

**WERE OUR FOUNDERS RIGHT AFTER ALL ABOUT
'THE 'INITIAL EVIDENCE' AND THE 'FULL GOSPEL'?'
THE TOTALLY NEGLECTED SCRIPTURAL PROOF FROM THE PENTECOST SERMON
(ISA 59:21 CITED IN ACTS 2:39)**

**Jon Mark Ruthven, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Regent University School of Divinity**

It was summer of 1967. I had just graduated from an up-and-coming evangelical seminary. I decided to drop in on an old friend from NYC Teen Challenge who had moved to a “Faith Home” nearby in Zion, Illinois. This old house was one of the last remnants of the empire built by John Alexander Dowie, who, though amazingly gifted throughout his ministry, had come to believe in his latter years that he was the Prophet Elijah and that he deserved more than his share of women.

My Teen Challenge friend, a Harvard grad and sincerely spiritual, as part of the tour, led me, reverently, up the stairs to a room of a bed-fast old saint, whose mission it was to pray all night, every night, for the salvation of the world. We chatted briefly before I was told that before Christ would return, there would be a billion Spirit-filled people on the earth.

A “billion”!? If true, Jesus’ return was a long, long way off! Hadn’t I just overheard a heated discussion among the faculty of my seminary about us “Spirit-filled” heretics? One prof urged that, like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, Pentecostals had no business being admitted to the divinity school. We Pentecostals (all two of us who were “out of the closet” and both graduates of Central Bible College) were in a distinct minority—as were Pentecostals around the world. True, Pentecostals were starting to make some noise back then in Latin America and Africa, but a *billion* “Spirit-filled” believers!? That seemed impossible. Even among us “heretics,” no one could imagine that one day *just the Assemblies of God alone* would be three times bigger than the JW’s and claim four times more members than the Mormons!

Part of the reason we found ourselves on the outside was because of our doctrine: we didn’t have much beyond traditional Fundamentalism—except the claim that healings continued and that tongues speaking was the evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost. The first generation of our movement was spent trying to get the fundamentalists to like us and to prove that our dispensationalist doctrine was every bit as pure as theirs. It was usually a one-way love affair: we were often dismissed as “the last great vomit of Satan” in these end times. Seriously, they said that. Back then we had no sophisticated scholarship defending our experience, like Del Tarr’s new work, *The Foolishness of God: A Linguist Looks at the Mystery of Tongues*.

So, to continue our sad tale of rejection.

Indeed, my fellow A/G divinity student, who is just now retired with an awesome publication record as the Dean of the prestigious Edinburgh University Divinity School, reminisced about his experience with his MA thesis at our old seminary. He had then merely

wished to explore the significance of signs and wonders in the New Testament, beyond the limited fundamentalist ideas he’d been taught.

During the thesis defense, however, the seminary systematic theology professor on the committee was outraged at the suggestion that prophecy and miracles could continue in the church: “If miracles and prophecy exist today, then why do you need a Bible?”

My friend retorted (and immediately regretted): “You have Scofield’s notes and the Westminster Confession of Faith, why do *you* need a Bible?” The systematics prof slapped the thesis with an F and stormed out. The other two on the committee, who still clung to the hope of my friend’s salvation, gave him good enough grades for his excellent thesis to pass—barely.

So it was odd and ironic that, other than a couple of statements about healing and tongues, our theology was identical with this prominent evangelical seminary. Didn’t we all agree on that famous hymn: “My hope is built on nothing less / than Scofield’s notes and Moody Press”?

Certainly, we Pentecostals would insist on our “distinctive”—the Baptism in the Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues, but, if pressed, we would agree with other Evangelicals that it is possible to go to heaven *without* a “Pentecostal experience.”

Proof of this position is the fact that the Assemblies of God was allowed, in 1943, only a year after its founding, into the National Association of Evangelicals—almost all of whom were originally cessationists (they didn’t believe in continuing gifts of the Spirit). Accordingly, a driving force for forming the NAE was J. Elwin Wright, who prudently downplayed his Pentecostalism, to build unity around the “core” of Evangelical doctrine: that traditional “salvation” (the atonement, repentance, baptism, being good and going to heaven by grace)—not charismatic experiences with the Spirit—is the *essential gospel* around which Evangelicals can unite.

