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## BEYOND THE PRESENT TIME

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## Editor's Perspective

The inventor of the cathode ray tube later said that he considered television, while feasible, to be impossible. He discouraged even dreaming about it. A few years later, IBM's chairman of the board figured that the world market would bear a total of five computers.<sup>1</sup> Researchers today estimate that there are approximately 300 million televisions and close to a billion computers worldwide.

Dreamers and visionaries routinely outdistance and stun doubters, doing what is “impractical” and even “impossible.” Science, technology, and medicine call it progress. We know it in a completely different realm, and we call it faith. It broadens our perspective and enables us to live with hope for a good future, all while circumstances tell us such is impossible. In a world that demands evidence in order to believe the incredible, Christians firmly hold onto hope because the God of hope firmly holds us and will not let us go.

Ellsworth Kalas, our lesson writer this quarter, helps us trace the biblical concept of hope. He challenges us, equipped with Resurrection hope and power, to look beyond this present time, living faithfully as we wait the promised “new heaven and . . . new earth, where righteousness is at home” (2 Peter 3:13).



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<sup>1</sup> [sermonillustrations.com/a-z/ff/future.htm](http://sermonillustrations.com/a-z/ff/future.htm)

## Meet Our Writer



A native of Sioux City, Iowa, J. Ellsworth Kalas received a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin (1951) and a master of divinity degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (1954). He has received honorary doctorates from Lawrence University (1965), Asbury Theological Seminary (1986), Kentucky Wesleyan College (2005), and Asbury University (2007).

Dr. Kalas served 38 years as a parish pastor. The first 22 years were in Wisconsin; the next 16 years were at the Church of the Saviour (United Methodist) in Cleveland, Ohio.

In July 1988, Dr. Kalas became the associate in evangelism with The World Methodist Council, with emphasis on spiritual renewal in local congregations and special programs for clergy.

In July 1993, Dr. Kalas became the first Beeson Senior Pastor in Residence at the Beeson School of Preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary. From 2006–2009, he served as president of the seminary. He is currently senior professor of homiletics at Asbury.

Dr. Kalas is a regular contributor to religious publications. He is the author of numerous books published by Abingdon Press, including the Back Side series; *A Hop, Skip, and a Jump Through the Bible*; and *Matthew* and *Genesis* in the IMMERSION BIBLE STUDY series.

### DAILY BIBLE STUDY

- Feb. 25:** The Lord Deals With the Mighty. Daniel 5:13-21.
- Feb. 26:** The Lord Judges the Powerful. Daniel 5:22-31.
- Feb. 27:** The Plot to Undermine Daniel. Daniel 6:1-10.
- Feb. 28:** The Plot Fails. Daniel 6:11-23.
- Mar. 1:** Daniel's God Is Exalted. Daniel 6:24-28.
- Mar. 2:** Daniel's Vision. Daniel 7:1-8.
- Mar. 3:** The Exaltation of the Coming One. Daniel 7:9-14.

# The Holy Spirit Comes

## **Purpose**

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To receive the reality of God's Spirit in our lives and in the church

## **Hearing the Word**

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The Scripture for this lesson is printed below. The background text is Acts 2:1-36.

### **Acts 2:1-13**

**1** When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. **4** They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

**5** There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. **7** They were surprised and amazed, saying, "Look, aren't all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? **8** How then can each of us hear

them speaking in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), 11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” 12 They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” 13 Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!”

**Key Verse:** They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. (Acts 2:4)

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## **Seeing the Need**

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Years ago I read somewhere that the Holy Spirit is the unknown member of the Trinity. Though I cannot remember who said it, I know it is true. My decades as a pastor, preacher, and teacher have given me firsthand evidence. Most Christians can explain at least some of their beliefs about God or Jesus Christ, but only a few can define what they believe about the Holy Spirit.

It is important that we know as much as possible about all of our Christian teachings, but it is particularly important that we know about the Holy Spirit. On the last evening that Jesus spent with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, he spoke at length about the Holy Spirit. He explained that it was important that he go away because otherwise **“the Companion [that is, the Holy Spirit] won’t come to you”** and that **“when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you in all truth”** (John 16:7, 13).

Since Jesus laid so much emphasis on the place of the Holy Spirit in our individual lives and in the community of believers, it is strange indeed that we know so little about the Spirit. If we are to receive the reality of God’s Spirit in our lives and in the church, we need to learn more about the Holy Spirit.

