

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

The Holy Spirit And The Last Days

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Acts 2:14-21

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 2:14-21. We are jumping back into our series in the Book of Acts. We are going through these foundational stories looking for resources, insights, corrections and encouragements that will serve us well in the church on the other side. Two Sundays ago we looked at the EVENT of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:1-13. Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. He said that they would receive POWER when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the world. So the disciples waited – and on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell and they rushed out into the city and began preaching the Gospel in languages that they had never learned or studied before - that was the miracle – and this speech that follows is Peter’s interpretation of the miracle. Someone in the crowd suggested that perhaps the disciples were all drunk on new wine. Peter offers this explanation by way of alternative.

We’re just going to read the first section of Peter’s sermon today. We will come back to the sermon in its entirety next Sunday, but the first third of the sermon is so explosive and so controversial that if we tried to deal with the full 27 verses in one message, it would by necessity be unbalanced – so we’ll deal with the first part today, and then next Sunday we’ll zoom out and consider Peter’s argument as a whole. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 14.

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ““ And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;

²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:14–21 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

So in response to the guy in the crowd who thought that maybe the disciples were all drunk on new wine, Peter stands up and says, “No that’s not it – after all, it is only 9 o’clock in the morning! This unique phenomenon is not about wine, it is about the coming of the Holy Spirit! It is about the dawning of the Last Days!”

Peter – filled with the Holy Spirit – understands the gift of the Holy Spirit as the fulfilment of a prophesy made a long time ago in the Book of Joel. In the Book of Joel there had been a terrible infestation of locusts, which the prophet at the time interpreted as something of a warning shot fired by Almighty God. The people responded appropriately so the Lord reversed their fortunes and promised to bless and prosper them. Then comes this prophesy in Joel 2 about what will happen afterward. At some point down the road, the people of God will be lifted up, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the enemies of God will be cast down in a climactic season of terrible judgment and in that season everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

THIS IS THAT, Peter says.

These must be the LAST DAYS because THIS IS the long-awaited outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

I. Howard Marshall says here:

“Peter regards Joel’s prophecy as applying to the last days, and claims that his hearers are now living in the last days. God’s final act of salvation has begun to take place.”¹

So Peter – reading the prophet Joel – says to the crowd in Jerusalem: “What’s going on here is that a page has been turned. We are all now living on page 1 of the Last Chapter of the human story. God’s final act of salvation has begun to take place and the main actor in this part of the story is the person of the Holy Spirit.”

And now in this first section of his sermon interpreting these great events, Peter begins to tell us what the Holy Spirit has come to do and that’s what we’ll be focusing our attention on this morning.

The first thing he has come to do, according to Peter, is to make prophets out of all the true people of God.

He has come to make prophets out of all the true people of God

Look again at verses 17 and 18:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your **sons and your daughters** shall prophesy, and your **young men** shall see visions, and your **old men** shall dream dreams; even on my **male servants** and **female servants** in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17–18 ESV)

Now again, Peter is quoting here from Joel 2. He is saying THIS IS THAT!! That thing you just witnessed, where a bunch of Galilean hicks started preaching the Gospel in all the languages of

¹I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 78.

the Mediterranean world – languages they did not know, have never studied and probably won't even recognize tomorrow – that THING that just happened – is the long-awaited fulfillment of this prophecy in the Book of Joel!!

That prophecy – in Joel 2:28-32 – actually goes back to something Moses said in the Book of Numbers. We talked about this a few weeks ago. God told Moses to pick men from all the 12 tribes of Israel and a portion of the Spirit that was on Moses would be put upon them so that they could share with him in the work of the ministry. So that's what happened. The Spirit fell on the men who had been chosen. But then, something really weird happened. The Spirit also fell on 2 men who hadn't been chosen and they started to prophesy as well and some people were upset. Joshua went to Moses and said:

“My lord Moses, stop them.”²⁹ But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Numbers 11:28–29 ESV)

Yes! Wouldn't it be AWESOME if the Holy Spirit fell not just on THE LEADER, and not just on the LEADER'S SPECIAL HELPERS – but on EVERYONE who truly knew and loved the Lord!! Wouldn't that be amazing? Wouldn't that be a GAME CHANGER?!

