Acts Chapter 2 v 1- 21 B

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[0:00] If you have a Bible to hand, then please would you turn to Acts on chapter 2, to the record that we have of that amazing event on the day of Pentecost, when God poured out His Spirit upon His church in that wonderful blessing, and the results and the fruit of that were those saving of many on that first day, and many more besides.

We often read of earthquakes taking place around the world, bringing all sorts of disaster, death often, of course, and terror, but many of the problems with earthquakes are not the initial quake, but aftershocks that can happen not just days later, weeks later, months later, and even tremors can go on for hundreds of years.

When we look at the day of Pentecost, we find really an occasion being written about, which was a gigantic spiritual earthquake, which shook the whole world and spread out from that place, so that just a matter of years later on, those who were engaged and involved in the day of Pentecost were accused of turning the world upside down.

It's like a great huge rock thrown into a lake, where waves flow out, spreading to the very farthest edges of the shore.

And so the book of Acts itself, which begins really with this event, this earthquake event, which is Pentecost. The book of Acts records over the course of 30 years, those ripples, those waves spreading out, beginning in that tiny little backwater of the Roman Empire, Jerusalem, spreading out throughout the whole known world.

[1:57] So that by the time we get to the end of the book, we find the very heart of the Roman Empire itself is feeling the effects, the aftershocks of the Holy Spirit changing, transforming lives and being marvelously transformed.

And some of those aftershocks of the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost were felt in the church again. So though there's this once for all, this unique event of the Holy Spirit being poured out in this way on the day of Pentecost, that once for all blessing, which was the giving of the Spirit in full measure.

God had given His Spirit again and again to His people throughout the Old Testament, read of David and others, and the Spirit of God coming upon them, judges and people like Samson and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

But those were periods of time. They were just for particular individuals, for particular events and occasions. But the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was for all the church for all time in full measure.

It's an unrepeatable event. And yet what we find as we read through Acts, there are occasions where there are aftershocks, the Spirit coming in great power again upon the church.

[3:11] So if you just turn for a moment to Acts in chapter 4 and verse 31, after some of the disciples had been arrested and they had been persecuted, they'd been told they mustn't speak in the name of Jesus.

In fact, what happens is that they come together and they pray and something wonderful happens in verse 31. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. These are the same Christians who received the Spirit of God, same believers on the day of Pentecost and many more besides, and receiving the Spirit again in wonderful power.

Turn over to chapter 10 and verse 44. We see again an outpouring of God's Spirit in a marvellous way with Cornelius and his household, his family.

When they heard the gospel, Peter comes to them after an angel has facilitated and moved and God has worked to bring the gospel to them. Verse 27, while talking with him, sorry, I beg your pardon, wrong verse there.

[4:18] 34, thank you. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers, that's the Jewish believers, who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues, as we saw that, foreign languages and praising God.

And the wonderful thing is this, that these aftershocks that we read about in the book of Acts have continued through the history of the church over the past 2,000 years or so. Particular times, not when the whole church, but when gatherings or groups of people or particular nations have experienced God's Holy Spirit transforming them, visiting them with great power.

Now these occasions are often spoken of and called revivals. The most famous of them, the most influential of them, was the great evangelical awakening of the mid-18th century.

People like George Whitefield, John Wesley, others as well, around the nation of the UK and spreading out from that, saw God work in amazing ways so that the church, which was in a very poor state, grew in tens of thousands of people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there's been others as well, smaller revivals that have taken place. The Welsh revival of 110 years or so ago, the revival in the Outer Hebrides, just in the 1940s and 50s, and other places too, East Anglia in the 1920s, and around the world these things are taking place.

[5:57] God is at work in this way. These Pentecostal aftershocks. And I would put it to you, dear friends, that this morning as we celebrate, as we think about Pentecost, as we think about God sending His Spirit upon the church, as we read of what He did there, then the great need for the United Kingdom in which we live, the great need for Whidbey, this town, and for this local church as well, is that we experience and know our outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, our reviving.

