Notes on the “Pentecost”

**“The house where they were sitting”**

Luke’s mention of “the house where they were sitting” has suggested to many that the disciples gathered in the Upper Room mentioned in Acts 1:13. It seems more probable that Luke’s language reflects a manner of speaking within Judaism about the Temple of Jerusalem, i.e., “house (בית) of the Lord.”3 Within ancient Jewish sources, and even until today, people refer to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in Hebrew as הבית הר (lit. “the mountain of the house”; cf. *m. Bikkurim* 3:4). In the first part of the Book of Acts, Luke’s Greek narrative frequently preserves Hebraic-styled syntax and idiom; thus, the mention of the “house” in Acts 2:2 likely reflects his preservation of the Hebrew idiom that identified the temple as “the house.” The location of the events in Acts 2 on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem seems certain in light of the festival of Pentecost, the crowds encountered by the disciples, and the ritual immersion of the large crowd that repented.

**The Festival of Pentecost**

After Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples remained in Jerusalem and “were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:52,53). Clearly, Jesus’ followers did not interpret any of His actions prior to, and including His crucifixion as either rejecting the temple or rendering it obsolete. We should assume, then, that Jesus’ followers would have participated in the pilgrim festival of Pentecost in accordance with the commandment of God: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place which he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and at the Feast of Booths (Sukkot)” (Deuteronomy 16:16). The first century Jewish historian Josephus mentions that the population of Jerusalem swelled at Pentecost as Jewish pilgrims came from all over the countryside (*War* 1:253; cf. 2 Maccabees 12:31,32). Luke also attests to the multitudes of Jewish pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost: “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome” (Acts 2:9–11). Peter addressed these crowds of pilgrims who were participating in the festival, which took place in the temple.4

**The Crowds of Pentecost**

These crowds of Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman world heard the disciples speaking in their own languages and were amazed (Acts 2:4–8). In response to their amazement, Peter stood and addressed the crowd (Acts 2:14–39) proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel and identifying what the pilgrims saw and heard as the “pouring out” of the Holy Spirit. This signified the advent of the Messianic era, so Peter called the people “to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus” (Acts 2:38). Peter’s discourse and the events that precipitated it suggest a public location; moreover, the only place in Jerusalem where such crowds would have gathered on the Day of Pentecost would be the Temple Mount.5

**The Ritual Immersion of the Crowds**

According to Acts 2:41, about 3,000 people responded to Peter’s call “to repent and be baptized.” The ritual immersion pools (*miqva’ot*) located around the southern and southwestern portions of the Temple Mount offer the only place in Jerusalem able to accommodate the ritual immersion of so many.6 These ritual pools serviced the pilgrims entering the temple (cf. Luke 2:22; Acts 21:24), and could accommodate the swollen masses of pilgrims that converged on the temple during the festivals. The most practical setting for such a series of events on the festival of Pentecost would be in the vicinity of the temple in Jerusalem.

When the temple stood, the Jewish people identified it as the dwelling place of God’s presence, i.e., His Holy Spirit; thus, it makes perfect sense that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost would occur in relationship with the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Joel 3:5). Moreover, Jewish tradition believed that the Holy Spirit manifested himself among those sitting together (Acts 2:2) studying the Torah (cf. *m. Avot* 3:2; and *b. Berachot* 6a). During the days of the Second Temple, the Temple Mount served as a center for the study of the Torah (cf. *Antiquities* 17:140–163; Luke 2:48,49, 21:37; *t. Sanhedrin* 7:1; *t. Hagigah* 2:9; *m. Yoma* 7:1; *m. Sotah* 7:7,8; and *b. Pesahim* 26a), and perhaps, Torah study explains, in part, what the disciples were doing “together in one place” when they received the Holy Spirit (cf. *m. Bikkurim* 1:6; *t. Sotah* 15:12). According to Jewish tradition, God gave Moses the Torah on the festival of Pentecost7 (cf. *Jubilees* 1:1),8 that explains the appearance of many of the Sinai motifs, e.g., fire, wind, and language8 in Luke’s description of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. All the events of Acts 2 occurred in a public setting; given the date of Pentecost, the only natural location for these events to take place was the temple in Jerusalem — the House of the Lord.

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