

# Gospel P6 - Acts E2

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## **Pentecost and the Expected Unexpected Spirit**

Podcast Date: May 07, 2018

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### Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

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## Pentecost and the Expected Unexpected Spirit

- Jon: Hey, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Right now we're working our way through the book of Acts. The story of the early church.
- Tim: The Book of Acts, is telling me that if I've given my allegiance to Jesus, I'm a part of a Messianic Jewish sect that started as a persecuted religious minority movement in ancient Jerusalem. That's a living heritage.
- Jon: Christianity has humble beginnings, but it had been expected by Jewish prophets who were hoping, expecting a new work of God's Spirit to come and recreate Israel. In this episode, Tim and I discuss the singular event that gave Christianity its early spark, its momentum, Pentecost, a time where God's Spirit showed up in an expected but unexpected way.
- Tim: In the same way, there was an expectation about the Spirit. We looked at one from Isaiah. Ezekiel, Joel, Zachariah, all have really explicit hopes for a new work of the presence and Spirit of God in this new age. But what happens doesn't quite correspond to what anybody would have expected.
- Jon: All the believers were in one room, and there was a loud, violent wind. Then tongues of fire came flying over people's heads, which sounds pretty scary and pretty confusing. But fire is an important image in the Bible about God's presence. God appeared in a burning bush to Moses, in flames over Mount Sinai, and in a pillar of fire over the tabernacle. And so the flames at Pentecost —
- Tim: This is the marking out of temple space, places where heaven and earth meet become where God's appearance manifests itself. That's the claim being made here, that Jesus's people are where heaven and earth meet.
- Jon: Today on the show, Pentecost, the new Israel and our bodies are the temple of God. Thanks for joining us. Here we go. All right. So the book of Acts, we just talked through the first chapter.
- Tim: Or just the opening scene.
- Jon: Opening scene of the first chapter and how it kind of gives us a template for how the book of Acts is going to work.
- Tim: How a marginal, small Messianic Jewish sect became an international multi-ethnic movement that will become the most ethnically diverse religious movement in human history.
- Jon: Spoilers.

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- Tim: That is remarkable. Second of all, we would expect then to find in this foundation story what are the core values. What kind of story could generate that kind of movement in human history and hold it together? It's an interesting way to pose it.
- Jon: One of the key components of the story was that this whole thing was going to start when they got power from on high.
- Tim: Yes, get the power.
- Jon: They are going to get the power. That's what this the next chapter is about.
- Tim: This is what the next key story is about. Power time. I printed the text out here just so you could...I'd love to give you know the honor once again.
- Jon: I get to keep reading.
- Tim: Yeah, come on.
- Jon: "When the day of Pentecost had come...This is a Jewish holiday, Pentecost?"
- Tim: Yes. If you read the Torah, there's three pilgrimage holidays or feasts. And so they just three times a year when hundreds of thousands of Jews from all over the world would descend on Jerusalem. The population of the city would quadruple or...I don't know how you say five or six times.
- Jon: Quintuple, Sextuple.
- Tim: Yeah, that kind of thing.
- Jon: That's as far as I could go.
- Tim: So Passover in the spring and then Tabernacle, or Sukkot in the fall. Then Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks comes in between. And Pentecost, that means 50 days, and it's just because you counted off seven sevens after Passover. Seven sevens after Passover and then it's Pentecost. It began as a harvest—
- Jon: It's a harvest celebration?
- Tim: Yeah, early summer harvest feasts. Usually, this is happening in May. That kind of thing. May or June.
- Jon: So it's Pentecost?
- Tim: Pentecost.

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Jon: "And they're all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven and noise like a violent rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as a fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Tim: I mean, usually you have like 30 questions.

Jon: I don't know if I have permission to stop.

Tim: Oh, yeah, totally, if you want to stop.

Jon: We've talked about this before. I mean, one way you frame this is like...We've talked about God, and I don't know if those conversations on God are going to come out before Acts or not. Probably not. Yeah, unclear. We're going to do a video on the identity of God. And as we talked about that, and we talked about why is it a Christian way to think of God as the Father, the son and the Spirit and why not just the Father and the son? That's kind of nice. You've got Father, you got the son.