The question, of course, is why aren't we experiencing that? Why is it that God isn't working in such a powerful way in the United Kingdom as He's done before, or in this church?

It may well be, of course, that one of the reasons that we do not know God's blessing in this way is because we don't see any great need of the Holy Spirit to come upon us in reviving power.

We're quite comfortably well off, aren't we, here in Whidbey? And in the UK, really, in one sense, almost every town has a church of some sort or another. Is there any great need or urgency that God should do something like this in our day and generation?

I want to take just a few moments, first of all, to, if I need to, convince you of the great need we have for God to revive His church here and in the United Kingdom by His Holy Spirit, and also to look at ways in which God prepares His people for revival and hopefully stir us to have something more of that faith, that desire, and that trust that God will, even in our day, send His Holy Spirit. [7:46] So let's just look for a moment, because what I want to do is compare the state of the United Kingdom here in 2016 with Jerusalem in the year 33 AD, when Pentecost took place.

I want us to look at similarities that are there between God's people and the world in that situation and today, because often we look back and say, well, of course, the world is so different, it's changed so much, but ultimately, apart from the outward trimmings, as it were, of life, we are just the same people and we have just the same great need.

Look at the church on that day of Pentecost. What was the church like? Well, the church, we know, was very, very small. We're told earlier on in chapter 1 that there was a group of about 120 believers who were gathered together.

They were very small, they were very weak, because Jesus says in verse 8 of the chapter, you will receive power. The reason they needed power, because they were weak.

They were just this tiny group, 120. You say, well, that's a good-sized church, but that's all there was. The true believers in the Lord Jesus, that's all there was.

[9:01] And they were true believers. They were those, many of them who'd been followers of Jesus in his lifetime, many who had trusted in him as the Messiah and the Savior, many who'd received of his Spirit already, giving them faith to trust and believe in him.

On that day that Jesus met with his disciples, after his resurrection, he breathed on them and said, receive the Spirit. But they lacked power. They lacked something.

They needed something more. In spite of Jesus' leadership, in spite of his discipleship of them, they were those who had very little spiritual understanding. When Jesus spoke to them earlier on, in chapter 1 and verse 6, he spoke to them about the Spirit coming.

They said to him and asked, Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel? They still had a mixed-up mind, a mixed-up understanding of Jesus, of his mission, of the work of the church, of many things.

They were very ignorant. Now what about the church in the United Kingdom in our own day and generation, even our own fellowship here? Can we not recognize that we are small?

[10:09] The church in the UK is small. It is lacking in resources. It is a minority religion. The truth is that we are in decline in the United Kingdom.

The church is constantly hemorrhaging people, buildings, resources, numbers. And isn't it true as well that in the United Kingdom as a whole, even those who are Christians are often very ignorant, mistaught, lacking understanding of the things of God, lacking in godliness, unrighteous, divided, disunited.

These things affect us as well as a church in the UK. Now that's not a very comfortable truth, is it? It's not very comfortable for us to recognize and to see just what a poor spiritual state the church here and the church in the UK is in.

We are not, we have not got anything to write home about. We have got nothing to celebrate, if I can put it that way, about the spiritual state of our nation and of our churches.

Like the church in Acts, small, weak, ignorant. But then look at the world into which God poured out his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

[11:30] Look at the world in which Peter and the other disciples were living in. It was an evil world, a wicked world, a godless world. If you read through the book of Acts, you see brutal violence, murder, gross occultism and witchcraft, slavery.

We read about all sorts of false religions and false gods. In Athens, Paul, as he walks around, we're told, was distressed in his spirit because he saw so much idolatry, false religion and people engaged in it.

This was not a world that was seeking God in the first century AD. This was not a world which was looking for the truth or seeking for righteousness.

This was a world that was on a one-way path to self-destruction. Remember, this is the Roman Empire, which is recorded in those books, the fall of the Roman Empire.

It was on its way down. In 400 years or less, it would be utterly, utterly destroyed. The UK, in which we live, is on that same steep slide into every form of evil, wickedness, false religion.

