

2. Joel 2:28-32 (Hebrew text - Chapter 3)

The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit that will precede the Day of the Lord.

H. Freeman (154, 155) gives 5 different interpretations of the fulfillment of this prophecy. The question is: was Joel's prophecy of the "pouring out of the Holy Spirit" fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21)? And if it was, in what sense was it fulfilled?

a) Termination at Pentecost view.

"Grotius, for example, held that the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (2:28-32) is to be sought for in certain events of Joel's own time, as well as on Pentecost at which time the prophecy terminated. Several Jewish interpreters, according to Keil, saw in the prophecy a reference to some event in Joel's own time, with its fulfillment terminating at the advent of the Messiah."

b) Fulfillment at Pentecost.

". . . a prophecy of the Messianic age, when the Spirit of God is poured out upon all flesh, and the Gospel will be offered to all . . . The fulfillment of this prophecy of grace is found in Acts 2:17 when the Holy Spirit was outpoured at Pentecost" (Freeman's quote of E.J. Young, IOT 247-248).

c) Nonfulfillment or eschatological view.

"When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost it was not in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. This prophecy has never been fulfilled nor will it be fulfilled during this present age, in which the church is being formed After this is accomplished the Lord will begin His relationship with His earthly people [Israel]; when He appears in His day then they will experience the fulfillment of this great prediction" (Freeman's quote from A. C. Gaebelain, The Prophet Joel, 136).

d) Typical fulfillment view.

". . . sees the prophecy of Joel as being fulfilled 'in earnest' at Pentecost, but not fully realized until the millennium, is set forth in the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown commentary on the Old Testament." See also J. D. Pentecost, Things to Come, 470. Pentecost says: "Peter is not citing the experience before them as the fulfillment of Joel's

prophecy," but is citing it as an analogy to its fulfillment in the "millennial age."

e) Continuous fulfillment view.

"The prophecy of Joel will have continuous fulfillment from Pentecost to eschatological times. R. A. Torrey advocates this view."

Verse 28. (MT: 3:1)

"And afterward" (וְהָיָה אַחֲרֵי־כֵן ; LXX - "after these things).

In Peter's citation (Acts 2:17) he interpretively replaces "afterward" with the more precise time designation "in the last days." This, then, is the sense in which the phrase is to be understood. This means that it is not to be taken with direct sequential reference to what precedes in the Joel 2 context. Remember that in the Hebrew text there is a separate chapter (chapter 3) beginning with Joel 2:28 (although chapter divisions were introduced into the text in relatively recent times).

From the N.T. citation it appears that "afterwards" is used in the sense of indicating a new period in God's dealing with his people. The "last days" as used here are best understood as beginning with Christ's 1st advent and will end with his second advent and the events related to it (cf. Heb 1:2; 2 Tim 3:1; 1 Peter 1:20).

Verse 28.

"I will pour out my spirit on all people."

In the OT period the gift of the spirit was not completely lacking, but now the Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. In the OT period the Holy Spirit is referred to in connection with enablement for particular tasks or functions in the theocracy for certain select individuals. For example, the Spirit came upon the craftsmen who built the tabernacle (Exod 31:3), the judges (Judg 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; etc.), upon Saul and David when they were anointed kings (1 Sam 16:13,14), and upon the prophets to enable them to speak God's word (2 Sam 23:2; Micah 3:8). In such cases the Spirit came upon these individuals to qualify and equip them for their particular task in the theocracy. In the new period about which Joel speaks the Spirit will come on all flesh. This is a general term, but implies that the work of the Spirit will not be limited to certain leaders of the people, and, if not directly, certainly by implication, extends this gift even beyond the people of Israel.

This, of course, need not be understood as implying that the Holy Spirit did not function in OT times to effect regeneration and spiritual growth in God's people.

L. Wood (The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, 64-77) discusses numerous OT references to the Holy Spirit. His conclusion is that just because there is no reference in the OT to the Spirit's work in effecting spiritual renewal in a person, that is not sufficient reason to conclude that the Spirit was not active in this way. Abraham and David, as well as others, are examples of men of faith and men of God. Did they achieve such by their own efforts apart from the Spirit of God? Did they have some resource that NT believers do not have? The evidence that the Spirit was at work in the lives of Old Testament saints is to be seen in the way they lived. If their lives show the fruits of the Spirit, then the Spirit must have been at work in them. On the basis of N.T. teaching on the work of the Spirit we can deduce that OT saints were regenerated just as NT saints are. Why doesn't the OT discuss regeneration? "The answer can only be that God saw fit to wait with this revelation until New Testament time" (p.68). Quoting A. Kuyper (Work of the Holy Spirit, 119) Wood says: "Believing Israelites were saved. Hence they must have received saving grace. And since saving grace is out of the question without an inward working of the Holy Spirit, it follows that He was the Worker of faith in Abraham as well as in ourselves."