## Living the Faith

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### Our Need of the Spirit

As we study the story of the early Christians in the Book of Acts, we are impressed that the disciples constantly referred to the resurrection of Jesus in their preaching and teaching and in their confrontations with those who had opposed Jesus and who were primarily responsible for his crucifixion.

However, this depth and power of conviction were not present at first. The Bible is honest about the state of mind of Jesus' first followers after his resurrection. They were confused. It was exciting and reassuring when Jesus was with them; but after his resurrection, he seemed to come without announcement and to leave without explanation. It was not at all like the previous three years when he was with them day and night and was gone from them only when he would go away to pray.

Jesus' unpredictable comings and goings were possibly intended to make dramatically clear that they needed the Holy Spirit. If Jesus continued to be with them, he would be confined to the limitations of the human body. He could not be in two, three, or dozens of places at the same time. It was proper enough that he worked with such a limitation when he was teaching the Twelve and the other scores who followed him. However, if his kingdom were now to embrace the whole world, with the disciples going everywhere to preach, how could Jesus go with them in their separate, multiple ways?

The disciples now needed more than the physical presence of their Lord; they needed for the Spirit of Jesus—the Holy Spirit—to go with them. Jesus had said, **“Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age” (Matthew 28:20)**. If that were to happen, it would have to be by the presence of his Spirit.

So during his last hours with the disciples following his resurrection, Jesus **“ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised,”** telling them that **“in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5)**.

The disciples found it hard to give up their dream of Jesus as the new king of Israel. They asked, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?” Jesus answered clearly and perhaps a little impatiently that this was none of their concern; their business was to wait until the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them to be

his witnesses **“in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (verse 8).

With that word Jesus disappeared from them, and they obeyed his command. They returned to the upstairs room where they had been staying to take care of administrative business, including selecting a replacement for Judas and to wait for the Holy Spirit.

*If God had not sent the Holy Spirit, how would Jesus' followers have done their work?*

### **The Coming of the Spirit**

At this time, **“the family of believers was a company of about one hundred twenty persons”** (Acts 1:15). We know the names of only a few; but we can reason that there were the 11 apostles, most or all of the 70 persons Jesus had trained and sent out two by two, and the faithful women from Galilee who had supported Jesus' work. The rest were perhaps some of the persons Jesus had healed, others who had been deeply moved by his teachings, and perhaps some who had been present when Jesus had fed the thousands.

This small group was **“all together in one place”** (2:1). The Bible does not tell us what they were doing. The point is that they were together and that they were in the Spirit of their Lord. **“Suddenly”** whatever they were doing was dramatically interrupted. There was **“a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind”** of such proportions that it **“filled the entire house where they were sitting”** (verse 2). I am sure that got their attention! Then they saw **“what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them”** (verse 3). This they saw on one another, but the writer does not tell us whether each one felt anything from the fire resting over their heads.

Then in the midst of the wind and the flame, the climaxing event: **“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak”** (verse 4). The wind and the fire had been dramatic events or signs outside their bodies. The coming of the Holy Spirit was within them, manifesting itself by taking possession of the uniquely human power of speech—yes, taking control of that part of our bodies that is the hardest for us to bring under control: the tongue.

So much could be said about this sign. The Bible demonstrates the power and importance of speech in the Genesis Creation story where

the instrument of creation is God's speaking everything into existence (Genesis 1:3). When God became incarnate in Jesus, it was as the **“Word became flesh” (John 1:14; italics added)**. By words, spoken and written, humans are distinctively different from the rest of creation; and by words we are capable of being so beautiful and so debased. No wonder then that when the Holy Spirit moves decisively into our human story, the crucial evidence is at the place of human communication: the tongue and words.

*When have you seen the power of speech at its best? When have you seen it at its worst?*

### **The Reaction of the People**

The Feast of Pentecost was one of the major religious festivals of the Jewish people. It came 50 days after the Passover, and it celebrated the wheat harvest. Devout Jews came from every part of the then-known world to celebrate one or more of the special festivals. Pentecost had its own appeal because of the mood of thanksgiving and security that came with the harvest. Thus **“there were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5)**, bilingual people, Jews whose religious and ceremonial tongue was Hebrew but whose daily speech was that of the area where they lived and did business.