What early Pentecostalism did *not* have (and still doesn’t) was a thorough reframing of the massive testimony *in the Bible* that the Pentecostal experience (the constant accounts of God speaking, revealing, and empowering). They were under great pressure to concede that their experience simply an “add-on” to sanctification in the traditional Protestant “order of salvation.”

Protestants argued that, yes, the Holy Spirit is at work today, but only in “salvation” and its many “stages”: Foreknowledge, Predestination, Election, Prevenient Grace, External Calling, Repentance and faith, Justification, Regeneration, Sanctification, Perseverance (conditional), Glorification (if you prefer the Arminian / Wesleyan version). Among Fundamentalists, then later, Evangelicals, the very idea of basing one’s theology on “experience” of the Spirit in prophecy and healings, rather than the “facts” of “sound doctrine” or scripture was not acceptable.

The great irony was that it was their “experience” with greedy priests that shaped the Reformers by answering the question, “How much does it cost to go to heaven?” (Priests were charging big bucks for “salvation”). After much confrontation, they came to the conclusion that it was free “grace”: “grace” went from “merited” favor (purchased from “saints”) to

“unmerited” favor (free, from Jesus)—not a bad move, but it became *the core* of “sound, Bible doctrine.” And you could be burned at the stake if you disagreed. Luther even signed off on the death of 100,000 “charismatics” and others in the so-called “Peasant Revolt.” Calvin wasn’t much better.

Problem is, *the Bible itself emphasizes one’s charismatic experience with God*—particularly in “hearing” his voice! That is its starting point, its major theme, and its goal. True “sound doctrine,” will focus on the *emphasis of scripture*—not on someone’s “experience.” And in that focus, brothers and sisters, is where we can clearly demonstrate the point of this article: our Pentecostal experience with the Spirit is far more central to the Bible’s own emphasis—indeed the very mission of Jesus—than traditional religion would admit. (More about this later).

The Full Gospel --- Or Not?

To be fair to the earliest framers of the Pentecostal message, they didn’t seem to want to de-emphasize their experiences with the Spirit by seeing it simply as an “add-on” to the *ordo salutis* (the “salvation” stages, above). They strongly believed their experience was truly biblical *and important*.

They used the term, “Full Gospel,” which may have been drawn from a word Paul used when summarizing his own Gospel in Romans 15:18-19.

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

Note first, that Christ works through Paul in “word and deed,” which to traditional theology means “preaching and holy living.” In the New Testament and even among Jews, however, this was a phrase that was purely charismatic: meaning, “prophecy and [miracle] power,” just as Jesus was a “*prophet mighty in deed and word*” (Lk 24:19). Paul immediately defines his phrase, “word and deed [as] the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the [prophetic] Spirit.” (Both are examples of “chiasmus,” an inverted parallel, often used in the Bible to define terms).

Here the ESV gets it right: by prophetic word and miraculous deeds Paul has “*fulfilled* the ministry” The words, “*preached/proclaimed [fully]*” are added out of thin air (not in the Greek text) in most other translations. These Evangelical translators can’t imagine a Gospel that is simply revealed in “signs and wonders”! It must be a *verbal* thing—a message, like a creed or doctrine or sermon: three points and a poem.

This is an important distinction, since Paul here is saying that his gospel is “fulfilled” or “completed” in the characteristic way God reveals himself—in “[miracle] power” (Heb 2:4), which is the *essence* of the Kingdom of God which “does not consist of [human] talk, but of “[divine miracle] power” (1Cor 4:20). To be fair, though, the miracles in the book of Acts (the church age) are usually accompanied by inspired explanation.

So our founders were exactly right to talk of the “full gospel” as *including* a Gospel of prophecy and divine healing, but these usually appeared only one part of the “fourfold gospel” made popular by A. B. Simpson at the end of the 1800s: Christ is Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Soon Coming King. Simpson wrote a well-known book, *The Gospel of Healing*, and even encouraged speaking in tongues, but, as is so often the case in charismatic movements, these practices faded over time—especially in the denomination Simpson founded. Seriously, every church should have a trained healing team for every service: the Gospel in action!

OK, so having used up over half of this article in introduction and background, the remainder makes a case that our founders of the “full gospel” were more right than they knew; and that a reasonable reading of the emphasis of scripture and Jesus’ own mission shows that traditional religion inhibited a fully *biblical* expression of the “full gospel.”