What, then, is the difference between the work of the Holy Spirit in OT times and in the new period of "the last days"?

Wood points out that a number of terms are commonly associated with the Spirit's work in the N.T. They include: regeneration, indwelling, sealing, filling, empowering, and baptism.

Wood argues that regeneration, indwelling, sealing, filling and empowerment are all to be found with OT saints.

It is, then, only baptism of the Spirit which is new to the New Testament. It is this aspect of the Spirit's work which began at Pentecost.

"The reason for this is that baptism has to do with the church, and the church did not begin as a distinct organism until Pentecost. In fact, it was the baptism of believers by the Holy Spirit that inaugurated the church. . . . It began when believers were baptized to form it. This happened when the Spirit came upon the believers assembled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12). . . . The truth of baptism by the Spirit is set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and

have been all made to drink into one Spirit.' The baptism of the Spirit is that work which joins Christians together into a common bond of church relationship. It unites them, giving them an organic oneness. It provides them with a sense of mutual love, and sets before them a common purpose. It is because of this unifying baptism that Christians, wherever they meet, feel an immediate closeness of friendship. They are of one group, a part in one grand enterprise. . . .

The moment of baptism is the same as the moment of regeneration; in fact, it is the same also as the moment when indwelling and sealing begin. . . .

The reason for baptism's being instituted at Pentecost - which is another way of stating the reason for the inauguration of the church - was that there was need for the spread of the gospel message. Christ had now lived and died and the good news of salvation was ready to be taken to a lost world. Through Old Testament days, God had in large part segregated His Word in Israel, until the provision for man's salvation might be made in the work of Christ. Now that this had been done, there was no longer need for segregation. The world at large should hear of the wonderful provision. No longer should there be a special people - in terms of a nation - but a universal people, without barrier or 'middle wall of partition' (Eph 2:14; cf. Gal 3:28) between them. For this reason, a new organism was called for, established on a different basis than the nation Israel. This organism was the church. The organism needed unity, a sense of oneness, so it could recognize and present itself as a common group. This was supplied initially by the collective baptism of believers at Pentecost, and continues to be provided by a continuing baptism of individuals at the time of their regeneration. . . .

The last matter to notice is that baptism involves a certain aspect of empowerment for the believer. . . . This power for gospel proclamation was promised already by Christ in Luke 24:49: 'Tarry ye [here] in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.' Jesus again promised it in Acts 1:8, just before His ascension to heaven: 'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' . . . The clear implication of these passages, however, is that all children of God have it in some degree" (pp. 74-77).

See also, J. O. Buswell on the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Systematic Theology, Vol. 2, 208-210).

Wood's discussion, of course, raises the question of the Israel/Church distinction. There are those who have posited too much discontinuity between the Church and Israel. Some have regarded them as two separate and distinct peoples involving two programs of God, two ways of salvation and two ultimate destinies. Others have made too little distinction between Israel and the Church. They are equated without sufficient recognition of the different principle of organization, and the new economy of God's dealing with his people inaugurated with the pouring out of God's Spirit at Pentecost. The Biblical perspective is that of one people of God, yet two distinct forms of organization. There is continuity in one way of salvation, by grace through faith. There is at the same time a measure of discontinuity in the change from a national to a supra-national spiritual body.

Verse 28, 29.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The meaning here seems to be that the Spirit will be given in discernable ways to God's people regardless of their age, sex, station or position in life. Even slaves will be recipients of the Spirit.

When interpreting the significance of the expressions "prophesy," "dream dreams," "see visions" it seems reasonable (at least to me) to follow the suggestion of Calvin when he says that Joel here speaks in the terms of the commonly known O.T conceptions of the function of the Holy Spirit. They should not be rigidly interpreted as restricted to only these specific functions in respect to their fulfillment. It is also not to be assumed that "prophesying" is to be limited to "sons and daughters" or dreaming dreams limited to the "old men." This usage, as Keil suggests, (p. 211, 212) can best be taken as "rhetorical individualizing." In other words, the manifold work of the Holy Spirit will be demonstrably given to individuals from all walks of life in the new era of which Joel speaks.

Jesus had promised that the Spirit would come (John 14:16-17, Lk 24:49). The disciples no doubt looked forward to the realization of this promise. In Acts 1:4-7 Jesus told them not to "leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about." The interesting thing about the response of the disciples to this statement is that they asked Jesus "are you at this

time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" It is clear that for some reason the disciples linked the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the kingdom. Why would they do this? The most likely explanation is that they knew well the connection that Joel had made between the coming of the Spirit and the coming of the day of the Lord. Both belong to the same era of the "last days." Jesus' response, however, avoids a specific commitment to when the restoration of the kingdom to Israel will take place.

It seems best, then, to understand the fulfillment of vs. 28, 29 as beginning at Pentecost and continuing in the period of the last days. Peter says clearly that the events which transpired in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost were "what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16).