Tim: Jesus talked to the Father, the father says things about Jesus and that kind of thing.

Jon: It's a nice tight little relationship. I get it. I have a Father, I'm a son. I'm a Father, I have a son. I understand that. But thrown in the mix is the Spirit. But the reason that you've mentioned was because of how earth-shattering this moment was of the Spirit coming.

The way this reads is pretty remarkable. It's not kind of like, "We just felt fired up all of a sudden. Everyone just felt encouraged and blessed and everyone was ready to go." It was like, "No, there was this crazy sound from heaven..." They don't say crazy.

Tim: Violent. That's what Luke says.

Jon: Violent sound from heaven. That's kind of spooky.

Tim: Yeah, it's more than crazy. It's terrifying.

Jon: It's terrifying. And then tongues of fire. I would be ducking for cover or something if you saw fire coming down your head, you'd be like, "Is that a lightning coming at me?"

Tim: I'd tackle you.

Jon: I'd be like, "Let's get out of the way." And it's not just like one, it's distributed.

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Tim: And then you're like, "Don't tackle me. You've got one too."

Jon: And then everyone starts talking in other languages that they don't know. That's weird. It's just a really extreme moment.

Tim: And not normal.

Jon: Not normal.

Tim: So back to your question about the identity of God, there was mental shelf space from the Hebrew scriptures about when the kingdom of God comes, when God begins to bring heaven on earth back together, it'll involve some kind of human figure. And sometimes talked about as taken up to the...

Jon: the son of man.

Tim: ...divine status, like the Son of Man or a king from a line of David. And so Jesus occupies that mental shelf space, the messianic king, but He also explodes it to a new level, because he's a son of God, and way that's similar and way different than any of the sons of David before him.

In the same way, there was an expectation about the spirit. We looked at one from Isaiah, but Isaiah's chock-full. Ezekiel, Joel, Zachariah, all have really explicit hopes for a new work of the presence and Spirit of God in this new age. So we're walking out that part of the prophetic theme of the Scriptures. But what happens in the same way, it just fulfills and it blows open the doors. Like the way that it happens doesn't quite correspond to what anybody would have expected.

It seems that this experience left a mark on how the early Jesus followers talked about God. If this hadn't happened, it's likely that we would have a binitarian sense of talking about God throughout the New Testament. Because that is often what you get.

Jon: Duotarian.

Tim: Duotarian, binitarian. But because of what happened with Pentecost and what Jesus had said leading up to these events, that left a permanent mark in awareness of the early Christians that the invisible presence of the Spirit is another distinct presence of God that is God and distinct from Jesus and distinct from the Father. Just like Jesus is both God and distinct from God, we find that same space is created for the Spirit.

Jon: Why is the phrase "speak with other tongues" instead of "speak with other languages"?

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Tim: Oh, yeah, that's odd. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word for language is the word for tongue.

Jon: For the physical thing in your mouth?

Tim: Tongue means language.

Jon: They don't have a separate word?

Tim: Correct.

Jon: And so it's just the tradition of our translations?

Tim: It's more just our English translations. And I think the phrase "speaking in tongues"...

Jon: Because that's become a phrase that means a lot of things to a lot of people.

Tim: Correct. Yeah, that's right. This might be the New American Standard translation. I think that's what I copied here and that you read. And so they just go with the word "tongue."

Jon: Do other translations say "language"?

Tim: Because look down in Verse 8. It's going to say, "We hear each of them in our own language."

Jon: And that's the same word?

Tim: But it is the same word.

Jon: Okay. And we do that in English, in mother tongue.

Tim: Oh, yeah. We have a few phrases where we still use "tongue" for language.

Jon: "What tongue are you speaking?" I think I want to start using that.

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Tim: Let's just pause because this is a good moment. You just said it's crazy, like if you saw fire descending you run, or I said I would tackle you. And that's probably true. So what are we supposed to imagine or think of here? These little tongues, it's the same word "tongues." They started off speaking in other languages, but then there's something like—

Jon: It's the tongues of fire. I get that.

