



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Dreams, Visions, and
Prophecies
(*Pentecost*, pp. 21-27)

Suggested Article:

📖 Revising Memories at
Pentecost
(*Pentecost*, pp. 79-82)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful
for your personal or group
study? Please send your
suggestions to
Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2015 Institute for Faith and Learning

Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies

The outpouring of God's Spirit "upon all flesh" at Pentecost would lead us to expect Spirit encounters that resemble it in the rest of Luke's story. What should we think when his reports of dreams, visions, and fulfilled prophecies in the believing community do not live up to those high expectations?

Prayer

Father, through your Holy Spirit
you create us and sustain us.

Open our hearts and minds to your presence now
as your Spirit moves among us.

Transform our minds
that we may see your great salvation in one another.

We pray in the name of Jesus,
and through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:14-36

Reflection

When people are "in Christ," Paul says, "there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Indeed, Peter's sermon interpreting the marvelous events at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) reads like an introductory tour of the "new creation" for those people on that day.

Peter prophetically transforms the *place* where the people live. Pentecost (or Festival of Booths) traditionally harked back to Mt. Sinai where the people were formed by covenant with God, but Peter attends instead to the upstairs room and David's tomb nearby as the intersection of the Spirit's power. Jesus was truly the Messiah from David's line; yet he is not buried like David, but is risen from the dead and enthroned as king in heaven (Acts 2:29-35). And Peter employs Joel's prophecy to transform the *time* when the people live. Bill Shiell notes, "Instead of reminiscing about times gone by, Peter said a new day of the Lord had dawned: sons and daughters could prophesy, men and women could preach, senior adults and young adults could see visions, and anyone who called on Jesus could be saved (2:16-21). A harvest festival designed to remind them of receiving God's law was transformed into a day to empower them by the Spirit."

Throughout Acts, we catch glimpses of Peter's prophecy being fulfilled in the believing community. For example, dramatic visions and dreams comfort Stephen (Acts 7:54-56), convict Paul on his way to Damascus (9:3-7; cf. 22:6-11; 26:12-18), guide Ananias to heal and instruct Paul (9:10-16), and then direct Paul's ministry (16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11). Likewise, Cornelius and Peter's visions in Acts 10 lead to a "Second Pentecost" when the Spirit is "poured out" on Cornelius's household (10:40), and later they convince the church leaders in Jerusalem of those Gentiles' conversions (11:1-18 and 15:6-21).

Yet, Alicia Myers notes, the reports of God's Spirit moving among those early believers do not live up to the high expectations established by Peter's sermon. Luke recounts how the Spirit



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2015 Institute for Faith and Learning

miraculously guides the Judean men Stephen, Peter, and Paul, and the Gentile centurion, but prophetic women and slaves are rare in the story. When they do appear, their insights are ridiculed (Acts 12:12-17) and silenced (16:18), or they do not speak at all (21:8-11). Myers wonders what we should make of this *uninclusive* record. Should we expect today outpourings of the Spirit on “all flesh” as Peter foretells, or just the limited experiences in the story as it unfolds?

Myers cautions us to read Luke charitably and in his social context. Compared to others writers of his era, Luke reports relatively positive roles for women and slaves. Myers concludes, “Like Peter, who in Acts 2 certainly could not have fathomed the inclusion of Gentiles that was to come in subsequent chapters, perhaps Luke likewise would be surprised at the fuller realization of God’s declaration in Joel 2 in other chapters of the Christian tradition. Perhaps the confines of his narrative account or vision, or both, led him to emphasize God’s Spirit upon certain Judean, freeborn men. Nevertheless, in so doing, Luke leaves plenty of room for the telling of God’s involvement with humanity outside his own plot—which is, after all, only one story in the midst of so many others both inside the New Testament and beyond it.”

Study Questions

1. How is Joel’s prophecy (quoted and expanded in Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:17-18) fulfilled in the events of Pentecost? How is it fulfilled through Stephen (Acts 7:54-56), Peter (10:9-29 and 11:1-18), and Paul (9:3-7; 16:6-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; and 23:11) in the rest of the story in the book of Acts?
2. Compare the stories of the slave girl, Rhoda (Acts 12:6-17), the unnamed slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit (16:16-19), and the four unmarried/virgin daughters of Philip (21:8-11). In each case, is there reason to be disappointed with their small roles in the narrative?

How would you respond to someone who concluded from these stories that women will always play only a small role in the Holy Spirit’s activity?

3. “Preaching still has the power to revise memories of a place and commission people in the Spirit’s power today,” Bill Shiell writes. How can preaching reshape our appreciation of cultural holidays—like Mother’s Day, school graduations, or Memorial Day—that often compete with Pentecost Sunday?
4. How does David Music’s hymn “A Mighty Rushing Wind” depict the fulfillment of God’s promise “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:16)?

Departing Hymn: “A Rushing, Mighty Wind”

Dreams, Visions, and Prophecies

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand Peter's interpretation of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
2. To consider how the promise of dreams, visions, and prophecies is fulfilled at Pentecost and in the rest of the story in Acts.
3. To discuss how your congregation can celebrate cultural recognitions – such as Mother's Day, High School Graduation, and Memorial Day – in light of the promise of Pentecost.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Pentecost (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "A Rushing, Mighty Wind" is located on pp. 67-69 of *Pentecost*.

