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 days to go	0
 Status	On Radar Scheduled
 Working Title	to you first...
 Project Home	
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 Context	Bible Study Deliverable NLR Preaching
 DELIVERED	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Suddenly from heaven...

Bailey, Ron. The Better Covenant (p. 170-174). Kindle Edition.

I have repeated these truths so that we can carry forward with us these Bible concepts of 'birth with a heavenly origin' and its link with 'entrance into the kingdom of God' as we move back to the Acts of the Apostles. They sit and wait and pray. They knew 'that day' was approaching although almost certainly they did not fully appreciate all that would transpire in it. The count-down continued until

...suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were

sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. Acts 2:2-3 NKJV.

That was the outward manifestation to illustrate the inward reality that now took place;

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:3-4 NKJV.

They praised God in languages that were intelligible to thousands of pilgrims who were visiting Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, but which those who spoke had never learned. It was a phenomenon which demanded an explanation; "what does it mean?" they asked. Peter's Spirit-inspired message then expounds the event. The explanation is that what has happened in Jerusalem is the earthly consequence of something which has happened in heaven. It is a fulfilment of ancient prophecy in which God had promised to send his Spirit, but it is more than that. It is the heavenly proof that Christ's earthly mission has succeeded. This day was only possible because the rejected Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, had taken his place at the right hand of God in heaven, a place of supreme authority and power. The nation had rejected him but God had acknowledged him and given him the throne.

The events of this day were proof positive of the finished work of Calvary and had now made it possible for the promise of the Father to be fulfilled. And the Father's promise had been fulfilled through the Son, and Jesus having left the earth had sent his Advocate as he promised;

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. Acts 2:32-33 NKJV.

Of those who heard, 3000 received Peter's witness to the Christ and were baptised in expectation of release from their sins and a personal receiving of this Spirit that Christ had poured out from heaven's throne.

A 'New Covenant' Community

This day marked the beginning of a New Covenant community; it is frequently referred to as the 'birthday of the church' and so it was. The church that Christ had promised he would build is now under way and men and women can be 'added' to it. Something has to be in existence before anything can be 'added to it'. Christ could not build 'His Church' until the foundation was laid. During his earthly ministry he had spoken of his intention to build 'His Church' in the future tense. The 'stone' had to be 'rejected' and made 'the cornerstone' before 'His Church' could be built.

The stone which the builders rejected Is become the head of the corner. (Psalm 118:22 ASV)

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17–19 NKJV)

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: *'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?* " (Matthew 21:42 NKJV)

This is the *"stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone."* (Acts 4:11 NKJV)

Coming to Him as *to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, *“Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”*

Therefore, to you who believe, *He is precious*; but to those who are disobedient, *“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,”*

and *“A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.”* They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. (1Peter 2:4–8 NKJV)

The pattern of life of that New Covenant community is expressed simply;

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47 NKJV.

This coming, descent, filling of the Holy Spirit is also called a baptism. It is the baptism that John Baptist had referred to years earlier, not in water but in Spirit. A birth, not from earth, but from heaven. A New Covenant community in Jerusalem In the same way that Moses had inaugurated the Old Covenant the Mediator of a New Covenant had now begun the building of a Temple not built with hands, constituted of living stones, and designed to be a place where God could take up residence.

The crossing of the Red Sea had baptised that covenant people into Moses, this event baptised a new people into a new Mediator and laid the foundations for a New Covenant community. The new community expressed their common life in an earthly expression of heavenly life. They lived in perfect harmony and instinctively moved to relieve those of their community who were in any distress. The sense of individualistic ownership was consumed in the fires of a passionate love for each other. Charles Wesley wrote a beautiful hymn describing these days;

Happy the souls that first believed,
To Jesus and each other cleaved;
Joined by the unction from above,
In mystic fellowship of love.

This was too good to keep to themselves and the instinctive witness to Christ began to fill Jerusalem. One key event was the healing of a congenital cripple who begged daily at one of the entrances to the Temple. God healed the man through Peter and the event attracted an enormous crowd of curious onlookers. Peter took the opportunity to bear witness to Christ in whose name and power the miracle had taken place and then pressed on his hearers their need to respond to the 'miracle worker', Christ himself.

He spoke of Christ's death and resurrection and called the nation to repentance. Even after their rejection of their Messiah God was still willing to pour out 'seasons of refreshing from the presence of God'. Christ, said Peter, was the central theme of all the prophets and then proved his case by a key reference to Moses.

Moses had predicted another prophet like himself.

For Moses truly said to the fathers, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:22-23 NKJV.

The early church frequently returned to this prophecy as being a prophecy of Christ himself. Moses was the Mediator of a covenant that brought into existence a covenant community over which he was the head. Now God had repeated the exercise with a new mediator of a New Covenant that had brought into existence a

New Covenant community over which Christ was the head. In spite of their rejection God was still at work to fulfil his promises. Peter concluded with a ringing statement;

to you first...

To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities. Acts 3:26 NKJV.

There is, in the word 'first', the bud of another truth. The apostles, at this time, were not clear as to the extent of those who would profit from Christ's death and resurrection but as Peter preaches under the inspiration of the Spirit we see here clear clues to a divine order... to you first... and then?

We recall from Jeremiah 31 that in its earliest introduction the New Covenant was promised to the separate nations of Israel and Judah. The northern nation of Israel had long vanished in obscurity with its peoples and only the southern nation of Judah was to return from its captivity, and even then only a remnant. Nevertheless God had not, could not, forget the northern nation of Israel. As Jerusalem stood under the impending destructions of Babylon Jeremiah had prophesied;

Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah**: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. (Jeremiah 31:31–32 ASV)

Both nation states are recognised in this introduction but when the promise itself is stated we read;

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more

every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (Jeremiah 31:33–34 ASV)

The two separate nations of the house of Israel and the house of Judah become merged in the promise of the New Covenant under the single designation of 'the house of Israel'. As with Ezekiel's two sticks, the two have become merged into one in God's future purposes.

The Promise to the house of Israel...

The 'Israel' that heard Peter speak was the nation partially reconstituted under the label of 'Israel' and was being offered 'first' the personal blessing of Christ himself in turning each individual away from his own iniquities. It is as Peter said earlier in his message;

You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Acts 3:25 NKJV.

The nation of Israel was destined for blessing from the time of God's call to Abraham and now Peter repeats the promises. In spite of their rejection of the Messiah all they need do is...

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, Acts 3:19-20 NKJV.

The invitations have gone out.

Even now the Lord of the feast was inviting them to share in the celebrations of the marriage of his Son. But God's plans were never exclusively for the nation of Israel

and that phrase 'to you first...' tells us that at the right time God's plans would be fully revealed.

For the time being, on a need to know basis, all they had to do was say 'yes' to the invitation.

In this study we began to make the connections between the Kingdom of God that is entered by new birth and the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We saw that 'dunamis' is inherent and not 'bolt on' power; power intrinsic to a new inward 'dynamic'. We also saw that God was continuing to reach out to the 'remnants' of the 'house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah' and that the foundations were being laid, in a New Covenant, for a New Covenant people.

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