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- Tim: So what's going on here? Again, this is a good example, where Luke is using this biblical narrative convention of overlaying an ancient story on top of this one. So do I have any categories for when the presence of God shows up in a place that there's wind from heaven, wind or fire over some remarkable circumstance?
- Jon: So we got the burning bush, there's fire there, Moses here is like a wind, a gentle wind, right?
- Tim: Or you think of Elijah. Let's talk about the burning bush. So the bush, but that takes place where the narrative of the burning bush opens.
- Jon: In the wilderness.
- Tim: In the wilderness. But even more specific, this Bible trivia. You shouldn't have to know this, but it's on Mount Sinai.
- Jon: Oh.
- Tim: The narrative opens and says...Oh, this is good. Actually, it calls it Mount Horeb, but the name of the bush in Hebrew is seneh.
- Jon: The Bush is called seneh?
- Tim: It's called the seneh bush. Only one Bush in all of ancient Hebrew literature is ever called the seneh bush. In fact, there's only one story in all of the ancient literature where it's called the seneh bush. And it's the burning bush. That takes place on Mount Horeb, which when you read through the narrative in Exodus, Mount Horeb is that the name of Mount Sinai.
- Jon: Why does it have two names?
- Tim: Likely some sort of regional dialect difference.
- Jon: Okay.
- Tim: But on Mount Horeb, Moses encounters the fire of God in the seneh bush, and then that speech God says to Moses, "Hey, this is assigned to you. When you rescue the people, bring them right here to the spot."
- Jon: Oh, wow.
- Tim: And then the narrative, Moses brings them to Mount Sinai where he saw God and fire at the seneh bush. It's a good one.

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Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And when God comes in fire on Sinai, it's a little more dramatic.

Jon: Yeah, it's a little more intense. And then He comes with fire to the tabernacle.

Tim: And then the tabernacle. That's right. And it's all taking place—

Jon: At Sinai.

Tim: All three of those scenes take place on Mount Sinai.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: So the bush, top of the mountain. And then the mountain glory fire transfers to the tent.

Jon: In Ezekiel's vision, the Ancient of Days are described as fire, right?

Tim: Correct. The Godmobile.

Jon: The Godmobile?

Tim: The God Chariot that Ezekiel sees. In Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days, there's brightness and fire flowing out. And those are all images of God over the Holy of Holies over the Ark of the Covenant Ezekiel and Daniel's visions are. Notice they're all hovering around temple imagery.

You also have a narrative in Kings and Chronicles that when Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem, the tabernacle fire and glory transfers to the temple. And so the glory fire wind thing now floats above the temple. So the commonality is, this is the marking out of temples space.

Jon: Fire from heaven.

Tim: This is heaven and earth. Places where heaven and earth meet, temple spaces become places where God's appearance manifests itself with these physical phenomena that all kind of look the same. People are freaked out. There's wind, fire, cloud stuff.

Jon: So it's storm? It's a storm.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. It's likened to a storm. A violent rushing wind. Luke phrases it in Verse 3, he talks about the wind, singular, enters the room, but then when he talked about



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the fire, he pauses and he really nails down that description. Where he says, "There appeared to them tongues like fire distributing themselves, resting over each one."

Jon: Right.

Tim: He didn't have to tell us that.

Jon: And it's not like him to go into a lot of detail.

Tim: Yeah, yeah. They don't have to tell you anything.

Jon: And often, a lot of details are left out.

Tim: Correct.

Jon: So when there's much detail, it's important.

Tim: This is a scroll moment, a background scroll moment, where if we have Mount Sinai —

Jon: And the fire coming on one temple.

Tim: Coming over the temple, or the tabernacle and over the temple. And then that maps on to divine glory fire.

Jon: It'd be cool if, in the scroll, all of the people are in the room, and behind them, the scroll opens at Mount Sinai and you see fire hitting that center in the scroll. But then you see the same kind of fire coming down and then distributing. It's just kind of maps on it so you can see, "Oh, I see what happening here."

