



April 2016

Ralph and Arlene Woodrow, P. O. Box 21, Palm Springs, CA 92263-0021

PENTECOST 120 DISCIPLES THE UPPER ROOM

When the Holy Spirit was outpoured on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), we often hear there were one hundred and twenty who were filled with the Spirit in the upper room. This raises two questions:

1. Were there *only* one hundred and twenty filled with the Holy Spirit?
2. Were they in the upper room when this happened?

Fortunately no major doctrine hinges on these two questions. But they do serve as examples of why we need to read the Bible *carefully* to see what it actually says.

When the Bible mentions there were “about one hundred and twenty” this was the number of people who were present when a replacement for Judas was chosen. Today we might call it a church business meeting. This happened days before Pentecost.

“And in those days [between the Ascension of Christ and Pentecost] Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said...” (Acts 1:15 NKJV).

The Phillips translation says: “It was during this period that Peter stood up among the brothers—there were about a hundred and twenty present *at the time*—and said...”

Just *which* day during that period this business meeting took place, we may not know with certainty; but based on the Ethiopic version which reads “on that day,” some believe, and with good probability, this matter was taken care of right after the Ascension.

Biblical scholars point out that one hundred and twenty was the number the Jews required to form a council in a city. Evidently considering this number as a valid quorum, Peter proceeded with the business at hand—even though all followers of Jesus, for various reasons, were not present on that particular day.

We know the followers of Jesus numbered considerably *more* than one hundred and twenty. Paul, for example, mentions *five hundred* to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection, plus appearances to others who are mentioned (1 Cor. 15:6).

John had baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus died, was buried, rose again from the dead, and ascended to heaven. The time was near for the promise to be fulfilled. The apostles were not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait there for the promise of the Holy Spirit: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4,5).

Years ago I heard a preacher say that the five hundred brethren to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection, obviously knew about the promise of the Holy Spirit—and that it was to happen within a few days—but in those few days all of them “backslid,” except for one hundred and twenty!

Somehow this does not ring true to me. Was there no more reality in seeing the resurrected, living Christ than this? Knowing that the promised coming of the Holy Spirit was not many days away, having come this far in their walk with Jesus, why would they have turned back now?

We know the five hundred brethren did *not* “backslide” in those few days prior to Pentecost, for writing later—possibly as much as thirty years later—Paul still referred to them as “brethren.” Following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to certain women and the apostles, “after that he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:5-7).

It is our belief that there were more than one hundred and twenty who received the Spirit in that initial outpouring on the Day of Pentecost. Certainly “all” the twelve apostles, including the newly appointed apostle, Mathias, were there. Mary and other women are mentioned, and included were old and young, male and female, slaves and free (Acts 2:16-18).

In our view, there is no reason to transpose the number one hundred and twenty that assembled for a business meeting in Acts 1 to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

We come now to our second question:

Were those who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in the *upper room*?

The “upper room” is mentioned as the place some of the apostles were living. They had seen Jesus ascend into heaven and returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. “And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room *where they were staying*: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Si-

mon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James” (Acts 1:13). The next verse says:

“These all **continued** with **one accord** in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Where did they assemble for worship and prayer? Luke explains. After the Ascension, “They returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the **TEMPLE** praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:52,53).

On the Day of Pentecost, “They were all with **one accord** in one place...” There is every reason to believe they were in the **TEMPLE** on this special day. And, as we notice reading on down, after this they *continued* to meet in the temple *daily*!

“So **continuing** daily with **one accord** in the **TEMPLE** ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46,47).

The next verse (Acts 3:1) tells of the healing of the lame man when “Peter and John went up together to the **TEMPLE** at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” When the lame man was healed, he “entered the **TEMPLE** with them...all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called *Solomon's*, greatly amazed” (verses 8,11).

The various Jewish groups, though differing among themselves, all had access to the temple, including (initially) those who had become followers of Jesus. That portion of the temple where they met was known as Solomon's Porch. Acts 5:12: “And they were all with **one accord** in Solomon's Porch.”

Solomon's Porch (or, as some translate it, Portico or Colonnade) was a large roofed area supported by stone columns, the outside of which was enclosed with a wall. We read of Jesus walking there in winter, implying it provided protection from the cold weather outside (John 10:22,23). Here there was room for huge crowds to gather, as when Peter preached following the healing of the lame man (Acts 4:4).

Coming to Acts 5, persecution of the apostles continued and they were imprisoned. But the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night and said: “Go, stand in the **TEMPLE** and speak to the people all the words of this life.” Accordingly, “they entered the **TEMPLE** early in the morning and taught” (Acts 5:20,21).

The Jewish leaders told them not to preach about Jesus anymore, *but* “daily in the **TEMPLE**, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Now, going back through the verses cited, the words “continually,” “continued,” “continuing,” and “one accord,” tie everything together. Thus we have, in summary:

The disciples were **continually** in the **temple**; they **continued** in **one accord** in prayer; on the Day of Pentecost they were all with **one accord** in one place; and after Pentecost they **continued** daily with **one accord** in the **temple**; they went up to the **temple** to pray, as when the lame man was healed; and believers in Jesus met with **one accord** in **Solomon's Porch** at the **temple**.

Clearly the emphasis throughout is on the temple, not where the apostles were staying in an upper room!

There is one thing that might seem to conflict with this conclusion: the word “house” in Acts 2:2. “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole *house [oikos]* where they were sitting.”

But the Greek word *oikos* is a general word, used in various ways. It can mean a household, a house as a residence, or a building of any kind. But it can also mean the house of God or temple, and is so translated in a number of verses (Matt. 21:13; 23:38; Lk. 11:51; Acts 7:49, etc.)

Over and over through the Old Testament the temple was referred to as the “the *house* of the LORD” (1 Kings 3:1; 6:37; 7:12; 9:1; Isa. 2:2; 37:1; Jer. 7:2; etc.)

When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, there is every reason to believe the followers of Jesus were in the temple—not the upper room of a residential house. As we read in *Wesley's Notes*, the sound of the wind “filled all the house—that is, *all that part of the temple* where they were sitting.”

This was Pentecost! Jewish people had come from “every nation under heaven” to be there at Jerusalem, at the temple. There is no reason to suppose the disciples would have simply stayed home—in the upper room—on this day.

Edersheim mentions that gathering places within the temple area, such as Solomon's Porch, included benches where people could sit to hear various Jewish speakers. Jesus himself spoke in the temple, even saying that those who believe on him would be filled with the Holy Spirit. His ministry resulted in division, but no one laid hands on him (see John 7:14, 28, 37-44; 8:1,2).

It has been estimated that the vast temple area was capable of holding 210,000 people. The fact that 3,000 were converted from Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost, shows the crowd was enormous. An upper room would hardly be large enough to admit a crowd like this!

Presented “as a study,” these are my thoughts. I am content to let every man be persuaded in his own mind, knowing that what happened on the Day of Pentecost is infinitely more important and glorious, than a couple details about that day. —RW

RALPH WOODROW

P.O. Box 21

Palm Springs, CA 92263-0021

Order Line: (760) 323-9882

E-mail: ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net

WebSite: www.ralphwoodrow.org