

Fact Check: Reconsidering Popularly Misinterpreted Scriptures

Sermon #3: Acts 2:17-21 | Has Joel's Prophecy Been Fulfilled

The Clarity of the Text

- Background:
 - In Acts 2:4, the Holy Spirit was given to the 120 believers in the upper room.
 - Those who observed asked a very pertinent question: **what meaneth this?** (v. 12). *This is the question of this sermon.*
- Responding to some who believed the crowd must be drunk, Peter gives the truth about what has taken place in Acts 2:14-16.
 - There is no way of taking **this was that which was spoken** than saying **that which was spoken** was **this** occurrence on the Day of Pentecost.
 - Compare Matthew 2:17, 22:31, 27:9, Romans 4:18.
- Not only does Peter clearly introduce the prophecy by saying **this was that which was spoken**, but there are two further confirmations:
 - The descriptions match Joel 2:28-29, which are quoted in Acts 2:17-21. The reason that verses 30-32 do not match Acts 2 will soon be evident.
 - The words of v. 33 make it clear (if more clarity was needed) that the Holy Spirit being given in Acts 2 was **the promise** mentioned in Joel 2.
- When one reads the words of Acts 2 *normally* (i.e.: using objective meaning, context, grammar, and historical setting), the *plain sense* of the text is that the sending of the Holy Spirit was in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29.

The Protest of the Theologians

- Despite this clarity, theologians (even dispensational) love to claim that Acts 2 was not the fulfillment of Joel 2.
- Social media post: "I think when Peter said in Acts 2:16 that Peter meant this is similar to what the prophet Joel said in Joel 2, NOT A FULFILLMENT of Joel's prophecy."
- H.A. Ironside: "[Peter] quotes most accurately from the Old Testament prophecy which, you will see, if you will turn over to the book of Joel and read carefully, refers to the beginning of the millennium. It has reference to the time when God will pour out His judgment on the nations and when the Lord Jesus will come the second time and establish His kingdom here on earth and the Holy Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. But Peter quotes that part referring to setting up the kingdom in power and glory, and he says to those finding fault and

objecting, 'This is the same thing that will take place then.'" [emphasis mine].

- Warren Wiersbe: "Peter did not say that Pentecost was the *fulfillment* of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32, because the signs and wonders predicted had not occurred. When you read Joel's prophecy in context, you see that it deals with the nation of Israel in the end times, in connection with "the Day of the Lord." However, Peter was led by the Spirit to see in the prophecy an application to the church. He said, 'This is that same Holy Spirit that Joel wrote about. He is here!'"

The Purpose of their Protest

- With the passage so clear, why would esteemed theologians seek to deny it? *Because if Acts 2 is the fulfillment of Joel 2 then it doesn't fit their theological mold.*
- Covenant theology does not have a date for the beginning of the "church age" because it doesn't recognize dispensations.
- Dispensational theology has largely settled on the Day of Pentecost as the beginning of the dispensation, but Acts 2 doesn't align with this narrative.
- If the sending of the Spirit is fulfillment of prophecy, then it is not a mystery hidden in God, but part of the prophetic plan. If it was part of the prophetic plan, then Peter was still living, working, and preaching under an existing dispensation. If Peter was under an existing dispensation, then their theological model is wrong.
- Rather than change their theological model, men are prone to change even the clearest meaning of the Scripture (while claiming never to do so).

A Clear Theological Conclusion

- The clearest conclusion to make is that the entire prophecy of Joel was not fulfilled, and that somewhere after the sending of the Spirit the prophetic timetable was stopped.
- Stanley Toussaint: "This clause does not mean, 'This is *like* that'; it means Pentecost fulfilled what Joel had described. However, the prophecies of Joel quoted in Acts 2:19–20 were not fulfilled. The implication is that the remainder would be fulfilled if Israel would repent." (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 358.)
- If Acts 2 is in the *prophetic timeline*, it is *not* the beginning of this dispensation.
- God has stopped the clock between Acts 2:18 & 19, and done a mysterious thing: allowed v. 21 to be descriptive of this day, *prior* to the fulfillment of the previous prophecies.
- This mystery was made to Paul, who delivered it to Peter.