Tim: Yes, that's right. Paul the Apostle, decades before Luke composed this account and phrased it quite this way, decades before Peter and Paul had already worked out language for this concept.

Jon: That you are the temple of God?

Tim: Yeah. And Paul can say, use as an individual, therefore, don't sleep around - its 1 Corinthians 6 - Or he can say, "Y'all, a whole community of Jesus followers are the temple, therefore, don't put up with arrogant leaders because it'll corrupt the temple." Here, Luke is showing a narrative form that basic idea, but it's happening at Pentecost, which means it's the foundation moment. It's the formation of the new temple.

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If the Messiah, if the king from the line of David has been raised up in all the classic messianic promises in the Hebrew Scriptures, "I'll raise up your seed after you," He tells David, "And he will build a temple for my name." 2 Samuel 7.

Jon: But the expectation there is that a king being raised up into power, a political power and a physical temple being built or rebuilt.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Correct.

Jon: And so here, it's Jesus being raised up from the dead or raised up to death, and then raised from the dead, and then a spiritual temple was built.

Tim: Well, it is a physical temple.

Jon: It is a physical temple.

Tim: It's made of people.

Jon: Made of people. Wow.

Tim: People. The Jesus's people we're having an earth meet. Just like heaven and earth met in the body, the person of Jesus. That's the claim being made here. This is new temple language, which makes perfect sense then of what happens next. Shall I read?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I'll take it over?

Jon: Take it over.

Tim: All right. Verse 5. Luke poses that scene. This is where you have like in comic books, in the panel and it's like, "Meanwhile..." "Now there were Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven."

Jon: Because it's Pentecost.

Tim: It's Pentecost. Hundreds of thousands. "And when this sound occurred, a crowd came together bewildered because each one of them, that is Jews from all over, was hearing them, the small crowd of Jesus followers - speaking in his own language." Actually, it's this phrasing that makes some people wonder if all the disciples were just speaking Aramaic. And the miraculous thing happening here is in the translation process that they're hearing it.

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Jon: The sound waves are being changed.

Tim: True. But he says up above, they begin to speak other languages. And then they say, "And each one of them is hearing in his own language." Whichever. "They were amazed and astonished - like you would be -aren't these all Galilean speaking? How is it we each hear them in our own language to which were born..."

Jon: How do they know they are Galileans? Is it the way they're dressed?

Tim: Oh, I think dialect.

Jon: They're hearing them in their language.

Tim: That's a good point. That's a solid point. Peter gets identified in Jesus's trial scene. Remember he's out warming himself by the fire and that little girl says, "You're a Galilean"?

Jon: Yeah. I'm sure you got to look too.

Tim: They have a look. That's a good point. The question never occurred to me. This is within the quote that they're saying...Likely, this is Luke supplying us with the list here. He names 15 places. Parthians, this is like up to the north, Medes and Elamites, Medes and Elamites, that's modern-day Iran, Persians; residents of Mesopotamia, ancient Babylon, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, this is modern-day Turkey, regions in modern Turkey, Phrygia, Turkey and Pamphylia, also up in modern-day Turkey, Egypt, North Africa, Libya, and Cyrene, also North Africa, Rome, way West Mediterranean, both Jews and proselyte, proselyte being non-Israelite, but converts who got circumcised and become Torah observant, Cretans, the island of Crete of Italy and Arabs, way off to the east and Saudi Arabian Peninsula.

In other words, he just painted a map of the ancient world. This is the equivalent of saying...

Jon: The whole world.

Tim: ...the whole world.

Jon: Is everywhere they're aware of?

Tim: Yeah, exactly. The known world. It's Luke's way of saying 15 that he names there. "We each hear them in our own language, speaking of the mighty deeds of God. And they were amazed saying to one another, "What does this all mean?" And others made fun of them saying, "They're full of sweet wine."

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Jon: I didn't realize it's a sweet wine.

Tim: Sweet wine.

Jon: Sweet berry wine. Do you know that? This is so good. Sweet berry wine.

Tim: What's that guy's name? It's the sweet berry wine guy. I forgot about that.