Moses said that – and the people remembered that – and a prophet named Joel picked that up and promised that. He said, that in the Last Chapter of the story, God would do that. He would pour out his Holy Spirit not just on the leaders – but on EVERYBODY! Every true member of the covenant community would become a Spirit anointed PROPHET OF GOD! The men. The women. The young. The old. The rich. The poor.

Everyone!

Everyone would be filled with the Spirit of God and able to speak the WORD OF GOD with supernatural power – can you say amen to that?

Amen!

That's what is going on here, Peter says: the long-awaited END TIMES OUTPOURING of the Holy Spirit of God! David Peterson comments on this remarkable turning point saying:

“So the gift of the Spirit is for all who are truly God’s servants, *both men and women* (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28).⁴² Whereas the Spirit especially designated and empowered the prophets and other leaders of Israel under the Old Covenant, God promises that *all* his people will be possessed by the Spirit in the last days.”²

This is that!

Now, obviously we have questions: “What exactly is a prophet?” “How is New Testament prophesy different than Old Testament prophecy?” “How is a prophet different than an Apostle?” “How can we know when someone is speaking by the Holy Spirit of God and when they are simply blowing hot air?”

Those are all really good questions – and we’re going to get into those things as we make our way through the Book of Acts – but for now, I just want you to understand the magnitude of this event. Something HUGE just happened here. We turned the page into the LAST CHAPTER of the story of redemption, and in this chapter, all of the sudden, every single REAL believer is FILLED with the Holy Spirit such that they now have all the POWER, all the GUIDANCE and all the INSIGHT they need to effectively address and advance the Great Commission – praise the Lord!

I don’t want to back away from that truth because I’ve got questions when it comes to application. We’ll get there. We’ll deal with all of that. But for now just see this: in the Last Chapter of human history, the Holy Spirit of God is going to fill, animate and empower the whole covenant community in a way he has never done before.

²David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 139-140.

Children are going to prophesy.

Young men are going to have visions.

Old men are going to dream dreams.

Rich, poor, male, female – it doesn't matter! If they are saved, then they are going to be filled, they are going to be empowered and they are going to SPEAK!

Now, that's not going to lead to complete chaos – at least it's not supposed to. There will still be order, there will still be offices. There will still be study and training and learning. The Holy Spirit doesn't BYPASS our humanity, rather he animates and restores our humanity.

Again, we'll get to all of that. The bottom line is this: because of the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is here now in the church, in a whole new way. He's come to turn every believer into a burning bush. He's come to enable every believer to speak the Word of God, with the help of the Spirit of God so as to form and reform the people of God – praise the Lord!

In this Last Chapter the Holy Spirit of God is going to be very active in the church and also very active in the heavens above and on the earth beneath – what in the world does that mean?

He has come to work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth beneath

Look again at verses 19-20. Peter, again referencing the prophecy from Joel 2, cites God as saying:

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. (Acts 2:19–20 ESV)

Now remember, Peter is attempting to explain the significance of what just happened on the Day of Pentecost and to do that he is referencing a prophecy from the Book of Joel which said that before the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord – before the absolute end – the Holy Spirit would come in a powerful way to empower his people AND to do wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth beneath. And Peter is saying: this is that! The Holy Spirit has come to DO THAT! Just like he has come to make all God’s people into prophets, he has also come to show wonders in the heavens above and to show signs on the earth below – so what does that mean? What does that language intend to communicate?

