

This Christological fulfillment provides the biblical connection between Yahweh's presence in His Shekinah and in His Spirit: *As the enthroned Christ fulfills the Shekinah symbolism, so it is from His throne that He pours forth Yahweh's Spirit – the Spirit who, now being the Spirit of Jesus – constitutes Jesus' (and Yahweh's) presence among His people* (cf. Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-4, 22-36). Most importantly, the Spirit's dwelling is no longer among the covenant household; the Spirit of Yahweh who was **with** them (Isaiah 63:11) is now the Spirit of Christ **within** them (John 14:16-18; Romans 8:9-10). The One who baptizes men with the Spirit (Luke 3:16) indwells them by His Spirit. In Him, they become individually and collectively the living temple of the living God.

- 3) Another important aspect of fulfillment associated with Pentecost was declared explicitly by Peter, and that is fulfillment in relation to **Joel's prophecy** (Acts 2:14-21). The particular prophetic content Peter cited is a key component of Joel's overall prophecy which focuses on the *Day of the Lord* themes of judgment and recovery/restoration.

Joel's prophecy begins with a dreadful description of a locust infestation (1:1-12) and drought (1:13-20) in the land of Judah. Whether or not the prophet was speaking of one or more actual episodes in Judah's history, what is important is that he intended this description to serve as a compelling metaphor for the coming day of Yahweh's apocalyptic judgment (quite possibly conceived as having a near-term expression in the impending Assyrian and/or Babylonian invasions) (2:1-11).

Joel used powerful sensory images to make his point, drawing upon the terrifying sights and sounds that accompany the destruction wrought by a locust plague and drought to portray the desolation coming upon Yahweh's unfaithful and disobedient covenant people. And in view of what awaited them, Joel called upon every Israelite to turn aside from what from occupying his attention and fervently seek the Lord's mercy with a heart of true repentance (2:12-17). Along with the other prophets, Joel was clear that the day of Yahweh's fierce indignation would not be avoided through pleading and petition, and yet retribution wasn't to be the last word; *desolation would yield to renewal and everlasting restoration*.

- In terms of Joel's imagery of natural desolation brought about through locusts and drought, renewal meant that Yahweh would restore the early and late rains, causing the land to again flourish and bring forth its produce in abundance (2:21-26).
- But this language symbolized a greater restoration, namely Yahweh's full and everlasting recovery of His people to Himself. Never again would they be punished or put to shame (2:26-27); The One who had fought against them would now fight for them.

Having purged His covenant sons in the fire of righteous judgment, the Lord would fulfill His larger, ultimate design of recovery and blessing (2:18-27). In that day Yahweh would set Himself in the midst of His people forever (3:16-21).

The Day of the Lord, with its judgment and retribution leading to creational and covenantal renewal, is the backdrop for Joel's promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, and it is this promise that Peter saw being fulfilled in the events of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-16). Several things about the prophecy itself and Peter's interpretation of it are important to note:

- a) First, Joel's prophecy follows the general pattern of Israel's prophets by speaking of the coming kingdom in terms of the ***globalizing of God's people***. Isaiah, in particular, addressed this at length (cf. 2:1-3, 11:10-12, 20:18-25, 42:1-9, 49:1-13, 52:13-15, 54:1-3, 59:15-60:3, 66:10-22). A point of distinction in Joel's prophecy is that he directly connected this globalizing effect with the work of the Spirit. The Babel dispersion certified man's alienation from God, but Joel's promise that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh suggested a full recovery of the human race. And what Joel suggested Peter made explicit: Initiating the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, Pentecost also marked the emergence of a new, global people for God. The *humanizing* of Yahweh's sanctuary was also its *globalization*. The transformation of the created order into sacred space was underway (cf. Acts 2:5-12 with Peter's explanation in v. 16 and exhortation in vv. 38-40).

This was a radical and critically important development in the progress of revelation and salvation history. In the first place, within the broader context of Old Testament prophecy (and probably also this passage from Joel) the Spirit's outpouring was associated more with the whole house of *Israel* than the world at large (cf. Isaiah 32:9-15, 59:20-21; Ezekiel 36-37). Even if Joel's prophecy is interpreted in this limited sense, it still represents a monumental shift in the way God had been present and operative within the covenant community of Israel. For during the period of the Israelite theocracy, the Spirit's indwelling presence was associated predominantly with Israel's prophets, priests, and kings. ***But Joel was proclaiming a coming day in which Yahweh would pour out His Spirit on all His people – the young and old, male and female, slaves and free.*** Joel had made Moses' personal longing for the sons of Israel a matter of direct prophetic promise.

For his part, and speaking under the leading of the Holy Spirit (ref. 2:4), Peter indicated that the promise of the outpoured Spirit extended beyond the house of Israel to include all mankind.

This is evident, not so much from his quotation of Joel or from who received the Spirit at that time (most of whom were Jews), but from Peter's later commentary: *The promise of the outpoured Spirit was for **all** whom the Lord would call to Himself* (2:37-39).

- b) Peter also importantly interpreted the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy at Pentecost as inaugurating the *last days* (2:17a). Many Christians struggle with Peter's statement because they have been conditioned to regard the phrase "last days" in dispensational terms as indicating the period leading up to the seven-year "tribulation" that is believed by many dispensationalists to culminate with Christ's return to establish His so-called millennial kingdom. The difficulty is compounded by his reference to the *Day of the Lord*, since this phrase, too, has a very specific "end times" meaning to most Christians. If Peter's assertion that Pentecost occurred in the "last days" is troubling to Christians, his associating Pentecost with the Day of the Lord is far more so.