[12:43] All sorts of blasphemy is against God, a rise in the occult. And surely the end result must be for our nation that we will end up in the same way.

Every nation that has turned away from God, every nation, every empire that has turned away from God and sought its own way and has made its own laws and ridden roughshod over God's commandments has ended in the same way.

Where is the British Empire? Where is the Ottoman Empire? Where is the Roman Empire? All gone. All destroyed.

Self-destroyed. This country of the UK is not a Christian country. It never has been a Christian country. It's been more influenced by Christianity in the past than it is now, but it's never been a Christian country.

It has always been a country which is mixed in the sense that it has had believers and unbelievers. And though we turn and look as we go through our villages around about and we see in every single one of them a church or a chapel, though many are closed, though many are turned into all sorts of houses and other things as well, we live in a world, in a nation, which has very few believers in it.

[14:01] All sorts of sinfulness is taught even in the church and accepted. All sorts of wickedness is done in the name of God. Though many people, if a poll was taken, would say that they are Christian or believe in God, the reality is that that is not the case.

See, even in Jerusalem, there were all these people who were told were God-fearing people. There was a lot of religion, a lot of religion in Jerusalem, a lot of religion in the world of Paul's day and of Peter's day, just as there's a lot of religion, but that religion was dead.

That religion was false. We're told in verse 5, they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews. They were there because it was part of God's celebration of the Feast of Weeks that he'd commanded.

They'd come from all around the world for this great occasion, this great gathering. They were far more religious, frankly, that way than the people of Whitby or the people of the UK, but they still needed to be saved.

They still needed to hear the gospel. They still needed the Spirit of God to come upon them and bring them into faith in Christ. They were still bound for hell, just as every other person in their known world and beyond was as well at that time.

[15:18] Religion could not save them. Religion cannot save this world, this nation, this town. And we see that when they're presented with their great need of Christ, there's a real despair amongst them, isn't there?

Verse 37, we're told that when Peter had finished speaking to them, when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

They were convinced of their sin. They were desperate. They knew that what they had was not enough. that unless the gospel was received and believed that none of them would be saved, all of them would be lost, all of them would be under the judgment of God.

The incredible thing is that in that day, that day of Pentecost, up until that moment when God poured out His Spirit, out of all the people in the world, we don't know how many millions that was, maybe even a billion, only 120 were saved.

Only 120. This tiny, tiny number of people in the vast majority of unbelief, false religion.

[16:34] The truth is this, dear friends, whether we like it or not, that in the United Kingdom, there are less than 8% Christians today meeting in churches.

And I'm being very generous when saying there's 8%, because as you know and I know, there are many who would go to church, maybe you're one of them, many who call themselves even Christian, but have not known the saving power of God in their lives, have not trusted in Christ.

That means even if there are 8% people in the United Kingdom who have trusted the Lord Jesus and are born again of His Spirit, that means there are over 50 million people in the United Kingdom today that are going to hell, that today do not know Christ, that today are lost.

50 million, that's just in the UK. Let's think about that in the world. There's 7 billion people. Therefore, there are billions and billions and billions.

Now, I've painted a pretty bleak picture, haven't I? But the reality is that it's a very true picture of what we know the situation in our nation is like and in our world.

[17:46] But before we sink too far into this slough of despond and wring our hands and shake our heads and go home weeping, because that's not the end of the sermon, you'll either be glad or sorry to hear, let us remember what God did at Pentecost.

That's the situation before Pentecost. That's the situation before God poured out His Spirit. Look at Pentecost, that tiny group of weak Christians who are in the face of evil, wickedness, godliness, and false religion.

God uses and works in and through so that they are those who turn the world upside down and they see 3,000 of that great crowd trusting Christ and converted.

Now, this is what we long for. This is what we need. This is what our desperate prayer must be for Whitby, for this nation in which we live, yes, for the world.

That God would send that aftershock, that He would send His Spirit in that wave again of blessing. Why should He? Why did He do what He did then?

