The Holy Spirit descends

The Church is born in Jerusalem

Central Truth:

The birth of the Church and the descent of the Holy Spirit are interlinked. If the Holy Spirit departs from the Church, then the Church is not at all Church.

Introduction: After Jesus died and rose again, he had not ascended to heaven right away. He had spent 40 days on earth with a purpose of convincing the disciples through ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive. During the period, Jesus commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit from above. Then He ascended to heaven in their sight.

In obedience to Jesus' command, the disciples waited in the house of Mark in Jerusalem. Almost 10 days went by during which about 120 disciples kept on praying with one accord. Also during this period, in place of Judas Iscariot another disciple called Matthias was chosen by lot.

On the day of Pentecost (50th day) the Holy Spirit came upon all of them. The first phase of the history of the Church was the movement in Jerusalem. Now let us study this important lesson.

The Day of Pentecost

You may be wondering what this particular day means! Pentecost was one of the Seven Festivals of Israel. These festivals are divided in to three groups for the seasons during which Israelites had to gather for celebration in a year (Lev.23:1-36)

The First Group: (During the first month)

1. Passover — Jesus Christ observed it with His disciples just before His crucifixion (Lk.22:1-23)

2. Unleavened Bread

3. First Fruits (Occurred on the next day of the Sabbath on which Jesus resurrected (Lk.23:56, 24:1)

The Second Group: (During the third month)

4. Pentecost The word Pentecost means Fiftieth Day (Feast of weeks) - counting from the day of First Fruits.

The Third Group: (During the seventh month)

5. Trumpets

6. Atonement

7. Tabernacle

After several appearances to the disciples during forty days, Jesus ascended to heaven. At the time of ascension, Jesus gathered His disciples on the Mount of Olives and He gave specific command to the disciples : "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father Promised..... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Act.1:4-8 NIV)

After Jesus ascended to heaven, they returned to the upper room in Jerusalem to wait in prayer.

Who all were in this prayer meeting ?The eleven disciples, the new disciple Matthias who was chosen in place of Judas Iscariot, Mary the mother of Jesus and many other men and women - about 120 in all.

The Holy Spirit Descends

Since the festival of Pentecost was ahead, people from all over the world had come to Jerusalem to celebrate. Then on the day of Pentecost a supernatural event occurred in the upper room. The Holy Spirit descended on the 120 waiting disciples. "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts.2:2-4 NIV)

Then the disciples knew for sure that this was the promise of God that Jesus had told them about. They received power and boldness to witness. You see the change in Peter who had once denied Jesus before a maid of the High Priest ! Now he became bold enough to defend the cause to the High Priest himself !

The god-fearing Jews who had arrived at Jerusalem from all parts of the world to celebrate the festival ran to the spot hearing the loud noise. To their amazement, the believers spoke in the languages of the crowd that gathered there. Those of them who understood the language realised that they were speaking great things that God had done. But there were those who did not understand some languages because they were foreign to them. They made fun of the believers saying "These people are drunk"

The First Sermon and the First Converts

Then Peter stood up with the other eleven Apostles and in a loud voice began to speak to the crowd about this experience as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). He also proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ- His death and resurrection very emphatically based on the Old Testament prophecies. All the Jews who were familiar with the scriptures were pricked in their hearts and said to Peter and other apostles, "What shall we do brothers?" Immediately Peter answered that repentance and baptism were required for the remission of sins and would lead to the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Those who responded to it were 3000 Jewish people. What a glorious response!

The Church Established

The Church was established in Jerusalem. Jesus in the Gospels said that He would build His Church (Matt.16:18). But nowhere do we find the church to have been built until the ascension of Christ. After the descent of the Holy Spirit and the addition of 3000 souls to the core group 120, we find; "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts.2:41,47 NKJV). So we can easily reach the conclusion that the Church was established at the descent of Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It must be specially noted that only the saved and baptised constituted the Church.

The Apostles daily went to the Temple-court and taught the Jews the Word of God. Those who heard the word believed and the number of men increased to be about 5000 (Acts.2:46,4:2-4)

How the early church functioned is mentioned in Acts.2:42. "They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers"

Signs and wonders

Many signs and wonders were performed by the apostles (Acts.2:43) It was necessary to confirm the word through the accompanying signs (Mk.16:20). Jesus performed miracles to prove His Diety and Sonship. But that was not the task He had considered to be entrusted by the Father. Preaching the Kingdom of God and sowing the seed of God's word were the primary priorities as in the case of discourse to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (Jn.2&3). Similarly the apostles gave priority to the message of salvation. However, miracles accompanied whenever the Lord wanted it to occur. See for example in chapter 3, the healing of the lame beggar at the temple gate (Act. 3:1-10). This miracle in fact had put the Sanhedrin council to silence (Act.4:14)

Scripture: Acts Ch. 1 & 2

Memory Verse: Acts 1:4,5

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

EXERCISE

1. *Name the festivals and the groups for the reasons during which Israelites had to gather for celebration in a year?*
2. *What is the meaning of Pentecost? After how many days did Jesus ascended to heaven? What was the command Jesus gave His disciples on Mount Olive before His ascension?*
3. *Where did they come together to prayer? Who all were present in this prayer meeting?*
4. *Describe the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost?*
5. *Describe Peter's sermon , the conversion of the Jews and the establishment of the Church?*