

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts2B_Peter's Sermon on Pentecost)

Introduction

It is vitally important to realize that there are two foci of all Old Testament and much of the New Testament prophetic Scriptures – 1) the sufferings of the Christ and 2) the glories to follow. Peter highlights this Scriptural reality in the following passage.

But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:18-21)

This two-fold focus of prophetic Scripture is many times overlooked or unnoticed by the casual student of Scripture. However, if the believer is to understand the gospel preached by Jesus and His apostles and the events of the 1st Century A.D. as they relate to the transition from the Age of Israel to Christianity, then the believer must grasp this fact along with all of its implications. From the standpoint of the believer who lived during the period surrounding Pentecost and prior ages (not to mention for a period after Pentecost), there was no understanding of a lengthy period between the suffering of Christ and His glorification. Only with the apostle Paul did the realization that a new age had been intercalated into human history begin to emerge. This is a fact of Scripture and of history that most dispensational theologians acknowledge and accept even though there are varying interpretations of that fact.

We will consider some of the different positions on this issue as we progress through our study of the book of Acts. Also, we will attempt to consider how the different positions affect one's interpretation of the remainder of Scripture.

Peter's Sermon

In response to the questions from the multitude that had witnessed the events of Pentecost (2:6-13), Peter seized the opportunity to explain the phenomenon. It is interesting that Peter stood up with the "eleven" which would have included the newest apostle – Matthias (see 1:26). It is also interesting that Peter quickly emerges as the most prominent apostle and relatively little is written about the other apostles' activities during these days, weeks, months and years after Pentecost. Peter speaks with a new confidence in spite of the fact that just a month and a half earlier he had denied knowing Jesus. The explanation of this newfound boldness by Peter is due in large degree to the fact that he had just spent the bulk of that period with our resurrected Lord (1:3) where "things pertaining to the kingdom of God" were explained.

Judged in the light of these facts, their final question on the subject should not be dismissed lightly as evidence of an "unspiritual" and "carnal" viewpoint, as some writers assume to do. Such treatment imputes not only inferior intelligence to the apostles but also, worse than that, incompetence to their Teacher.¹

¹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom, An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1959), 393.

Evidently the apostles, schooled in the teaching of the Messianic King Himself, had heard nothing which would absolutely preclude the possibility of the establishment of the Kingdom in the near future of their own times.²

During that forty day period, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ probably comforted Peter and reassured him of the fact that he was loved by the Father and the Son and that Peter would lead the “church” (assembly of believers) after Jesus’ ascension. This is very consistent with Matthew 16:17-19 where Jesus states “on this rock I will build my church” referring to Peter’s proclamation of faith in Jesus – “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). It is important how one interprets the meaning of “church” (*ekklesia*) in these passages. Some understand it to be the same as the Pauline “body of Christ” whereas others understand the *ekklesia* in these passages to refer to a different assembly of believers. The following quote represents the most typical understanding of the subject among dispensationalists.

For, during the days of His flesh Christ was engaged almost wholly in teaching about the Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy and in doing the predicted miraculous works which constituted His regal credentials as its Messianic King. Even His announcement of the Church, a new thing which is not identical with the Kingdom, was nevertheless made in close connection with the Kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19). We shall not be wrong, therefore, in looking for both the Kingdom and the Church in the literary record of the book of Acts. They are not present, however, in the same sense. The Church is present historically, having begun as a definite body of people on the day of Pentecost. But the Kingdom, although occupying a large place in apostolic preaching and teaching, is present only as an “eschatological” possibility, as James Orr has correctly indicated.³

There can hardly be any reasonable doubt that on this historic day the building of Christ’s *ekklesia* began. No other date fits the data furnished by the New Testament.⁴

Classic dispensationalism has usually insisted that Acts 2 is the record of the church’s birth. It has normally denied that the church of Acts 2 stands in direct continuity with some kind of Old Testament “church,” that is, with the “people of god” in ages past. At the same time, it has rejected the ultradispensational concept that Acts 2 describes a Jewish “church” that is to be distinguished from the later, predominantly Gentile (and Pauline) church. However, most dispensational teachers have not insisted on a total discontinuity between the church and Old Testament saints.⁵

Spirit baptism always unites a believer to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The “body of Christ” is a figure that the New Testament writers used exclusively of the church, never of Israel or any other group of believers. Therefore this first

² Ibid., 394.

³ Ibid., 389-390.

⁴ Ibid., 397.

