

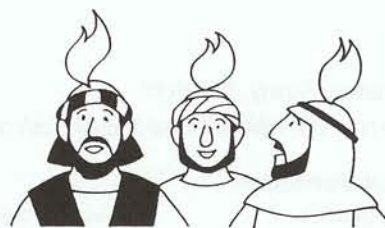
BACKGROUND

During Jesus' ministry here on earth He told His followers that they would become world travelers taking the news (Good News) about Him to far away places (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). He promised they would be "...clothed with power from on high...(Luke 24:49). He also assured them that wherever the adventure took them, He would go with them (Matthew 28:20).

After the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven, the eleven disciples and a small group of those who believed in Christ were left on earth. Instead of being sad, they met together to praise God and pray in the large upper room where Jesus had eaten His last supper with them. Acts 1 tells us there were 120 of them gathered there ten days after Jesus' ascension which was a day the Jews called PENTECOST. Pentecost was the annual Jewish barley festival held late in May or early June, fifty days after the celebration of Passover. Pentecost was Israel's day of thanksgiving. Thousands (possibly 100,000-150,000) of pilgrims moved through the streets of Jerusalem to the temple area for worship unaware that in a nearby loft something was about to happen that would change the course of history!

In our second cycle we studied, "We Are A Covenant People." We learned that Covenants play a big part in the history of God's relationship with people. God's covenants are formal statements describing His commitments. The Mosaic Covenant, called that because God communicated it through Moses, was also known as the "Old" Covenant. At Pentecost, the anniversary of the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit introduced a "New" Covenant (new terms for relating to God). The Old Testament arrangement based on religious rule keeping and animal sacrifices was canceled (Hebrews 8:13). Since Jesus came and the Spirit was poured out, knowing God was now a new ballgame! Today we relate to God through His Spirit who lives in everyone who trusts Jesus. God's Spirit living in us writes God's laws on our mind and hearts (Hebrews 8:10;10:16-17) and guarantees God's commitments will be carried out. Pentecost was the start of a new way to know and live with God.

"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 that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..." Acts 2:2-4a

