

October 5, 2025
The Birth of the Church

Group Study: The Birth of the Church (Acts 2)

- 1. How does Peter’s use of Joel’s prophecy reshape the crowd’s expectations about the Day of the Lord?**
- 2. Why do you think the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost disrupted both social and cosmic expectations?**
- 3. How might the inclusivity of the Spirit (“sons and daughters... young and old... slaves and free”) challenge us in the church today?**
- 4. The crowd’s response is described as being “cut to the heart.” What does true conviction look like in our lives?**
- 5. What does it mean for the church to continually be “born again” whenever the Spirit moves in new and unexpected ways?**
- 6. Where have you seen God’s Spirit show up in surprising or disruptive ways in your own community?**

Good Faith Bible Study

Kathy and Nathan Maxwell

October 5, 2025

“The Birth of the Church”

Focal Text: Acts 2

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies>

In the lesson this week, we’re looking at the Pentecost events in Acts 2 as “the birth of the church.” It’s marked by wind, fire, voices, confusion—likely not at all what the followers of Jesus expected. As I mentioned in the lesson, this podcast is going to take a closer look at Peter’s sermon, specifically his quotation from the prophet Joel.

Peter stands up in the middle of Jerusalem and does something that’s actually very Jewish, very expected, perhaps: He interprets the present moment through the words of Scripture.

But when we carefully compare Joel to Peter’s words in Acts, we find that Peter doesn’t quote Joel word for word. Peter changes a few things. And those differences actually tell us something important about how early Christians understood the Spirit and the church and the way that God was working in the world.

So let's start with Joel.

In Joel 2, the people have faced devastation. Locusts, famine, fear. The prophet calls them now to repentance: "Return to me," says the Lord, "with all your heart." And then comes a promise: God will restore the land with grain and wine and oil, and God will pour out the Spirit like rain on parched ground.

Joel's vision of God's restoration is strikingly inclusive: sons and daughters, young and old, even male and female slaves. Everyone receives the Spirit. The Day of the Lord is coming, Joel says, and this gift of prophecy will mark the dawning of a new age.

That's Joel's original context. Now watch what Peter does with it.

In Acts 2, Peter begins: "In the last days, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."

But wait. Notice the shift. Joel says, "after these things." Peter says, "in the last days." Why? Perhaps it's because Peter sees this event at Pentecost as the very beginning of God's promised future. The "last days" aren't way off on some apocalyptic horizon. They've started, Peter's saying. Right now.

Here's another detail: In Joel, the order is "your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." But in Acts, it's flipped. The young men are mentioned first, and then old men. Maybe this is because the Spirit first fell on the disciples, who were, perhaps, mostly young. Or maybe Luke simply wants to highlight youth. But either way, the change signals that Scripture isn't frozen—Peter is interpreting it in light of his own experience of God's work.

And then, of course, there's the cosmic imagery: blood, fire, smoky mist. And to Joel's audience, it seems like these images represented signs of judgment. But for Peter and his audience, well, they might have remembered the darkness at Jesus' crucifixion. And suddenly maybe these terrifying signs aren't so abstract. They're tied to the cross, to God's disruptive work through Jesus.

And of course Peter doesn't stop with quoting Joel in his first sermon. He weaves Joel's words into a sermon about Jesus.

Verse 22 is fascinating in Acts 2. It's the only verse outside the Gospels that mentions Jesus' miracles. And it's here that Peter reminds his audience: This man, Jesus, did mighty works. And then he names the scandal: "This man, Jesus. You crucified him." The Romans may have driven

the nails, but Peter puts the blame squarely on his Jerusalem listeners—especially the religious leaders.

Then comes the contrast. Humans humiliated Jesus. But God raised him up. Enemies sought to shame Jesus. But God exalted him. Over and over, Peter emphasizes that it is God who is doing the acting here, God who works through Jesus, God who overturns human judgment.

And the sermon builds to this climax: “Therefore,” Peter says, “let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

It’s the first Christian creed. Short, direct, and it’s meant to cut to the heart.

And it works. The crowd asks, “What then should we do?”

Peter calls them to repent. It’s a message that echoes John the Baptist in the wilderness, and Jesus also. Repentance, though, isn’t focused on feeling guilty. Repentance is a change of mind; it’s a turning of direction. And then, Peter says, be baptized, but now be baptized in Jesus’ name, and receive forgiveness and receive the gift of the Spirit.

As the church is born, a new community takes shape. They devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to breaking bread together, to prayers. They hold life in common. They share what they have. And the Lord adds to their number day by day.

That’s the Spirit’s work. The Spirit is turning competitors into family.

So, what can you do with this as you prepare to teach or as you study the lesson for yourself this week?

One way that you can dig deeper is to practice side-by-side reading. Print out Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21. Place them in two columns, side by side. Read each passage carefully, and mark or maybe highlight differences between the two. And then ask yourself a few questions: What differences did you notice? Why might Peter have made these changes? What do those changes tell us about how the Spirit helps us to interpret Scripture?

And as you study the passages, you might reflect on these questions. Where have you seen God “flip the script” in your own life—maybe taking something that you thought you understood and showing it in a completely new light? And then think about: How might that be like Peter re-reading Joel through the lens of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

goodfaith

MAGAZINE

Both of these exercises—asking these questions—invite us to see Scripture not as static, but as living and Spirit-breathed.

Peter's sermon shows us that the Spirit doesn't always come with wind and fire. The Spirit also comes through interpretation. Joel's words were re-voiced and re-framed. Now, they were not re-placed. The words as Joel recorded them are valuable in and of themselves. But for Peter, in the first-century context, these words are suddenly filled with new meaning in the light of Christ.

This examination of Peter's use of Joel's prophecy suggests that our task as the church is never just to repeat the past word-for-word. We should pay attention to the past. But our task and our privilege is to listen for how the Spirit is speaking now, through Scripture, through community, and through the surprising, disruptive work of God in our world.

So, as you study this week, I invite you to lean into that tension: ancient words, new meanings, Spirit-filled life.

Because every time the Spirit shows up—in Joel's day, and in Peter's day, and in our day—God's future breaks into our present.