[18:54] That's the question. Why did He send the Spirit at Pentecost? Was it just a random act? No, it wasn't. Let's remember that Pentecost was the fulfillment of God's promise.

God sent His Spirit because He had promised to send His Spirit. Jesus Himself would promise that just earlier on, just several days earlier. Chapter 1, verse 4.

Jesus says, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 8, He said to them, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Jesus had promised it. But Jesus had promised it much earlier than that, hadn't He? He'd promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples in John chapter 16.

He said, I've got to leave you now, but it's good that I'm going because then I'll send you another comforter, an advocate, a helper, and I'll send him to you. But actually, the promise of God concerning the pouring out of His Spirit goes back much further than even the words of the Lord Jesus.

[20:01] That's why Peter refers to the promise given to Joel, the prophet. Several hundred years earlier, God had said, In the last days, I will pour out My Spirit on all people.

Peter is saying that what God promised Joel hundreds of years before is fulfilled today. You're seeing what God has promised coming into being. You're seeing God being faithful to His Word and the Spirit coming.

We're living in the last days, the days between Jesus His ascension into heaven and when He comes again. Those last days are the days when God's Spirit is much at work.

And so, when we get to the book of Acts and chapter 2, what's happening here is not God's last attempt. I've sent My Son into the world. They killed Him.

There's only 120 left of these disciples in the church. I don't know what I'm going to do. It looks like everything's going wrong. I'll send My Spirit now. No, that's not how God did it.

[21:02] It's not some last-ditch attempt. It's not God thinking this is plan C or plan D. This is what God had purposed all along in the sending of His Son to accomplish salvation for sinners and then the sending of His Spirit to make that powerful effect of the cross and of His resurrection impact people's lives.

It was always God's plan to work in the way that He did, to send the Spirit so that the church of Jesus Christ may grow and bear fruit to the ends of the earth.

Pentecost came because God promised. Dear friends, we have many promises from the Lord concerning revival and concerning the Spirit of God being given, the Holy Spirit being given to us.

In Luke and chapter 11, Jesus is teaching about prayer and He uses this familiar illustration. Luke 11, verse 11, Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

[22:22] Jesus is speaking to His disciples. He's teaching them about prayer. And what is He teaching them to pray for? He's teaching them to pray for the Holy Spirit. This is the church in Embryo, if I can put it that way.

This is the believers, His disciples. Jesus is saying, ask the Father for the Holy Spirit. He will give him. He's not talking about regeneration here. He's not talking about coming to faith in Christ.

He's talking about revival. He's talking about equipping. He's talking about providing. And when we look through the Old Testament, again and again, we find that God has given promises to His church, to His people, that He will bless them if they will look to Him and speak to Him in prayer.

2 Chronicles chapter 7 is one of the most well-known of those. Verse 14, where God says to Solomon, if my people who call on my name humble themselves, turn from their sins and pray and seek my face, then I will forgive their sin and heal their land.

God knew that days of darkness would come. God knew there would be days of difficulty and hardship, days when the church, His people, would go through a low period. And so again and again, He gave them promises saying, look, when these times come, turn to me.

[23:42] When these things happen, ask me. When we read through the Psalms, we have the very heartbeat of many of God's people crying out to God, looking to God to renew and to bless.

And surely what they say echo the very things that we long for as well. Here's Psalm 80. Then we will not turn away from you.

Revive us and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord Almighty. Make your face shine on us that we may be saved. And Psalm 85, verses 4 and 6.

Restore us again, God our Savior. Put away your displeasure towards us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice?

The need for revival was because God's people had lost their way. That the church had wandered from the truth, that it had given up on God's word, his commandments, his laws.

[24:52] And so the call was to revive us, Lord. To bring us back to yourself. To restore us to the people we are meant to be. God promises these things.

And surely even these desires reflect the very heart and promises of God. But then of course we notice that Pentecost came after much prayer.