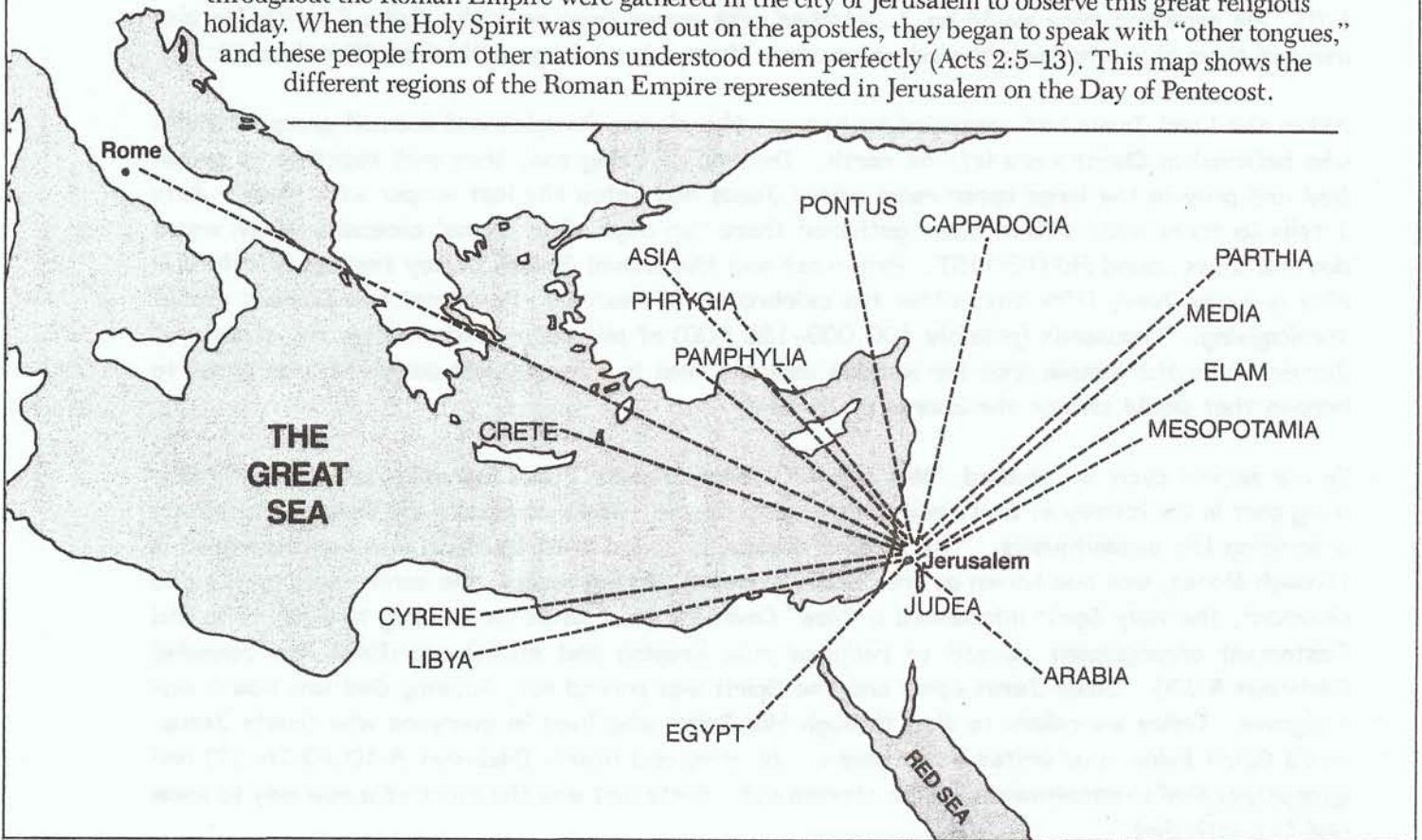


Billy Graham states, "The day of Pentecost in the New Testament on which the Holy Spirit came was a day of "first-fruits" - the beginning of God's harvest in the world, to be completed when Christ comes again. Pentecost in the New Testament marked the commencement of the present age of the Holy Spirit."

When the Spirit of God came, they began to speak of Christ and His gospel with a power that none of them had known before. People who had heard the noise and been drawn to the place were Jews from many lands, yet every man heard these believers of Jesus speaking a language they understood.

The Nations of Pentecost

Pentecost, a Jewish feast also known as the Feast of Weeks, marked the completion of the barley harvest. On this annual holiday about 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus, Jewish people from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered in the city of Jerusalem to observe this great religious holiday. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles, they began to speak with "other tongues," and these people from other nations understood them perfectly (Acts 2:5-13). This map shows the different regions of the Roman Empire represented in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.



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Lessons from Jewish Pentecost about the Holy Spirit

What Pentecost Celebrates	How Celebrated	What It Pictures about the Spirit
Harvest God's goodness in providing food	The first sheaf of barley is presented to the Lord in thanksgiving and anticipation of a full harvest ahead.	The 120 are the first "sheaves" of a spiritual harvest, which will gather people all over the world to Christ through their witness.
Community Equality of God's people	Most inclusive festival. Everyone invited (Deuteronomy 16:11). All social classes participate as equals.	The Spirit is for the <i>whole</i> church; <i>all</i> who believe in Jesus are equipped by the Spirit to do God's work <i>together</i> (John 7:37-39).
Acceptance God's acceptance of imperfect people	Festival bread is common bread of Israelite homes (see GWHN, pages 8-9), made with yeast—symbol of sin (Leviticus 23:17).	God accepts and empowers ordinary people still struggling with spiritual imperfections and uses them as workers in his harvest.
Commitment God's commitments to his people	Remembering God's gift of the Mosaic Covenant, the Law, at Mt. Sinai, fifty days after first Passover (Exodus 20:1-17).	Spirit's coming inaugurated the New Covenant in Christ; the Spirit writes God's laws on believers' hearts (Hebrews 8:10).