This notion of a continuous fulfillment should be distinguished from a view of partial fulfillment (Feinberg, Premillennialism or Amillennialism, 76,211) or typical fulfillment (Pentecost, Things to Come, 470). The prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, and continues to be fulfilled throughout the period of the last days (cf. Acts 2:38,39, and Joel 2:32).

Verses 30-32.

The prophecy in Joel goes on to announce signs in the heavens and earth that will precede the dark and terrible day of the Lord.

It seems best, in my view, to regard these signs as yet to be fulfilled. One might ask, why, then, did Peter quote almost the entire passage, if only part of it was to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost? It seems to me that we have here an example of the prophetic time perspective in which two things are juxtaposed both of which belong to the "last days," but which are separated by an unannounced period of time. Both the giving of the Spirit to all flesh and the Day of the Lord belong to the period of God's dealing with his people that was at that particular point beginning. The period of time separating the two advents of Christ is never indicated in Scripture. Rather, the idea of imminency (that it could occur at any time, therefore be ready) is what is prominent.

See, Keil, 218, for various views on the time of fulfillment. (CC 40)

See Allen, 103 for view that it is already fulfilled. (CC 40B)

H. Bavink, Gereformeerd Dogmatiek, IV 563-564.

"The first activity which Christ accomplished after his glorification consists in the sending of the Holy Spirit. Because He was exalted at the right hand of God and received the promise of the Holy Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit promised by God in the OT; he could now send this one to his people on earth (Acts 2:33). . . . Before the ascension the Holy Spirit was not, because Christ was not yet glorified (John 7:39). This cannot mean that the Holy Spirit did not exist before the glorification of Christ because in the OT there is constant talk of God's Spirit; and the Gospels tell us that John the Baptist and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit, Lk. 1:15, 41; that Simeon was led by the Spirit to the temple, Lk 2:26,27, that Jesus was anointed by him without measure Jn 3:34. And the intention also cannot be that the disciples did not know that a Holy Spirit existed before Pentecost. Because they were taught entirely differently by the OT and by Jesus himself. Even the disciples of John, that said to Paul at Ephesus, that they at their baptism not only had not received the H. S., but also had not heard if there was a H.S. (Acts 19:2) do not thereby indicate that the existence of the H. S. was unknown to them, but only would say that an extraordinary working of the H.S. - that is the wonderful event on Pentecost - they had not heard about. They knew very well, that John was a prophet, sent by God and endued with His Spirit, but they had remained disciples of John, and had not become disciples of Jesus and thus remained outside the circle of believers which received the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The event which took place on this day therefore can have no other meaning than that the H.S. who earlier already existed, and gave many gifts and worked many powers, presently, after the ascension of Christ from his people is now come to live in His people as in his temple. The pouring out of the H.S. is after the creation and incarnation the third great work of God. This extraordinary gift of the H.S. was repeatedly promised in the O.T."

The "day of the Lord" is mentioned in vs. 31 as it was in 2:11. Here, however, it comes subsequent to the pouring out of the Spirit and the cosmic signs in the heavens. This passage thus assumes an important place in sketching the progress of the history of redemption. We learn from this passage that the sending of the Spirit will precede the coming of the "day of the Lord." Several things may be inferred from this:

1. In this period in which the Spirit is poured out the fullness of God's kingdom has not yet been revealed, because it precedes the Day of the Lord.

2. This period may appropriately be characterized as the period of the Spirit.

P.K. Jewett ("Holy Spirit" ZPEB, III, 186f.) points out that with "this Pentecostal outpouring, what may be called the 'dispensation of the Spirit' began. The promise of the prophet Joel that God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh was fulfilled (Joel 2:28f), and the saying of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit would come to teach the disciples how they ought to speak (Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12). The most elaborate account of the Lord's teaching regarding the coming of the Spirit is in John 14-17, where it is made plain that the primary work of the Spirit was to illumine the minds of the disciples in their teaching in order that Christ may be glorified. This is exactly what happened at Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts. By the preaching of the apostles through the power of the Spirit, men were everywhere convicted in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8; Acts 2:37).

According to Acts, the entire historical movement, beginning at Pentecost and resulting in the founding of the Church universal, took its rise from the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5,8) and was under His direction and control. The presence of the Spirit became the distinctive mark of the Christian society. The Spirit directed Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch . . . (8:29,39)."

The Spirit led Peter to Cornelius, 10:19; 11:12.

The Spirit enjoined the church at Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the missionary task, 13:2.

The Spirit guided the church on crucial questions arising from the missionary task, 15:28,29.

The Spirit would not allow Paul to enter Asia, 16:6

Paul told the Ephesian elders that the H.S. made them bishops to "feed the church", 20:28

The church age may thus be called the age of the Spirit, and the time that preceded it may be cited as a time when the Spirit was "not yet given" (John 7:39).