God's people were praying. In Acts chapter 1 verse 14, they all joined together constantly in prayer along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.

They were praying. In fact, on the day of Pentecost, it's almost certain they were praying as well. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. What were they doing? Well, whenever they met before, they were praying.

And their prayer was a prayer which was expectant, wasn't it? They had expectant prayer. They believed the promises of Jesus. They believed that he'd said, wait and I'll send the Spirit. And rather than sitting and twiddling their thumbs, they prayed.

[25:54] Lord, you've said you're going to send your Spirit. You've said he's going to come. Please send him now. They prayed with expectancy.

Dear friends, we need to pray with faith. We need to pray believing. The Apostle James, when he writes, he writes about the foolishness of praying without faith.

He says this, verse 6 of chapter 1, when you ask, you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind.

That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. We need to pray with faith, expectant faith, believing faith that God will hear.

But notice as well that it is persevering prayer as well. They didn't just pray once and stop. They kept on praying, praying and praying and praying, asking for God to fulfill his promise.

[26:54] When Jesus gave that promise to them concerning Pentecost, it was on his ascension. 40 days after his resurrection. They had to wait another 10 days before the day of Pentecost came.

How do they feel in those 10 days? Day 1, yes, Jesus has promised, yes, day 1, Jesus has promised he's going to come now. Day 2, yes, it must be day 2.

It wasn't yesterday, so it must be day 2. Day 3, day 4, day 5, day 6. slowly, you can just get that sense, surely, ebbing away. Well, Jesus said he was going to, and it's now a week later.

Dear friends, don't we sometimes stop praying because, well, we've been praying for weeks, months, years, decades. You see, the trouble is, of course, we live in a world of instant, don't we?

Instant coffee, instant communication. Everything is instant. But God is not bound by time. We're bound by time because we live within it.

[28:02] God isn't. To him, one day is a thousand years. He's not in a hurry. He's not in a rush. He's not desperate.

He calls us to wait. But waiting means active praying. Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. Waiting is seeking God. It's looking to God.

It's depending upon God. It's trusting in him. Thirdly, and this is probably something as well which challenges us more than anything else I have to say is we notice it was united prayer.

They prayed together. They prayed together. Yet, prayer doesn't have to be together. Yes, we don't have to pray in a building. We know all that. But they prayed together. As I've said before, there in verse 14, they all joined together constantly in prayer.

On the day of Pentecost, they were all together in one place, almost certainly in prayer. The characteristic of the church from then on was that they met together in prayer. Chapter 2, verse 42, all they devoted themselves, we're told, to prayer.

[29:17] In chapter 12, verse 5, again, they were praying. Whenever they had a need, they prayed together. Chapter 4, verse 24, after Peter and John had been released, what happens? They heard these things.

They raised their voices together in prayer. That's when they had that aftershock, the pouring out of the Spirit on them again. Then, sorry to say it, and this is, you say, well, you know, you should be at the prayer meeting on a Wednesday.

You should be there, dear friends. And there's opportunities for prayer on a Sunday. And even if you can't, you say, well, I can't. Well, meet with somebody else. Make time to pray. Meet with the week, during the week, with somebody else.

Say, let's get together and pray together. Let's pray for our family. Let's pray for our needs. Let's pray for our church. It's a privilege that we have, dear friends, as Christians.

We can pray together. And it's so important that we do. And there's so much, I believe, blessing that we miss out on because we don't. One final thing here.

[30:24] When Pentecost did come, it came with great power, didn't it? It came with great power upon the church and upon the world. The church was transformed because there they are.

They're all speaking in these languages. This is tongues. This is the Spirit of God speaking in tongues. It's speaking in different languages. It's speaking languages to people who do not understand that language which you have yourself.

It's proclaiming the gospel. Its only purpose is for that, to make the gospel known. But they're changed, aren't they? They're changed because though they had faith, they were still hiding away in the upper room.

They still were not out in the streets speaking of Jesus. They still were weak and frail and worried. But here, when the Spirit of God comes upon them, the church is transformed. They are suddenly out in the streets and they are preaching of Christ and proclaiming the gospel.