Now this polyglot festival multitude heard a peculiar mixed chorus of speeches. One gets the impression that the 120 believers had moved outside, still speaking in languages other than their own, and soon the festival crowd came upon disciples speaking in their own language. **“They were surprised and amazed, saying, ‘Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language?’” (verses 7-8)**. To make the point emphatic, the biblical writer lists some of those languages, a wondrous, widespread variety. However, even more important than the variety of languages was the content of their message: **“We hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” (verse 11)**.

We can trust our biblical historian because he tells us the whole story. “They were all surprised and bewildered,” so that they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Few public experiences get a unanimous vote of approval or disapproval. So here, too: **“Others**



jeered at them, saying, ‘They’re full of new wine!’” (verses 12-13). Some people saw the event and were moved by awe and spiritual longing; others were amused and scoffed.

The phrase *full of new wine* is especially interesting. We think of an occasion in Jesus’ ministry when the conventional religious leaders criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. Jesus countered, “**No one pours new wine into old leather wineskins. . . . But new wine is for new wineskins**” (Mark 2:22). The scoffers had the right figure of speech—“new wine”—and they unknowingly identified themselves as persons of “old wineskins.” Unfortunately, they missed the significance of their own figure of speech: A new, real, transforming intoxication had come into the world, filling the void that we humans try so pathetically and inadequately to fill in a variety of other ways, the presence of God’s Spirit in our daily lives.

*When have you experienced the Spirit of God in such a moving way that it was exhilarating and deeply moving?*

### The New Reality

If the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost had been nothing more than the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the witnessing of faith in languages not their own, there would be little reason to remember it. However, the Day of Pentecost was more than a one-time phenomenon. Its far greater significance is in what happened immediately after these dramatic symbols.

As the surprised and bewildered crowd speculated as to what was happening, Peter stood up and commanded their attention. Picking up on the scornful comments of some doubters, he declared, “**These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect.**” Instead, the assembled crowd was seeing what the prophet Joel had predicted centuries earlier: an outpouring of God’s Spirit “**on all people**” (Acts 2:15, 17). In Old Testament times, God’s Spirit had come only at certain times to certain prophets, judges, and kings; but now it was a holy democracy. Their “**sons and daughters . . . / young . . . / elders . . . / my servants, men and women**” (verses 17-18)—all who are willing will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Simon Peter himself was the first living evidence of the difference the Holy Spirit makes. The man who a few weeks before had denied his Lord three times now stood before a crowd of thousands and

preached with a vigor and forthrightness that showed he was a different man, indeed. He announced, “**Therefore, let all Israel know beyond question that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ**” (verse 36).

God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is with us still. Jesus promised that after his death and resurrection his followers would enjoy the continuing presence of his Spirit in their lives. Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit is to most Christians the unknown member of the Trinity. A great many persons in our time have become more conscious of the Holy Spirit through what is known as the charismatic or Pentecostal movement. I rejoice in whatever biblical experience blesses the lives of others; I only urge that we seek for a new, deeper reality of God’s Spirit in our lives rather than settling for personal blessing.

For since God’s Spirit is the *Holy Spirit*, when this Spirit comes into our lives we should become more profoundly holy persons. Our society desperately needs the kind of winsomeness that comes with the beauty of true holiness. On the Day of Pentecost, the infilling of God’s Spirit caused the believers to speak in the languages of those assembled. Never again in the New Testament was the gift of tongues used in this particular way. I think the essence of this action is fulfilled, however, each time a believer becomes sensitive enough to the needs and thinking of another person to enter into communication with that person in such a way that they can come to Christ, just as a multitude did on the first Day of Pentecost.

*In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit?*

**Help us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be your witnesses in our time and place; in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

### **Daily Bible Study**

- Apr. 15:** The Hopeless Human Situation. Isaiah 59:9-15a.
- Apr. 16:** The Source of Hope. Isaiah 59:15b-21.
- Apr. 17:** Waiting in Hope. Psalm 38:9-15.
- Apr. 18:** Hoping Against Hope. Romans 4:16-25.
- Apr. 19:** Seizing the Hope Set Before Us. Hebrews 6:13-20.
- Apr. 20:** The God of Hope. Romans 15:7-13.
- Apr. 21:** Encourage One Another With Hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11.