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, “A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2” in Charles C. Ryrie, consulting editor, Wesley R. Willis & John R. Master, general editors, *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 167-168.

occurrence of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the church, the body of Christ (cf. Matt. 16:18).⁶

Peter explains the Pentecost phenomenon by using a passage from Joel. Specifically, Peter quotes almost verbatim from Joel 2.28-32 with a few minor deviations. The following chart compares the two passages.

| Joel 2 | Verse Reads ** | Acts 2 | Verse Reads ** |
|--------|--|--------|--|
| v. 28 | And it shall come to pass <i>afterward</i> that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, <i>your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions</i> | v. 17 | And it shall come to pass <i>in the last days, says God</i> , that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, <i>your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.</i> |
| v. 29 | And <i>also</i> on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days | v. 18 | And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days <i>and they shall prophesy.</i> |
| v. 30 | <i>And</i> I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and <i>pillars</i> of smoke. | v. 19 | I will show wonders in heaven above and <i>signs</i> in the earth <i>beneath</i> : blood and fire and <i>vapor</i> of smoke. |
| v. 31 | The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. | v. 20 | The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. |
| v. 32 | And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. <i>For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls</i> | v. 21 | And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. |

** I have highlighted in bold, italic font those words and phrases that are different between the two passages.

Peter states very plainly that “this is that” or “this is what” was spoken of by the prophet Joel. He doesn’t say or even seem to imply that he was trying to draw some type of analogy from Joel, e.g. “this is similar to Joel’s prophecy.”

Such an interpretation is unlikely on linguistic grounds. The Qumran documents have alerted New Testament scholarship to the so-called Qumran peshar mode of interpretation. In peshar exegesis, expressions resembling the one Peter employed were used regularly to refer to contemporary fulfillment. It would be surprising if Peter used this expression in some other way, of which we do not have other analogous examples. We may conclude that Peter meant to say that the outpouring of the Spirit fulfilled Joel’s prophecy. But this in no way clashes with fundamental dispensational convictions. Dispensationalists correctly recognize that the church is not directly prophesied in the Old Testament. And it should be noted that Joel 2 does not prophesy it! What Joel 2 does prophesy is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in “the last days” (cf. Acts 2:17). This outpouring is seen by Joel as fundamentally an endowment, widely spread among Israelites (cf. Acts 2:17-18), which enables men and women, young and old, and bondslaves of both sexes to engage in prophecy. But the prophecy of Joel does not intimate that this same outpouring of the Holy Spirit was also a spiritual “baptism” by which all those so baptized would be brought into the church, the

⁶ Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts” at www.soniclight.com
The Church of the Servant King
www.cotsk.org

Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). And neither does it disclose that such a body would be characterized by an absolute equality between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:6). It is faulty exegesis to conclude that Joel's prophecy even implied these things. The hidden reality of the church remains hidden reality even when Joel's prophecy is seen to be fulfilled at Pentecost.⁷

If Pentecost was what Joel predicted (as Peter states), then Pentecost was the beginning of the last days – those days which would immediately precede the coming of the Lord to judge the world and to establish His kingdom.

Some believe that Peter was just mistaken. God was starting a new age or dispensation that none of the prophets had prophesied. If so, this raises a very interesting, if not disturbing question. Was Peter, who was “filled” with the Holy Spirit (2.4), proclaiming error? Remember, this is a type #1 filling (instantaneous and the content = the H.S.), not a type #2 filling (progressive and the content = the character of God).⁸ Regardless, one thing is crystal clear. God was not fulfilling prophecy and beginning a new dispensation at the same time.

If Pentecost was what Joel predicted, then it is plain that Pentecost was the beginning of the last days, those days which would immediately precede the coming of the Lord to judge the world and to establish His glorious kingdom. There are those who say that Peter supposed what was happening was predicted by Joel, but actually he was mistaken, for God was instead beginning something brand new which none of the prophets knew anything about, namely, the beginning of an entirely new dispensation of the Church which is the Body of Christ. We must leave it up to the individual student to decide whether Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was mistaken. One thing is certain: God was not fulfilling prophecy and beginning the Body of Christ at the same time.⁹

The question arises, if God was fulfilling Joel's prophecy, why did not the signs appear in the heavens and why did Christ not come back to establish His Kingdom? The answer should not be difficult to find. It was evidently because the rulers of Israel hardened themselves in their unbelief and opposition to Christ.¹⁰

Some other interesting observations can be made about this comparison of the two passages:

- Joel uses the term “afterward” in verse 28, whereas Peter substitutes the phrase “in the last days” in Acts 2.17. There are several points to note in this regard:
 - It is very likely that Peter is adding interpretive language to his quotation, i.e. he sees the period that is now transpiring as the beginning of the “last days” of Israel's age.
 - In contrast, Joel was prophesying and uses the term “afterward” because it fits the context of his message.
 - The context of the passage in Joel is preceded by verses that call for Israel's repentance (2.12-17) and that explain the blessings that will attend such repentance (2.18-27).