As Pentecostals, we celebrate Pentecost Sunday each year, though not as much as Christmas and Easter, celebrating the birth and resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps this is true because of our religious tradition that taught us that Pentecost was a kind of afterthought to the more important work of Jesus on the cross—even though more people go to church for Easter than Good Friday. Why would Pentecost Sunday rank so low in traditional Protestant church year celebrations?

Well, remember my friend’s MA thesis experience? If you deny the present-day experience of the Holy Spirit, and His characteristic expression in tongues, prophecy and miracle power, then you have to put your theological emphasis somewhere other than Pentecost, right? I mean, why celebrate an event that is “non-repeatable.” Pentecost, they say, was only to “jump-start” the Church with miraculous gifts, then, once the thing got rolling, you didn’t need the Spirit any more—except to invisibly empower your “salvation” theology. Time to re-read Galatians 3:3.

If You’re Going to Get It Right, It Better Be in the First Keynote Address of Christianity

Well, the message of Pentecost *is* a big deal—a much bigger and more central deal than traditional religion wants to give it. Maybe it’s time to look at the Pentecost event with new eyes—a new point of view.

The setting of Acts 2 is in the “Pentecost” festival, commemorating the offering of the *covenant* at Sinai—*ironically, the opportunity to hear God’s voice*, which they rejected in favor of writing (2 Cor 3; Heb 12). Pentecost was one of three main holy days attracting Jews from all over the world to the temple (Zion). This particular festival was interrupted by a thunderous, rushing wind sound in the temple area. Suddenly, a group of people started shouting out in different languages as tongues of fire appeared over their heads. Thousands of onlookers were amazed, fearful, and gathered around; some began nervous joking.

Peter then stands up and gives the charter, keynote address of all of Christianity. If the Book of Acts is to get the core Christian idea right, balanced, and on message, it needs to be here. Peter’s audience is Jews, who, if they were motivated enough to walk or sail hundreds of

miles to get to this temple celebration, they were motivated enough to know their scriptures well. Peter knows this, so he explains this explosion and the "drunken" speech behavior of the first Pentecostals with scripture.

The first one is Joel 2: "this is that"—the Spirit is now poured out on all people. He then must explain where this comes from (Psalm 16): "This Jesus, whom you have crucified, God has made Lord and Christ, and is pouring out that which you see and hear."

To many of the local Jewish hearers, this is *not* good news: they had a hand in crucifying "this Jesus" and now they were scared to death. Jesus survived their attempted murder plot and is doing things now, right before them, that only God could do!

The most important part of a speech is the conclusion or the "punch line." So it is here. In answer to the "take away" question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter lays out the whole point of Pentecost, and indeed the whole point of Jesus' mission and Christianity: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

If you are a good traditional Protestant, this is where you put the period: get saved and be baptized (then be good and go to heaven). The Holy Spirit's role after that is to continually convict you of sin—and help you pay attention to sermons and Bible reading.

The core of this traditional theology is a *gospel of preparation*. But they stop there. The question remains, "preparation" for what?

So Peter does not stop with the first half of John the Baptist's message. He sees "repent and be baptized" *only as preparation* for the real point of the Baptist's message: "One mightier than I is coming who will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

Peter follows the Baptist's message to its punch line: ". . . and you will receive the Holy Spirit."

In the clearest possible terms, all four Gospels introduce the *mission of Jesus*: to immerse us in the Spirit—which is all about his *working*: revelation, power and utterance.

But it still doesn't stop there. Peter now wraps up the whole message in a summary conclusion that combines all the major elements of the Pentecost narrative. In typical Jewish abbreviated format, Peter summarized a crucial prophecy of Pentecost: "*for* [this word often introduces a quotation] this promise/covenant is for you, your children, and all who are afar off."

Peter's passage that summarizes the whole chapter can only be Isaiah 59:21.

"And as for me, this is my *covenant* with them," says the Lord: "My *Spirit* that is *upon you* [singular—Jesus], and *my words that I have put in your mouth*, shall not depart out of your mouth [he is still speaking], or out of the mouths of your *children*, or out of the mouths of your *children's children*," says the Lord, "from this time forth and *forevermore*."

