

# PENTECOST: WORDS AND WORLDS



Miller Summer Youth Institute  
at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

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# INTRODUCTION

This study is intended to guide a discussion about Pentecost.

You may choose to use it with a Sunday School class, Bible study, small group, or for your own personal devotions.

This study will begin with a reading of Acts 2. The guide then explores the relative scope of the geographic area represented in the Pentecost story compared to the United States and finally asks participants to think about regional dialects and their significance.

If you are using this with a group, you may wish to have handouts of the regional dialect activity and either handouts or a way to project the maps.

There are discussion questions with every section. If your group engages well in discussion, you may not have time to move through all of the questions.

If your group resists conversation, you may choose to have them journal about the questions privately or discuss in pairs to help them engage with the lesson.

We hope you find this guide useful! Let us know how you use it at [SYI@PTS.edu](mailto:SYI@PTS.edu)



# PENTECOST: SCRIPTURE

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Acts 2.1-6 (KJV)

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

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

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

# PENTECOST: SCRIPTURE

Acts 2.7-12 (KJV)

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?



# PENTECOST: SCRIPTURE

## Discussion Questions:

What is your earliest memory of reading or hearing this passage?

Have you ever celebrated Pentecost in church? If so, how?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where people were speaking a language you didn't understand? If so, what was the situation? How did it feel?

How many languages do you speak? If you speak more than one, how did you learn them?

# GEOGRAPHY OF PENTECOST



# GEOGRAPHY OF PENTECOST

One of the most striking things about the story of Pentecost is this sudden compatibility between cultures and languages.

People from wildly different backgrounds are able to understand one another in their “own tongues.”

Often, when we read this, the countries listed blend together, becoming not individual locations but a singular list. We read it not as more than a dozen different places but a collective “all over.”

Since people are rarely well versed in the geopolitical map of the first century, such a shortcut is probably a helpful tool. Nonetheless, it can be helpful to bear in mind some kind of map that demonstrates the sheer breadth that this passage covers. From “Arabia” in the southeast to Rome in the northwest, the Pentecost story covers quite a bit of geography.



## Approximate Scope of Locations Listed in Pentecost Story

# GEOGRAPHY OF PENTECOST

With this scope in mind, it becomes apparent that the people who gathered were from very different places. It seems obvious that they would feel a degree of clash when they gathered together, not only culturally but linguistically.

Naturally people from such distant lands and such different places would speak with different words and experience the world in different ways.

Which brings up an interesting question. For those reading this story in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what would a similar geographic scope look like? How would that map compare to our world?

The first step is to look at a map of North America.

For the second step, to get a sense of scale, a helpful exercise is simply to overlay the map of Pentecost onto the map of North America.

A helpful third step is to consider a map of the United States, and a fourth and final step is to compare that with the map of Pentecost.





# Step 1: North America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century







## Step 2: Scope of Pentecost Compared to North America





## Step 3: The United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century





## Step 4: Comparing Pentecost with the United States



# GEOGRAPHY OF PENTECOST

The scope of the Pentecost story comes into focus with comparisons like this. On the one hand, it becomes apparent that the event covered quite an expanse.

The people present at Pentecost came from places not really any farther apart than Orlando and Seattle, or San Diego and Boston.

Discussion Questions:

In overlaying the maps, how did the comparison match up with your expectations?

What is the furthest you have ever traveled? What was it like being that far from home?

What's the hardest thing about being away from home?

What's the best part about coming back?

How does this comparison change or inform your understanding of the Pentecost story?



# LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

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Though the geography of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is broader than the map of Pentecost, there is much less linguistic diversity.

But there is more diversity than we often realize.

The United States, having no official language, nonetheless currently relies primarily on English. But that English isn't quite as uniform as we might think. Different regions develop their own accents and dialects over time. Projects like the Atlas of North American English have attempted to categorize the wide variety of dialects in North America.

One way to consider the breadth of regional dialects is to consider terms specific to different areas of the country.

On the next page, you'll find a list of terms specific to various regions of the United States. This list is not scientific or exhaustive but demonstrates the diversity of dialects within the same language. See if you can guess the definition of each term, and for bonus points, try to identify the region of each. Try without an Internet search first. Once you've answered all you can on your own, feel free to look up the answers.



# LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Term	Definition	Region(s)
Alligator Pear		
Bawlmerese		
Berm		
Blue norther		
Bodega		
Boomer		
Bubbler		
Cabbage Night		
Commode		
Fireboard		
Grip		
Hoosier		
Hootenanny		
Hotdish		
Mango		
Pokelogan		
Pole Cat		
Potsy		
Quahog		
Red Up		
Sliding pond		
Schnickelfritz		
Speedie		
Yat		
Yinzer		
Yooper		



# LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Term	Definition	Region(s)
Alligator Pear	Avacado	New Orleans
Bawlmerese	Baltimore Dialect/Accent	Baltimore
Berm	Shoulder of a Road	PA, Ohio, WV
Blue norther	Fast moving cold front	Texas
Bodega	Corner Grocery Store / Convenience Mart	New York City
Boomer	Small Red Squirrel	Appalachia
Bubbler	Water fountain	Wisconsin
Cabbage Night	The night before Halloween	Vermont
Commode	Toilet	Centra United States
Fireboard	Mantel	Appalachia
Grip	Small suitcase or overnight bag	Orleans
Hoosier	Person from Indiana	In Indiana Indiana
Hootenanny	Thing with forgotten name, Whatchamacallit.	Midwest, Appalachia
Hotdish	Casserole	Midwest
Mango	Bell Pepper	Midwest
Pokelogan	Marsh	Norther New England
Pole Cat	Skunk	South
Potsy	Hopscotch	New York City
Quahog	Clam	New England
Red Up	A Light Cleaning	Southwestern PA
Sliding pond	Playground Slide	New York City
Schnickelfritz	Micscheivous Child, Rascal	Central PA
Speedie	A kind of meat sandwich	Central New York
Yat	New Orleans Dialect/Accent	New York City
Yinzer	Person from Pittsburgh area	Pittsburgh
Yooper	Person from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan	Michigan



# LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Discussion Questions:

Which of the terms did you know? How did you know them?

What are some of the terms or linguistic features of your hometown?

How does it feel to hear someone use familiar language?

Often, regional dialects can be a source of pride and a sign of belonging. How might you be able to identify someone from your hometown?

Have you ever heard someone speaking in your accent while traveling? What does it feel like to hear the sound of home when you're far away?

How do you think the people at Pentecost felt when they heard their own languages?

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