Jon: I should know his name.

Tim: Man, there's multiple things rushing together. Notice the description. It's important, though. He's very specific, that even though these are people from all over the known world, they're Jews or convert to Judaism.

Jon: Well, that's why they're there.

Tim: Correct. That's right. It's a pilgrimage feast, and they're there because of Pentecost. So it's multicultural, but it's mostly monoethnic. However, we're now 600 past the first waves of exile, so these people are coming from generations and generations, like if they've lived in all these places. So Jerusalem felt very international, multicultural, but they're all there because of their ties to their ethnic heritage as Jews.

Jon: They all have different languages and cultures now, but they're all Jewish by identity.

Tim: Correct. Many languages, many cultures, but they're all Israelites. And that's important, because remember of the whole thing is, when is the time that you're going to restore the kingdom to the tribes of Israel?

Jon: Who are scattered at this point.

Tim: Who are scattered. But not on Pentecost.

Jon: They all come back.

Tim: They're all here. It's really important. The multiculturalism often gets mistaken for multiethnic. And that's coming later on in the book. But the picture here...

Jon: Because they are all ethnically Jewish.

Tim: ...there is mono-ethnic but multicultural.

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Tim: So then Peter gets up, and he gives a famous Pentecost speech. I mean, it says, copy and paste job of the Hebrew prophets and psalms that you could want. It's this beautiful speech, most of it is weaving together language of the Old Testament with the story of Jesus. But there are a handful of places where he addresses the people that he's speaking to. This is at the bottom of Page 6 there.

Every time he does so, he indicates that he's speaking to Israelites. So when he says, "Let all the house of Israel know," especially in the prophet Ezekiel, House of Israel, is his way of referring to the 12 tribes of Israel. Actually, it seems that Luke composed Acts 2 with an eye towards the prophet Ezekiel because phrase "The whole house of Israel" is important for Ezekiel's view of the restoration from exile. That it will be a time when all the tribes come back in a reunited. That they're reunited here in the land. That's a key prophetic hope.

Ezekiel has multiple scenes talking about how the reunified New Covenant, new heart, new spirit people of God will be created by the pouring out of God's Spirit. It's an important theme in Ezekiel. Then also in Ezekiel, he has a key role for what he calls just a new David. He doesn't say, "Messiah," he just uses the name David to refer to the Messianic King.

So Luke's giving every clue that what's happening here at Pentecost is the renewal of Israel, the formation of the unified tribes. All the tribes are there or representatives. There wasn't any other event where you could say, "Everybody's represented here."

Jon: Not during other pilgrimages?

Tim: Well, I'm sorry. It could have been, but it happened to be Pentecost. But the point is, is it's happening on a day when Jerusalem is full of more of the representative tribes than on any other day. And that's the day when Pentecost happens. We're told that 3,000 come to give their allegiance to Jesus, and then hundreds and thousands more in the days that follow. So it seems to me that the question that the disciples asked is being answered here.

Jon: "When's it going to happen?"

Tim: "When's it going to happen?" And he says, "Listen, here's what's going to go out to all nations. You don't need the blueprint, but it's coming soon." And here it is. This is the answer. It just happened.

Jon: "It's going to happen soon and power is going to come for you."

Tim: That's right.

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Jon: And then here comes—

Tim: "To be my witnesses." What are they doing? They're telling the story of God's mighty deeds which now includes the story of Jesus Messiah. The rejection, Peter sermon is about. He tells a story of God's being at work here to bless the nations through Abraham. He sent the king you rejected him, but God vindicated him. He's exalted him as Messiah. Here's your chance to recognize your Messiah and thousands of Jews from all over the world do. It's a new covenant.

Jon: So interesting. I never really thought about that. I always pictured all those converts being Jerusalemites who then stick around and form the early church. But they would all then end up going back to the places they came from, and then what? They're followers of the way of Jesus, and them and their families and whatever in Iran or Mesopotamia—?

