When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:1–41 (NIV)

SUMMARY OF EVENT
A group of Christians gathered together in a room during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, and while they were assumedly praying, the Holy Spirit came upon them in the form of fire and they spoke in languages they had never learned. Since it was a time of festival, many Jews from the diaspora gathered in Jerusalem and some of them drew near to better understand what they heard and observed, marveling that Galilean Jews were speaking in various diaspora languages. Peter addresses those open to hearing the gospel, and his speech (summarized in Acts 2) draws on Old Testament Scripture to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Holy Spirit was a promise they could receive as well. The result was that 3,000 people put their faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND (Joel 2:28–32; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 36:27)
Pentecost is the name for the Feast of Weeks because it occurred on the 50th day after Passover. Pentecost was originally a harvest festival that celebrated God’s provision (Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15–21; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:9–12). Various Jewish and Christian traditions speculate that Pentecost was somehow associated with the renewal of the covenant with Noah, and that at the giving of the Law at Sinai the Israelites heard God speaking through the fire in their own language.

Note that the imagery of fire and wind in Acts 2 is similar to other theophanies (manifest appearances of God) in the Old Testament (Exod. 19:18; Job 38:1; 2 Sam. 22:16; 1 Kings 19:11; Ezek. 13:13). By the first century, Jews associated the giving of the Spirit with the end times (Acts 1:6), which also included God’s judgment on evil in the world. This is why in Joel, which is quoted at length in Peter’s speech, is primarily about “the day of the Lord,” which stood for God’s coming in judgment.

NEW TESTAMENT PARALLELS (Matt. 3:11; Acts 4:31; 10:46; 19:6; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12–14)
What happened at Pentecost was a direct fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to his followers that the Father would send the Spirit after Jesus left them (Matt. 3:11; John 14–15; Acts 1:6). It is important not to separate what happens in ch. 2 from the details of ch. 1, namely, the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. This protects the church from separating the person and work of the Holy Spirit from that of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is in some places called the Spirit of Christ (Acts 16:7; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11). The Spirit is given to further carry out the purposes of Jesus Christ.

WHAT IT MEANS: POWER FOR HOLINESS, POWER FOR MISSION
God came first in the person of Jesus Christ and then in the Holy Spirit, not to judge the world, but in order to expand the number and character of people who get to participate in and announce his coming kingdom.

Pentecost is also regarded by many as the birth of the Church. At Pentecost God poured out his Spirit on his people in a permanent way, whereas in the Old Testament the Spirit was given for specific, temporary tasks (Exod. 31:3; Num. 11:17, 25–29; 1 Sam 10–11; 2 Kings 2:9; 3:13–15; Judges 6:34; 15:14). In keeping with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the purpose of God’s pouring out his Spirit, Pentecost means that God himself provided the means by which people will be able to keep the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus. In other words, the Holy Spirit was given because humans cannot by their own might meet God’s standard. Sanctification is a grace of God accomplished by his Spirit who indwells and empowers Christians. This theme of holiness is confirmed by the descriptive affirmation of the believers’ resulting fellowship in Acts 2:42–47.

But furthermore, the cross-cultural themes present in the rest of Acts confirm the theme of empowerment for mission. God’s Spirit is given to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Pentecost, therefore, is a fulfillment of God’s original promise to Abraham that all the people of the world will be blessed through him (Gen. 12:1–3). The theme of supernatural empowerment to reach people with the gospel ties together this event with the rest of the mission of God in Acts. The Church can be partners with God in his mission to the world because of the residing power of the Spirit, now offered to the Church.

“Because the Son returns to the Father with his humanity, it partakes in the Father’s infinite reconciliation, which the Holy Spirit can diffuse.” (Eugene F. Rogers Jr., After the Spirit)