How can we be sure this is the summary verse that Peter is quoting? Look at the structure of the sermon, then at this summary:

- the covenant (Pentecost) is fulfilled (“fully come”) in the outpouring of the
- Spirit / “words” of God (Joel 2) placed
- “upon” (Isa 61:1-2) the resurrected and exalted Jesus (Psalm 16), now is being
- transferred to His “children” (disciples, John 14:17-19; Acts 1:8) expressed in
- the Spirit’s “words . . . in their mouths” (“spoke as the Spirit gave utterance”)
- to all generations, forever (“to those who are afar off”).

Another proof that Isa 59:21 is Peter’s citation is that Acts 2 is nothing more than an *expanded paraphrase of the immediate context of Isa 59:21*—verses 19-20:

So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west,
and his glory from the rising of the sun;
for he will come like a rushing torrent,
which the wind/Spirit of the Lord drives.
For a Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the Lord.

In Acts 2, Luke weaves Isa. 59.19–21 into a coherent narrative flow, describing: 1) The powerful rushing sound 2) of the wind/Spirit and the words in the mouth/speaking (Joel 2) 3) which cause 4) the universal—“west to east” 5) fear of 6) the Lord’s name and his glory. 7) In this thunder, fire, and speech the redeemer (Ps 16) 8) comes to Zion/Jerusalem 9) to Jacob/Jews, who, upon their repentance, 10) will receive the covenant/promise of the Spirit 11) that shall not depart from him nor from his children nor from their children forever.

This complicated fulfillment is spelled out in Appendix IV of the second edition of *On the Cessation of the Charismata*. It’s reasonable, then, that just as Isa 61:1-2 is the accepted “programmatic statement” (agenda) of the Gospel of Luke, so Isa 59:19-21 is the programmatic statement of Luke’s second volume, Acts. The Gospel of Luke explains the Spirit “upon” Jesus that he modeled for his “children.” Acts 2:39 now explains the Spirit’s transfer from Jesus to them, and to the Church ever after. *The normative experience of the New Covenant is “words in the mouth” expressed repeatedly in this summary!*

So the “Full Gospel” is centered on Jesus. But Jesus has a mission: to fill us with his very presence (“I will come to you”) which is also his Spirit (2 Cor 3:17). Hence, Jesus came to . . .

1. **introduce** the kingdom/New Covenant Spirit (Matt 3:11 || Mark 1:8 || Luke 3:16; John 1:26,33; Luke 4:18; Rom 15:8);
2. **model a perfect example** of how to live out that kingdom, New Covenant Spirit in a ministry of revelation and power. “I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done” (John 13:15); Isa 61:1–2 > Acts 10:38; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Cor 4:8–16; Phil 3:17; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 2:21–24; 3:18;
3. **ratify** the New Covenant Spirit in his blood (Matt 26:28–29 || Mark 14:24–25 || Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25; Gal 3:10–16; Heb 9:15; 10:10; 12:24; 13:20–21);

4. **vindicate** the kingdom/New Covenant in the power of his resurrection (Rom 1:4–5; Phil 3:10–14; Rom 8:11–14; 1 Tim 3:16);
5. **bestow** the kingdom/New Covenant Spirit from Heaven (John 14:16–18, 26; 16:7; Acts 2:33; 2Cor 3; Eph 4:7–11); and, ultimately . . .
6. **become** the New Covenant (John 14:18; 14:26; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17).

So a true “son of God” is “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14) and one who “does not refuse the One who speaks” (Heb 12:25). The Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is indispensable in that he “mediates” the new covenant, “in [his] blood” (1Cor 11:25), which is expressed in Jesus’ “body” (1Cor 11:24) his charismatic “members” (1Cor 12:13), which, if rejected, results in the covenantal curses (“this is why many of you are weak, sick, and die”) of Deut 28, the very curses that Jesus rolled back when he introduced the Kingdom “in power” and conquered in his death on the cross—“the last enemy.” Jesus’ death on the cross was “for our sins” in that he not only did away with the old covenant curses, but that he opened up the New Covenant—vindicated by the “Spirit of power” and of revelation, prophecy and tongues of praise. See? *That* is the Full Gospel!

Jon Mark Ruthven, Professor Emeritus, Regent University School of Divinity

Copyright © Jon Ruthven – Used by Permission