Joel 2 has some incredible language that Peter has picked up and dropped into his sermon wholesale. He talks about blood, fire, pillars of smoke, the sun going dark and the moon turning to blood - what in the world is all that about? John Stott says helpfully here:

“this is traditional apocalyptic imagery for **times of social and political revolution**”³

I think that is exactly right. If you are a regular reader of the Old Testament then you have seen this kind of language before. In Isaiah 13 for example, when God is foretelling the destruction and overthrow of Babylon he says:

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; **the sun will be dark** at its rising, and **the moon will not shed its light**. (Isaiah 13:9–10 ESV)

Well, that’s almost exactly what Joel and then Peter are saying here. You see the same thing in Ezekiel 32 when God is foretelling the punishment and downfall of the Egyptian Empire, he says:

“When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark; I will **cover the sun with a cloud**, and **the moon shall not give its light**.” (Ezekiel 32:7 ESV)

³John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 74-75.

Alright, so this is standard Old Testament imagery used to describe catastrophic social and political upheaval. That language was intuitive for them in a way that it is not intuitive for us. You see, people in Bible times believed that behind the events that we see and experience at ground level there are things going on in the spiritual realm. When Babylon fell, it wasn't just because the Persian Empire was younger and more dynamic – that was true – but behind that truth there was another truth – the truth of the Providence of God. God was pulling levers. He was making one ruler drunk and giving another ruler energy and drive. He was orchestrating events that served his purposes in the world.

So there was A REALITY behind our REALITY – and that was actually the more important reality. That was the ultimate reality – and apocalyptic language was used to speak about that reality. The sun, the moon and the stars were the great POWERS in the heavenly realm, so in Apocalyptic language they often SYMBOLIZED and stood in for the great powers in the spiritual realm – whose rising or falling would eventually be experienced in the physical realm.

You probably already know this – you just may not know that you know this. In Revelation 9:1 the Apostle John says:

“I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth” (Revelation 9:1 ESV)

Now is that an ACTUAL STAR? Because if an actual STAR fell to the earth then that would be an extinction level event. If John is speaking literally here then the Bible should end here. “I saw a star fall to the earth. The end.”

But he's not speaking literally here is he?

And you know that because of how the verse ends. He says:

“I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and **he** was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.” (Revelation 9:1 ESV)

The STAR is a HE in John's vision – that is to say, the star is an angel. He is a heavenly power doing something in the spiritual realm that will affect our experience in the physical, geo-political realm. That's how apocalyptic language works.

So – to bring this in for a landing – in Acts 2 the Apostle Peter, quoting the prophet Joel is saying that in the Last Chapter of this story, not only will the Holy Spirit be very active in the church, he will also be very active in the world – the spiritual world and physical world which Bible people knew were connected. He will be functioning there as the Actor and Agent of Divine Providence.

That's what that terminology MEANS. In the Old Testament when you talked about suns going dark, stars falling from the sky and moons turning to blood you were talking about GREAT MOVES OF PROVIDENCE. In his commentary on the original citation from the Book of Joel, David Allen Hubbard says here these signs and wonders are best understood as:

“clear cut indicators that God is at work. Their cosmic scope (*heavens ... earth*) highlights their extraordinary character.”⁴

Alright – in street level English, when Peter says, the Holy Spirit has come to show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, fire, smoke, suns going dark, moons turning to blood – he is saying: “The Holy Spirit has come to do GREAT WORKS OF PROVIDENCE in the physical and spiritual realms.”

This may include acts of healings – as we will soon see – but it also means acts of social and political upheaval. Just like God threw down the nations of Egypt and Babylon in the Old Testament – so too will he be working to undermine the hostile cultural and political powers of today.

⁴David A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 25 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 75.

The Holy Spirit is active in the church and the Holy Spirit is active in the world. He is doing everything that needs to be done so as to position people for repentance, conversion and saving faith. That's the third thing that Peter points out in this section of his sermon.

He has come to position people for repentance, conversion and faith

In verse 21 he says:

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21 ESV)

It might be helpful here to go back and revisit the original citation from Joel 2. Let me read it to you. The prophet records God as saying:

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, **before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.** ³² And it shall come to pass that **everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.**” (Joel 2:30–32 ESV)

Alright, so we've got suns burning out and moons turning to blood – which as I've said was standard apocalyptic language for STAGGERING SOCIAL and POLITICAL UPHEAVAL. God is going to shake the entire universe, the prophet says. Just like he did when Egypt fell; just like he did when Babylon fell. Once again, in the future, God is going to turn the world upside down. He is going to RATTLE THE CAGE OF THE COSMOS – BEFORE the great and awesome Day of the Lord and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Are you seeing that?