Tim: And it seems like a bunch of people—

Jon: This is before Paul would go and plant churches in these places?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Paul's not going to start doing that for another...there's just going to be another decade or more down the road. There's something happening in those first decade and a half, 15 years. It was the spreading of this multicultural Israelite crew that formed a nucleus at Pentecost.

The way Luke tells the story, the way Peter talks, everything that the prophets hope for, that's what Peter says.

Jon: This is the renewal of Israel.

Tim: This is the renewal, the regathering of Israel from among the exiles to form the nucleus of the New Covenant Israel with their hearts, transformed by the Spirit.

Jon: The question that the apostles had were, "When is the time for you to restore the kingdom to Israel"? And so this is God restoring the kingdom to Israel?

Tim: It seems the way Luke's design these first two chapters, this is the fulfillment to their question. Which makes sense because Jesus's answer was, "Listen, you don't need the full timeline, but you're going to receive power and become my witnesses right here." And this is ground zero, Jerusalem, then it's going to spread out.

And what else is Peter announcing Jesus as the Risen King of Israel and the world and thousands converting and having their lives transformed by the Spirit? This is the coming of the kingdom of God to a multicultural crowd in Jerusalem. Some

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people have also drawn attention to a thematic connection. But the confusion of languages at Babylon in Genesis—

Jon: That's like a reversal of that.

Tim: Correct, correct. I do think there's a big picture level that's for sure resonating in the background here. I think the main scroll I want to have this of the filling of the temple, and then of the gathering of Israelites around the temple, around the tabernacle, if that's on the scroll - if we have a bunch of Israelites gathering, and then they'll map on to the disciples as the new temple with the fire and then with all these people coming around them.

But the idea of Babylon being this act of human arrogance and self-exaltation led to a confusion of the languages. Here, it's the reunification of language to form the seed of Abraham, the new seed of Abraham. It's pretty cool. But it's in the background. Luke doesn't even draw attention to it. You just kind of have to know the story to see that.

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Jon: So when Peter gives a speech, he is quoting a lot from Ezekiel. And by using all of the house of Israel, though it's really calling back to this idea of the 12 tribes being unified?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It connects to the hope in Ezekiel, but also in Jeremiah, Isaiah, that when the new covenant people are formed after the restoration of exile, it will be all the tribes represented. You tell me why Luke pauses the narrative in the mid climactic scene to list 15 regions of the known world.

Jon: He's just a geography buff.

Tim: That's one explanation, right? But usually, they're still economic in how he tells the stories. Here the story really blooms out just on a list. And the list remarkably overlaps with the list of the exiles from Isaiah Chapter 11.

Jon: There was no travel and commerce over to like Spain in human history?

Tim: Oh, yeah. At this point in the Roman Empire, they had roads and shipping everywhere.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: You're right. Actually, it's I was exaggerating when I said it's the known world at the time. Because even in Jonah's day, Tarshish is likely Spain.

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Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Wait. Tarshish, is that the way he's going to?

Tim: He's trying to flee to Tarshish.

Jon: That's a long way away.

Tim: Yeah. Is as far away from Nineveh as you could go. That's a good point. Luke's list could have been more expansive. So he's not just trying to blow out a picture of the whole globe here, but it is from all points of the compass where he draws from.

So, Pentecost, we've got the new temple ruled by exalted Son of David, his renewed covenant people from the tribes. So the next part of the story is Luke's going to show how that new temple is planting and being built here in Jerusalem, and it comes into conflict with the physical temple. Actually, with the leaders of the physical temple.

It's a tale of two temples - what I call the section. Then that tale of two temples is going to lead to conflict, and that conflict is going to culminate in the first martyr in the story, which is Stephen. That closes the Jerusalem movement because, with the martyrdom of Stephen, the disciples scatter outside of the city and start going out. So that's the first video be that interest in Pentecost, and then this tale of two temples leading to the conflict and scattering.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of Bible Project podcast. Today's music was by Dan Koch, and our show is produced by Dan Gummel. If you like the show, you might also enjoy Tim's podcasts, a collection of his lectures of sermons over the last decade. It's called "Exploring My Strange Bible." You can find a link to it in our show notes. Thanks for being a part of this with us.

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