And from then on, the church grows. From then on, the church is different. It's not that they just simply felt better about themselves. God sent His Holy Spirit so you can be happy.

[31:28] No. Not that they were more prosperous. God sent His Holy Spirit so they could have more finances, more money. No, God sent His Spirit to empower, to empower His church to dynamic effect, to empower and equip His people to witness and to live for Him in a world so that the world stands up or sits up and takes notice.

Why are you a Christian, dear friends? Why am I? Why has Jesus saved us and left us in the world? Why hasn't He saved us and taken us straight to heaven? For one reason, that we might be light and salt in this world, that we might be His witnesses, that we might be those who speak and live and talk and show the reality and the power that Jesus is alive.

And we can't do that without the Holy Spirit's help. We can't do that without His power. We are here, dear friends, living in a dying world as dying men and women preaching an undying gospel.

The world around us is desperate. The world around us is empty. The world around us is lost. The world around us is crying out to be saved.

They don't know it. They don't recognize it. They think they're all fine and dandy, but deep down in their hearts they know that there is something that is wrong. There is something that is not right. There is something that needs to be sorted and they look here and there trying to find something to sort that out, trying to answer the questions of life and they always come back disappointed.

[33:04] And one of the great tragedies surely of our generation has been that when the world has looked to the church, the church has had nothing to say or the church has had something wrong to say.

Be good. Get baptized. Take communion. Go to confession. Wear a cross. Whatever it may be. Do these things and you will be okay.

When ultimately the world needs the church to say this, you are a sinner. God judges sin. He sent a saviour for you. And though we do feel weak and we are small and we think, well, what's the point?

We've done it again and again and we'll be doing it again and again in the summer. Why bother when people don't pay attention? Dear friends, we do need the Holy Spirit. But God's desire and promise is to give him to us.

in answer to prayer. Even something of this power that he showed at Pentecost. It's the greatest need we have as a local church, as churches in the UK and in the world.

[34:11] Our greatest need, dear friends, is God's Spirit to come upon us. He'll deal with the problems that we have, our divisions, our foibles, our faults, the way we keep standing on one another's toes.

He'll deal with that. We'll become more gracious and forgiving as we stand on more people's toes. He'll help us. So can I lay before you a challenge and to myself as well.

each day will you ask God to send his Holy Spirit in revival upon the church and upon the nation.

Let's pray together now. We thank you, our God and Father, that your ways are not our ways, that you work in your own way, time, power.

We thank you, our Lord, our God, that you are at work and have always been at work in this world. We thank you for your goodness and grace to us as a church because, oh Lord, we wouldn't even be here except that it's your power that's sustained and kept.

[35:28] You're the one who brings the church into being. You're the one who takes the church on and we as Christians, Lord, we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be knowing you, following you, trusting you, except that you have done the work in us.

Lord, we cry to you again. We pray again. Continue your work and increase your work where we have put handicaps in the way of your work, where we have doubted, where we have sinned, where we have become cold and lukewarm.

Lord, we pray, please deal with us and meet with us even this morning. Please put within us a new heart, a new desire, a new love for you and for your word and for your work.

Please take away those things which have become so important to us but really they're just distractions. They're just secondary. They're less than that. Give us a zeal and a passion for you, Lord Jesus, to make you known and to live for you.

Come and revive us, we pray, and our churches that we represent here and the churches that we know, Lord, around the nation who love you and love your word and long for that reviving and who feel themselves like us to be weak and helpless.

[36:43] Come down, oh Lord, we pray, even upon Whitby, this town, which is so full of people who are lost and godless and blind and helpless. Please, oh Lord, make yourself known to them.

Please stir up a hunger and a thirsting for what is true and lasting. Send your spirit, revive your work, glorify your son.

Amen. Amen. My apologies about that. Ephesians chapter 3, verse 20. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout every generation, today, tomorrow, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen

[38:13] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.