Begin with a Story

When I was a child, my family often vacationed at Winona Lake, IN, a small resort town that is a center of evangelical Christianity. On muggy July nights I would dig my bare feet into the cool sawdust floor of the Billy Sunday Tabernacle (named for the famous evangelist who had settled in the town) and sing inspiring gospel songs by Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932), like "Send the Light," "I Stand Amazed in the Presence," and "Since Jesus Came into My Heart," and his haunting tune for "His Eye is On the Sparrow." Gabriel had been a prolific musician in his day; he is said to have written or composed over 7000 songs, many of them for Billy Sunday revivals.

An exuberant refrain from Gabriel's song "Pentecostal Power" sticks in my memory: "Lord, send the old-time power, the Pentecostal power! Thy floodgates of blessing on us throw open wide!" As the congregation's fervor soared high, this prayer appeared to be answered. But later, when everyone's emotions 'came back down to earth,' there was a spiritual power brown-out: problems remained and there was plenty of spiritual work to do.

In this study, Alicia Myers traces a similar pattern from Pentecost to the ensuing years in the book of Acts: as the story unfolds, our soaring expectations are only partially fulfilled, and we wonder where the 'Pentecostal power' went with regard to women (and to slaves). How should we deal with our disappointment?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide aloud.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 2:14-36 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 interprets the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: Peter says this event transforms how the people should see their time and place, and portends continuing activity by the Spirit in their lives. Bill Shiell and Alicia Myers draw lessons for today from two aspects of Peter's sermon;

you may emphasize one aspect or the other, or combine them as in the study guide. Bill Shiell is struck by how Peter revises and deepens the peoples' collective memories of Mt. Sinai and of David's city, Jerusalem, in light of the Spirit's coming; Shiell suggests preaching today can do the same for our cultural recognitions that often compete on the church's calendar with Pentecost. Alicia Myers notes the gap between Peter's expectation of prophecy by all sorts of believers and the muted voices of women and slaves in the rest of the story in the book of Acts. From this she draws lessons on how we should read the book of Acts, and other Scripture, as guiding practices in the Church today.

Study Questions

1. Peter emphasizes that the Spirit will enable believers to prophesize – to have divine insight and speak truthfully – about events in the world. Alicia Myers notes that he adds a second “and they will prophesy” in Acts 2:18, which does not appear in Joel. At Pentecost this is fulfilled, she notes, among “the mixed gender gathering of Spirit-filled believers, as well as the diversity of the ‘Judeans and proselytes’ who have been enabled to hear these words.”

Assign individuals or small groups to read several of the passages about Stephen, Peter, and Paul, and summarize how the Holy Spirit guides them through prophetic dreams and visions. Emphasize how the Spirit continues to guide these leaders in miraculous ways.

2. Form three small groups to study the diminished roles of dreams, visions, and prophecy in the stories of Rhoda (Acts 12:6-17), the slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit (16:16-19), and the daughters of Philip (21:8-11). Rhoda's report/prophesy is ridiculed. The slave girl is silenced and disappears from the story (in part, surely, because her insight was not given by the Holy Spirit). Philip's daughters are introduced with honor, but are immediately upstaged by another prophet Agabus, a Judean man.

It would be wrong to conclude that these stories show how women *ought* to be valued in the believing community. “Perhaps the confines of his narrative account or vision, or both, led Luke to emphasize God's Spirit upon certain Judean, freeborn men. Nevertheless, in so doing, Luke leaves plenty of room for the telling of God's involvement with humanity outside his own plot – which is, after all, only one story in the midst of so many others both inside the New Testament and beyond it,” Myers explains. “Acknowledging the continued activity of God's Spirit even in this day, we too proclaim the reality of the last days when we offer witness and when we listen to the prophetic voices of those on the margins.”

3. “Pentecost gives us the opportunity to go with people to the places they remember – their families, friends, schools, and communities – and incorporate these into worship by showing how the Spirit empowers us to transform those places,” Bill Shiell writes. “If Pentecost Sunday falls on Memorial Day, we might ask a veteran to share a testimony of God's alternative peace in the midst of perpetual war. When commissioning high school graduates, we might share stories of graduates who spent a gap year serving the poor. If it is Mother's Day, we might ask a family to share a story of serving on mission together.” This approach avoids two mistakes: either “surrendering” the calendar and sermon to the culture, or completely ignoring people's significant remembrances as we cling to the liturgical calendar.
4. David Music employs the two emblems of the Spirit's coming – the sound of a rushing wind and the tongues of fire on the disciples' heads (Acts 2:2-3) – as metaphors for all believers' prophetic speech: “Lord, make our breath a wind and let our tongues be fire, / and as at that first Pentecost your people's lives inspire.” Encourage group members to recall times when they prophesized – i.e., they drew insight from God's Word to speak boldly about events in their families, at work, in the congregation, or in the wider community.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.