

## **God is Fire sermon**

**5/20/18**

Today, on the church calendar, is the Day of Pentecost. If you're not familiar with that, it's the day when the church of Jesus actually began. It had been 10 days since Jesus rose into heaven and right before he ascended, He instructed his followers to stay in Jerusalem until they receive power from on high. I'm pretty sure Jesus' disciples didn't have a clue what that would look like – and they were in for an amazing surprise. So, they'd been waiting for this for the past 10 days. They'd been praying constantly during this time. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day they were apparently in the Temple in Jerusalem around 9am for the celebration of the Jewish festival of Shavuot, also known as the Feast of Weeks or the Day of First fruits. It's when the wheat crop is harvested and the first portion of that harvest is brought to the Lord. To fully understand and grasp the historical context of Pentecost we need to first explore the roots of this Jewish festival.

Now, remember that Jesus was crucified during the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Passover. During this celebration, the Jews remembered back to God's miraculous delivery of His people from their slavery in Egypt. This also represented the beginning of the **barley** crop harvest. After the Feast of Unleavened Bread was completed they were instructed to count 49 days and then on the 50<sup>th</sup> day they celebrated God's faithfulness with the bringing in of the **wheat crop** in to the Temple. This festival is one of 3 festivals that Jewish men were required to come to the temple in Jerusalem yearly to celebrate. So the city of Jerusalem would have been filled with thousands of people from all over there to honor God.

There's a long standing Jewish tradition that maintains that Pentecost or Shavuot had tremendous significance for them. For they believed that it was on Shavuot that God had appeared to them on Mount Sinai and gave them His laws – thus officially establishing them as His people and nation. Let me read to you what happened on that significant day.

**Exodus 19:16-19 (NIV)** *On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. 19 As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.*

**Exodus 20:18-21 (NIV)** *When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."*

*20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*

*21 The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.*

After that God began to speak His commandments to the people. And much later, as Moses is recounting the extraordinary events of that day he says:

**Deuteronomy 5:4 (NIV)** *The Lord spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain.*

**Deuteronomy 5:23-27 (NIV)** *When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. 24 And you said, "The Lord our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. 25 But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer. 26 For what mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? 27 Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey."*

Clearly that was an amazing day. And later as the rabbis wrote about this day they wrote that on that day when God issued each and every command, **God's voice appeared as a flame shaped like a tongue** and these various tongues of fire would shoot out of God's mouth and go flying through the

air, circle the people, and hover over each individual Jew until in unison they all agreed to follow what God commanded.

It was also a long standing Jewish belief that many years earlier on this same day of the year is when the whole **Tower of Babel** event took place. At that event God confused their languages by causing people to speak in many various languages. And it was a long held tradition that God created 70 different tongues or languages.

It was believed that when God uttered His commandments on Mount Sinai that as the commands went out from Him they traveled around the world and communicated God's words in all 70 languages of the world. Thus everyone was able to hear God's commands in their own native language.

Later as Moses is recounting these events to the Israelite people he says,

**Deuteronomy 4:23-24 (NIV)** *Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. 24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

And then in preparation for them entering into the Promised Land Moses says,

**Deuteronomy 9:1-3 (NIV)** *Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. 2 The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: "Who can stand up against the Anakites?" 3 But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire."*

It's not unusual for God to be associated with a consuming fire.

#### **Appearances of "fire" by God:**

- The Lord appeared to Moses in a **burning bush** (Exodus 3:2-3)
- As the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt he guided them with a cloud by day and a **pillar of fire** at night (Exodus 13:21)
- During their travels in the wilderness a cloud covered the **tabernacle** during the day and a fire over it at night (Numbers 9:15-16)
- When **Daniel** was given a vision of heaven he saw God's throne and it was **ablaze with flames** (Daniel 7:9)
- When God appeared to the Israelites at **Mt. Sinai** he descended onto the mountain as a blaze of fire (Exodus 19:18)
- **King David** in recounting how God miraculously rescued him from Saul and his enemies describes actions in vivid imagery as a **consuming fire coming out of his mouth** (2 Sam. 22:7-10)
- When **Isaiah** prophesied the destruction of the Assyrians by God he refers to the **tongue of the Lord as a consuming fire** (Isaiah 30:27)
- In the future, the Lord will come in fire (Isaiah 68:15)
- In the ancient manuscripts found in the **Qumran caves** there's one called "**The Tongues of Fire**" scroll. And the message on this scroll describe how tongues of fire would descend on the High Priest and speak through the Urim and Thumin and the stones on the breastplate of the High Priest.

#### **In recap:**

1. God has a rich history of associating Himself with fire.
2. It was on Shavuot, at the **Tower of Babel**, that God initially created the **many world languages**
3. It was on Shavuot that God **created the Jewish nation** by giving them His Law and as He spoke each and every command, the rabbis taught that God's voice came out of His mouth as a small tongue shaped flame and went out into the whole nation and landed on each and every person until in unison they agreed to accept and obey God's command.

So now we come to the observance of Shavuot in the first century, 50 days after Jesus was crucified and 10 days after He instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive power from above. It's 9am and Jesus' disciples have made their way to the Temple to celebrate Shavuot and pretty crazy and unexpected things begin to happen.