I feel like it is easier to see the connections when you read the whole citation. Joel is saying that the purpose of these various UPHEAVALS is to position people for repentance, conversion and

salvation AHEAD of the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing in the meantime – in this Last Chapter before THE END – he is optimizing the conditions for conversion!!!

It seems to me as though Peter spent more time thinking about this than any of the other Apostles. “What is the purpose of this delay?” What is the purpose of this Final Chapter? If you think about it, Jesus said on the cross:

“It is finished” (John 19:30 ESV)

Having lived a perfect HUMAN life, and then having laid down that life as a sacrifice for sins that was acceptable to our Three Times Holy Father, the work of redemption was FINISHED. A way home had now been made. He rose from the dead to demonstrate and proclaim God’s acceptance of his sacrifice and then he ascended up to heaven to be seated and to be crowned – so why in the world is there any remaining story after those events?

That’s a really good question – and Peter seems to have pondered it more than most. In 2 Peter 3 he shares his inspired conclusion. He says:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (2 Peter 3:9–10 ESV)

So Peter says that this Last Chapter only exists because of the kindness and patience of God. He does not desire that ANYONE SHOULD PERISH. So he has sent the Holy Spirit to do TWO EXTRAORDINARY things: To turn every true believer into a prophet. And to work mighty acts of Providence so as to undermine and destabilize the strongholds of ignorance and unbelief.

Brothers and sisters, this is very good news!!

Do you ever feel like it is almost impossible to do evangelism right now in this culture? We're sowing our seeds, but the soil is as hard as bronze! It's like everyone has been benumbed by Social Media and 24 hour cable news. Nobody is thinking! Nobody is asking questions! We are all so comfortable. We are all so ENTERTAINED. It is like everyone in the world has been plugged into the Matrix! No one is aware of the past and no one is thinking about the future – we are just living the Vida Loca in the present!

How do you share the Gospel in a cultural context like that? How do you get through to your kids and your grandkids when they've got these stupid things in their ears and when they spend who knows how many hours a day looking at nonsense and insanity on TikTok? How do you even get them to THINK about ultimate reality when they are being benumbed into insensibility by the culture?

Oh thanks be to God for a Holy Spirit who knows how to shake up the world!

According to the prophet Joel, and according to the Apostle Peter, the Holy Spirit is working a two part plan throughout this Last Chapter of the story of redemption. He is raising up the church and he is undermining the world. Which is why all we have to do is put one foot in front of the other.

Do you remember the story of Jericho?

God told the people to JUST WALK AROUND! Just walk around the city day after day after day. And then on the last day, march around the city 7 times – do you remember that? All the alpha males in the congregation must have thought that was insane. All the cage Calvinists with their giant beards and their bad attitudes: “How is this going to do anything? We need a catapult or a canon or something.”

No – you don't. No you don't. Because while you are putting one foot in front of the other at ground level God is at work, underground, out of sight, undermining the foundations, such that when the trumpet blows the walls of the city will come tumbling down.

That's how history works.

And that's how the Holy Spirit is working in this Last Chapter of the story of redemption. He is undermining the foundations right now even as he continues to equip and empower the Body of Christ. So all you have to do, brothers and sisters, is keep marching around the city sowing your seed. Don't worry right now, if the ground is hard; don't worry if the walls are high. The Holy Spirit's got a plan for that. You just keep doing your job.

You preach. You pray. You work. You walk.

And the Holy Spirit will make the sun go dark and the moon turn to blood in this fallen world. He will shake the foundations and rattle the cage giving everyone an honest opportunity to awake from their slumber, to shake off their shackles, to come to their senses and to call upon the name of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The Holy Spirit knows how to make that happen – the Holy Spirit CAME to make that happen; thanks be to God! Let's pray together.