One obvious difficulty is the imagery attached to this theme. The prophets spoke of the Day of Yahweh as a time of cataclysm and cosmic upheaval, and Joel was no exception. That "day" was to be heralded by "*wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke,*" with the sun being "*turned into darkness*" and "*the moon into blood*" (cf. also Isaiah 13:6-10; Joel 3:14-16; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-15). Everywhere the Old Testament associates the Day of Yahweh with God's presence in the world to judge and punish those who oppose Him, His people, and His purpose, and the language of cataclysm and finality attached to it explains the tendency to regard it as God's day of comprehensive judgment at the end of the age.

Thus some commentators exempt vv. 19-20 (ref. Joel 2:30-31) from Peter's treatment of Joel's prophecy. In other words, the Day of the Lord statements don't pertain to the Pentecost event as fulfillment, but since they are sandwiched in Joel's prophecy between two passages that *do* (vv. 17-18 and 21), Peter recited the whole context. While this explanation has some degree of plausibility, there is a better way to resolve the difficulty.

That resolution begins with the recognition that the "salvation" Joel referred to is, in context, deliverance from the destruction associated with the coming Day of the Lord. For Peter to find fulfillment with respect to Joel 2:32a at Pentecost while excluding the Day of the Lord content from that same fulfillment would be for him to fracture and abuse the prophecy.

A second consideration is the fact that a central feature of the Day of Yahweh motif is God's judgment of *Israel*. This is clearly evident in the fact that the judgments of the captivities are treated as manifestations of the Day of the Lord (ref. Ezekiel 13:1-11; Joel 1:1-2:17; Amos 5:16-27; Zephaniah 1:1-16). This motif does extend the scope of divine judgment beyond Israel to the Gentile nations, but this broader judgment typically follows upon Israel's judgment. The general pattern is one of judgment and restoration, and it operates in this way: *The Day of the Lord speaks first to Yahweh's punishment of His unbelieving and disobedient covenant people, which He accomplishes by the hand of other nations. But when that scourging is complete, the Lord then turns His hand against those nations that have come against His people in order to deliver them and restore them back to Himself.*

Throughout the Scripture, the Day of the Lord always focuses on the twin themes of judgment and restoration: Regardless of its particular contextual referent, it invariably speaks to a theophanic episode in which Yahweh judges and overcomes His enemies (those who have brought His people into subjection). By that victory He secures the liberation of His own toward the goal of regathering them to Himself. This dynamic is clearly seen in Joel's prophecy: The Day of the Lord would surely come (2:1-11), but it would give way to deliverance (2:18-20) and restoration (2:21-27). Not all would be swept away in Yahweh's fierce anger; all who called upon Him in the day of judgment would find deliverance (2:30-32). Moreover, that deliverance would come in connection with the outpoured, indwelling Spirit.

When these considerations are brought to bear upon Peter's use of Joel, his meaning becomes much more transparent. Consistent with the contextual flow of Joel's prophecy, Peter recognized in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost the fulfillment of the promise of deliverance. Joel saw that deliverance as escape from the destruction associated with the day of Yahweh's judgment, and so it was with Peter: *At Calvary, the Lord judged His true enemies and secured the release of His people from their longstanding captivity. The reality of release was now being attested by the Spirit's outpouring at the hand of the triumphal, enthroned King, and all who perceived the day of Jubilee and called upon the King in repentant faith were promised a share in His deliverance.*

But Peter's reference to the Day of the Lord likely also pointed to God's judgment of Israel. Desolation due to unbelief was again coming upon them (Luke 13:34-35, 19:41-44, 23:27-31), but this time in testimony that the former order of things had passed away.

G. K. Beale's observations are helpful:

*“Israel’s rejection of Jesus sealed their fate as a nation (as elaborated already in Matt. 23:29-38). What underscores the picture in Joel 2:30-31 as figurative for Israel’s final demise is the observation that the very same language was used earlier in Joel 2:10b to signify clearly the imminent destruction of Israel in the Old Testament epoch itself (‘the sun and the moon grow dark’; cf. the full cosmic conflagration imagery in Joel 2:1-5, 10a, c). **Rather than saying that the Joel language is used symbolically in Acts 2, it may be better to say that it indicates the real beginning destruction of the old world, represented by Israel and her temple, which begins in the spiritual realm.** That is, unbelieving Israel and the temple were judged to be spiritually condemned at the time of Jesus (e.g., Matt. 23:29-39) and Pentecost, and a generation later the destruction of her temple occurred as an expression of the earlier spiritual judgment. The consummated fulfillment of Joel 2 will express itself in the destruction of the entire physical cosmos, which the temple symbolized.”*
(The Temple and the Church’s Mission, emphasis added)

- c) Peter’s inclusion of Joel 2:30-31 was likely intended to indicate the passing of the former order (including the *city* and *temple* as its epitomizing symbols; note esp. 2:40) even as he associated the outpouring of the Spirit with the inauguration of the “last days.” But taken together, these ideas imply that this consummative period initiated at Pentecost constitutes a ***new beginning***. This, too, is in keeping with the prophets, for they spoke of the last days as heralding the introduction of a new age (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-8), just as the Day of the Lord would bring comprehensive renewal and restoration (Joel 3:9-18; Zephaniah 3:1-20).

The Day of the Lord marks the passing of the former order, and so also the inauguration of the new age of eschatological renewal and the recovery of all things to God. In keeping with the promises of the prophets, this age of renewal is the *age of the Spirit*, being attested by the outpouring and indwelling of the Spirit to form a new people for God. The promise of the restoration of Israel is the promise of Israel’s *fullness* realized by the enthroned Son of David pouring out His Spirit upon all mankind. The Man of the Spirit, who is the Last Adam, has ushered in a new creation and become the fountainhead of a new humanity. In Him, as the True Israel, *“Israel has become a third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’”* (ref. Isaiah 19:19-25).