

Acts 2:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

Analysis

The 'cloven tongues like as of fire' (Greek: diamerizomenai glōssai hōsei pyros) represent the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence throughout Scripture (Exodus 3:2, Isaiah 6:6-7), while the divided tongues signify the Spirit's distribution to each believer individually. This fulfills both John the Baptist's prophecy that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16) and Christ's promise of the Comforter's coming. The Spirit's visible appearance authenticated the birth of the Church and empowered the apostles for their worldwide mission.

Historical Context

Occurred on the Jewish feast of Pentecost (Shavuot), fifty days after Passover, circa AD 30 or 33. This feast commemorated God's giving of the Law at Sinai, where fire also appeared (Exodus 19:18), creating a deliberate parallel between the Old and New Covenants. The 120 disciples were gathered in Jerusalem's upper room, likely near the Temple where thousands of Jewish pilgrims had assembled for the festival.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the imagery of fire challenge you to embrace both the refining and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. What parallels do you see between God's giving of the Law at Sinai and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ὥφθησαν αὐτῶν διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ¹
And there appeared of them cloven tongues like as
G2532 G3700 G846 G1266 G1100 G5616

πυρός ἐκάθισεν τε ἐφ' ἔνα ἐκαστον αὐτῶν
of fire it sat and upon G1520 each of them
G4442 G2523 G5037 G1909 G1538 G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 3:11 (Parallel theme): I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

Jeremiah 23:29 (Parallel theme): Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?

Acts 2:4 (Parallel theme): And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Genesis 11:6 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Luke 24:32 (Parallel theme): And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

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