⁷ Hodges, “A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2,” 168-169.

⁸ Please refer to our studies of “The Spiritual Life of the Believer” for more information on this topic.

⁹ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 21.

¹⁰ Ibid.

- Joel 2:28-32 explain the events leading to and associated with Israel's repentance.
- The verses Peter chooses to quote from Joel began to find their fulfillment at Pentecost even though the pre-conditions for their ultimate fulfillment were never satisfied, i.e. the repentance of Israel.
- Peter does not quote the last half of Joel 2:32 because its fulfillment was contingent upon Israel heeding the signs that accompanied the outpouring of the Spirit and repenting.
- The phenomena prophesied by Joel will find their ultimate fulfillment in the future last days of Israel a.k.a. the Tribulation or Daniel's 70th week.

The simple fact is that the signs and wonders forecast by Joel are the well-known signs that immediately precede the end of this age and the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory (see Matt. 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26; Luke 21:25-27; Rev. 6:12-17). No interpretation of the prophecy of Joel can possibly be right if it ignores that fact that Joel's signs and wonders are a "set piece" in the eschatological drama presented in the New Testament. This leads to an inevitable conclusion: some kind of hiatus exists between the fulfilled and unfulfilled portions of Joel's prophecy.¹¹

Peter then explains that this Jesus Who was resurrected was crucified at their hands, yet His death was according to the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God. Peter thereby recognizes the balance in verses 22-28 between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Men cannot be responsible as Peter indicates if they have no free will. On the other hand, God's sovereign plan makes provision for the free will of man.

In his quote of the Psalmist from Psalm 16:8-11, we note that the Psalmist indicates that Jesus' soul would not be left in "Hades." We should pause and take note of the following distinctions.

The Residence of Souls and Spirits After Death

- **Gehenna**

This is the term that Jesus used to warn of the consequences of rejecting Him (Matt 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47, Lu 12:5). It is identical with the Lake of Fire in Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). The 2nd Death and the Lake of Fire are identical in Revelation 20:14.

- **Sheol**

This is synonymous with the grave – sometimes a general reference without an indication of righteous or wicked (Ge 37:35; 42:38; 1 Sa 2:6; 1 Ki 2:6; Job 14:3; 17:13, 16) – sometimes only of the wicked (Ps 9:17; Pro 23:14).

- **The "Abyss"**

This is also referred to as the "bottomless pit" and is the place where Satan is chained throughout the Millennium and prevented from having access to the earth. It is also the temporary abode of demons until they are cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan at the end of human history (Re 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3).

- **"Tartarus"**

¹¹ Hodges, "A Dispensational Understanding of Acts 2," 169.

This is the temporary prison of the angels that had sexual relations with women prior to the flood in Genesis 6 in violation of the rules of engagement in the Angelic Conflict (see 1 Pe 3:19-20; 2 Pe 2:4-5; Jude 6)

- **Hades**

This is synonymous with Sheol, but is seen in the NT as containing two compartments: torments and paradise.

- “Torments” (from Luke 16:23)

This is the abode of all unbelievers prior to their sentencing to the Lake of Fire at the Second Resurrection (see Matt 11:23; 16:18; Lu 10:15; 16:19-31; Re 20:13-14; Re 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14).

- “Paradise” (from Luke 16:22)

This is the abode of all Old Testament saints prior to their resurrection. Nothing is mentioned in the Bible regarding the resurrection of the Age of Gentile believers, however it is likely that they are housed in paradise (a.k.a. Abraham’s bosom) with Age of Israel believers from the time of their death until their disembodied souls and spirits were transported with Christ to heaven (see Lu 16:19-31; 23:43; Ac 2:27, 31). They will receive their resurrection bodies at the Second Advent. After Christ’s resurrection, paradise is seen as in heaven (2 Co 12:1-4; Eph 4:8-10).

After Peter uses Psalm 16 as evidence of the resurrection of Christ, he proceeds to demonstrate that David could not have been speaking of himself when he wrote that Psalm. Peter rightly notes that David has been dead and buried for 1000 years and his tomb is present in the city of David for all to observe. Rather, David, serving in a prophetic role, prophesies the resurrection of Christ. When Peter indicates that David has not ascended into heaven, he is referring to the physical resurrection of his body, not the presence of his soul and spirit.

Acts 2:38 must be interpreted in light of God’s covenant dealings with the nation Israel for Peter’s instructions to make any sense. At this time, Israel was still in active covenant relationship with God. Peter affirms this in Acts 3:25 where he indicates that he was addressing “children of the covenant.” As such, Israel enjoyed a special place among the nations of the earth. Peter, as did John the Baptist before him, was calling these covenant people back to a right relationship with God, so that he would not suspend His covenant relationship with them.