Paul reminds us that the free grace of God is not a license to sin: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom 6:1–2). Baptism teaches us to say “no” to sin and “yes” to God’s will. Now that we live in Christ and belong to Him, we must strive to be more like Him. But we can only overcome our weaknesses and trials with God’s help.

Discussion: Share a time when you struggled to say “no” to sin or overcame it with God’s help.

3. We Are All Witnesses of the Lord

We all have a mission today. We must continue the work of the apostles and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Although spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth may seem like an insurmountable challenge, God has equipped us with His Holy Spirit to rise to the occasion. It is the Spirit’s power, wisdom, hope, and peace that turns people’s hearts from the world to God, from darkness to light, and from destruction to salvation.

Testimony: Receiving the Holy Spirit

I came across numerous questions about our faith during my time in the Dominican Republic (or “DR”), but whenever I was asked about the Holy Spirit, I became nervous and uneasy. How could I give an answer when I myself had not received the Holy Spirit? Nonetheless, the questions encouraged me all the more to pray for God’s will to be done and for me to be equipped for His service.

After being in the DR for over five months, my return to the US was delayed by a month due to a couple of unforeseen circumstances, one of which was to interpret for the next visiting preacher. Before his arrival, I had a couple of weeks to think, reflect, and pray. A little less than two years prior to this point in time, I had the first of three related dreams: While at an outdoor church service, I received the Holy Spirit during the prayer. It was so real that I felt very happy. Alas, it was only a dream. Within a year of the first dream, I had the second one. This time, I was attending a service inside the church. While praying, I suddenly started speaking in tongues. Of course I rejoiced upon receiving the Holy Spirit, but again it was just a dream. The third dream occurred during my extended stay in the DR. However, my reaction was significantly different from the previous two. I dreamt that

I was inside the church and when I knelt down to pray, I started speaking in tongues. Weeping and pleading with God for His forgiveness and mercy, I could only see myself as a sinner—arrogant, cowardly, disobedient, and self-centered. I then realized that in my previous dreams, I had desired the Holy Spirit for selfish reasons rather than for surrendering myself to God.

A couple of days after this third dream, I prayed to God to direct my footsteps. As soon as I felt my tongue start to move on its own, I stopped praying. I could not believe that I had truly received the Holy Spirit! At first, I thought I was only imagining my tongue moving, so the next few times I prayed by deliberately repeating “Hallelujah” very softly so that my tongue would not move freely.

When the preacher finally arrived, we prayed together. Afterwards, he immediately asked, “When did you receive the Holy Spirit?” By confirming that I indeed had received the Holy Spirit, my doubts disappeared and I was grateful beyond words to God for granting me His precious Spirit. As in my dream, I felt so unworthy of God’s love and mercy that I was moved to tears. I asked, “How could you grant Your Holy Spirit to such an undeserving sinner like me?” I recalled how God had shown me tremendous love throughout my life. Previously, I had only been praying to receive blessings for my own benefit, but did I truly believe, obey, surrender, or have faith in Him? What had I done with my life, but waste a good portion of it? I realize now that God does not need me—I need God! I love Him because He first loved me, and the best way I can show my gratitude is by denying myself and taking up the cross to travel on the path that God has allotted for me.

Being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit are just the first steps of my journey with Christ. I am still a work-in-progress, in need of God’s forgiveness every day, and I ask for mercy and sanctification to grow in His likeness. As apostle Paul says in Philippians 2:12, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

– Francisco Macías
(Excerpt from *Manna 79*)

Memory Verse

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Meaning

1. To repent is to “think differently, to change one’s mind for the better.” Repenting means avoiding any conditions that led to the mistake, such as the environment, our peers, or our behavior.
2. The Holy Spirit is a promise from God. Anyone who prays with humility with an earnest heart will receive it.

Conclusion

The Acts of the Apostles describes how the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost and helped the church to grow and aided in spreading the gospel. The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit and were able to perform many wonderful deeds to bring glory to God’s name, thus bringing many to know Him and receive baptism for the remission of sins. The early church was established through truth, love, submission to the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and humility; all are worthy examples for us to follow. It is not by our own might or power, but by the Spirit of God that we can accomplish anything.

Lesson 1 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What steps are necessary to receive the Holy Spirit?
Truly repent—change your mind for the better—and receive water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Then pray with humility and an earnest heart for the Spirit to abide within you.
2. What did the disciples do after returning to Jerusalem following Jesus Christ's ascension? What can we learn from them?
After returning to Jerusalem, they gathered together to pray. We can learn from their obedience and their continued prayers.
3. What are two key lessons we should remember regarding the promised Holy Spirit?
The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance in heaven (Eph 1:14); Speaking in tongues is proof of the Holy Spirit's abidance (Acts 10:45–47).
4. What are the key components of the early church's growth?
The early church studied the truth and followed Jesus' teachings. Further, they abided in the truth by having fellowship with each other, partaking in Holy Communion, sharing with those in need, and acting in union with each other. These were only possible because of their prayer.
5. What are the effects of water baptism?
Forgiveness of sins; regeneration; and baptism into Christ.
6. Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Spirit guiding you? If you have not yet received the Holy Spirit, have you ever felt God's guidance at a particular time in your life?
Personal answers.