**Read Acts 2:1-13**

Isn't God amazing? He certainly has a flare for the dramatic as a way to get people's attention. There's thousands of people gathered from all over the surrounding regions there on that day to celebrate Shavuot and suddenly they hear all these disciples speaking the wonders of God in their own native tongues. And they all have fire, in the shape of tongues, dancing above their heads. That phenomenon would certainly get everyone's attention and it did. And Peter proceeds to stand up and proclaim that this exact event is not merely a supernatural occurrence but was prophesied by the prophet Joel many years ago. And Joel prophesied that God would pour out His spirit on all sorts of people and they would begin to declare the wonders of God. Then Peter transitions into the prophecy of the Messiah coming and God sent him in the person of Jesus Christ. However, you killed him but God raised him up again and he's ascended up to heaven where He's now poured out his Holy Spirit and that's what you're witnessing right now. And as a result of this creative display of God's power and Peter's convicting words, 3,000 people accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior and were baptized that very day.

**Significance for us today:**

**1. God's Word is no longer merely on tablets of stone but is written on our hearts by God.**

**Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV)** *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

**2. God's message of salvation is for everyone (Jews and Gentiles alike).**

That was God's message from the prophet Joel that Peter quotes from. The first line and last lines particularly capture this message.

**Acts 2:17 (NIV)** *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people."*

**Acts 2:21 (NIV)** *"And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Not just the super spiritual or those who faithfully keep God's laws. God's message of hope and salvation is for everyone.

**3. All of God's people have the Holy Spirit living inside of them to enable them to become more like Jesus.**

**4. Everyone is invited to accept Jesus Christ, have their sins taken away, and enter into a personal forever relationship with God.**

Turn to Hebrews 12:18ff. The writer of Hebrews is writing to primarily Jews who have accepted Jesus Christ but are now considering going back to their roots of Judaism and trying to earn God's favor through keeping the Law given by God. And so throughout this book, the author is trying to argue that Christ is far superior to everything and everyone, including the Law of the Old Testament given at Mt. Sinai.

Read **Hebrews 12:18-29**. God invites everyone of us to leave the fear that gripped the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai when God descended from heaven onto the mountain with thundering's and lightning and raging fire and instead come to the God of Mt. Zion (which is representative of the heavenly dwelling of God). From the God sitting on Mt. Zion we are offered God's love, forgiveness and grace. However, in the closing statement – if you choose to return to Mt. Sinai there is a God who is a consuming fire waiting for you there.

**God is Fire sermon**  
**5/20/18**

Today is P \_\_\_\_\_

also known as S \_\_\_\_\_ or Feast of W \_\_\_\_\_

What other key events happened on Shavuot?

**God's association with fire:**

1. God appeared to Moses in \_\_\_\_\_ (Ex. 3:2-3)
2. God lead Israelites out of Egypt with a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21)
3. God appeared in the \_\_\_\_\_ as fire (Num. 9:15-16)
4. Daniel saw a vision of God's throne ablaze with flames (Daniel 7:9)
5. God descended on Mt. Sinai in a blaze of fire (Exodus 19:18)
6. God rescued David with a consuming \_\_\_\_\_ coming out of His mouth (2 Sam. 22:7-10)
7. Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the Assyrians as a " \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord as a consuming fire." (Isaiah 30:27)
8. According to the Qumran cave scroll, "The Tongues of Fire" tongues of fire would descend on the \_\_\_\_\_

**Significance for us Today:**

1. God's Word is no longer merely on tablets of stone but is written on our \_\_\_\_\_ by God. (Jeremiah 31:33)
2. God's message of salvation is for \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 2:17, 21)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ of God's people have the Holy Spirit living inside of them to enable them to become more like Jesus.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is invited to accept Jesus Christ, have their sins taken away, and enter into a personal forever relationship with God.

**God is Fire sermon**  
**5/20/18**

Today is P \_\_\_\_\_

also known as S \_\_\_\_\_ or Feast of W \_\_\_\_\_

What other key events happened on Shavuot?

**God's association with fire:**

1. God appeared to Moses in \_\_\_\_\_ (Ex. 3:2-3)
2. God lead Israelites out of Egypt with a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21)
3. God appeared in the \_\_\_\_\_ as fire (Num. 9:15-16)
4. Daniel saw a vision of God's throne ablaze with flames (Daniel 7:9)
5. God descended on Mt. Sinai in a blaze of fire (Exodus 19:18)
6. God rescued David with a consuming \_\_\_\_\_ coming out of His mouth (2 Sam. 22:7-10)
7. Isaiah prophesied the destruction of the Assyrians as a " \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord as a consuming fire." (Isaiah 30:27)
8. According to the Qumran cave scroll, "The Tongues of Fire" tongues of fire would descend on the \_\_\_\_\_

**Significance for us Today:**

1. God's Word is no longer merely on tablets of stone but is written on our \_\_\_\_\_ by God. (Jeremiah 31:33)
2. God's message of salvation is for \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 2:17, 21)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ of God's people have the Holy Spirit living inside of them to enable them to become more like Jesus.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is invited to accept Jesus Christ, have their sins taken away, and enter into a personal forever relationship with God.