

Aim of lesson

To consider the coming of the Holy Spirit and the gospel that Peter preached.

Bible background

Acts 2:1-41.

Outline of lesson

What were they waiting for?

Ask the class about last week's lesson. Can they remember what Jesus had promised the disciples before he went up into heaven? He had told them to wait in Jerusalem. What were they waiting for? Have the class look at Acts 1:4-6. Ask the class to suggest what the disciples might have expected 'the Holy Spirit coming on them' to mean.

It will probably be useful to look at Acts 1:8 and Luke 24:49 to see that it is described as power. It may also be useful to remind the class that the Lord Jesus received the gift of the Holy Spirit from his Father when he was baptised, and he then had the power to do miracles.

Read together Acts 2:1-4 and ask the class what two pictures are used here of the Holy Spirit. Use the beginning of the worksheet to record the ideas of the class on the ways in which the Holy Spirit is like the wind (it is invisible, powerful and can bring blessings or destruction, like the changing weather), and the way in which it is like fire (it is powerful and can bring blessing or destruction).

The class may be able to remember the dove which represented the Holy Spirit when Jesus was baptised. (This seems to be a symbol of salvation, favour and blessing since it was the herald of those things to Noah at the time of the flood.)

All these images of the Holy Spirit are to demonstrate God's presence, character and power. The class may like to consider how this visible sign of God with them would help the disciples as they began preaching on their own. It would remind them that they were not on their own; God and his Son were powerfully present with them.

Other pictures

An older class with plenty of time may like to study other 'pictures' of the Spirit in more detail. The symbol of horses and chariots is used in Zechariah 6:1-5, probably portraying God's power over the nations and their armies; seven eyes is the symbol used in Revelation 5:6 showing that God, by his Spirit, sees everything everywhere, and seven lamps in Revelation 4:5 show that God's presence is a light that never goes out. The same word for Spirit is used to picture the breath of God in 2 Samuel 22:16 conveying a similar idea to the picture of wind, but more intimate, and the reference to the Comforter in John 14:26 is another such picture.

Speaking with tongues

You may like to read Acts 2:5-13 with the class to see how the disciples immediately had their first opportunity to preach to the people on their own. It may be good to point out that the word 'tongues' in verse 4 is the same as in verse 11, and refers to the different languages of the people present.

What would they say?

Ask the class to close their Bibles and write on a piece of paper what they would tell the people if they were Peter addressing the crowd. This can be done individually or collectively and headings of subjects are sufficient, though if they say they would tell the people about Jesus, you will need to draw out what they would say about him in a little more detail.

Having the joint list of topics to hand, read together through Peter's speech, Acts 2:14-36, allowing the class to interrupt when they identify a subject from their own list. At the end it will be possible to note any main subjects missed by your class, although it is best not to include in this the content of the quotations Peter makes, but rather point out that he supports what he says by quoting from the Old Testament.

Get the students to summarise these points you have collected from Peter's speech in the space on the worksheet. Include the response of the crowd and get the students to complete the crossword and put the phrase into their own words. The exact wording used for the crossword is from the NIV: 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven'. (Not all editions of the NIV have exactly this wording. If your class have Bibles with different wording you may like to have this previously written out, or have one of the class write the verse up on a board.)

The promise is for you and for your children ...

(If you wish to discuss the promise mentioned in v39, it is worth noting that it may refer to the forgiveness of sins or to the Holy Spirit. If it refers to the Holy Spirit it certainly does not mean that the specific gift of tongues given at that time would be given to everybody, as even in the early church not all had this gift, see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and v29-30.)

Digging deeper

Pentecost

Pentecost was one of the feasts instituted by God in the Old Testament. This study explores the feasts and their connection to the New Testament and the work of the Lord Jesus.

Feast 1	Feast 2	Feast 3
Unleavened bread / Passover	Harvest / Weeks	Ingathering / Tabernacles or booths

Feast 1	Feast 2	Feast 3
A sheaf of the first fruits	Early harvest	Gathering in of the harvest
Jesus was crucified	50 days In New Testament times the Feast of Weeks was called Pentecost. The one in Acts was 50 days after Jesus death.	The gathering of God's people in the kingdom

Relevance to our lives

Use the question in the workbook 'What do his words mean?' to help the class to consider how Peter's words apply to them. You may like to discuss with them what they would reply if some friends at school asked them what Jesus says they should do.

Prayer

The class could write a prayer which might have been said by one of those who heard Peter that day and were baptised.

Other suggestions for activities

- The class could make posters to display some key statements from Peter's speech. Verses 21, 24, 25, 28, 32, 36 and 38 all contain suitable phrases for the class to choose from.
- The class could divide into two teams and each write ten or fifteen questions on this chapter to ask the other team. The teacher would have to keep score and be judge of the answers.
- The class could mark on a map the different places the visitors to Jerusalem had come from. See Acts 2:7-11.