



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

*The Day of Pentecost, Part 2*

#### The Sermon of Peter

Acts 2:14-21

February 18, 2007

- I. **The Signs of the Last Days**
- II. **Judgment in the Last Days**
- III. **Salvation through Judgment in the Last Days**

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### INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Immediately following the manifestation of tongues by the 120, in the first part of Acts 2, Luke writes that Peter stood up and addressed the ‘Men of Judea and all...who live in Jerusalem.’
- ❑ It becomes clear, for the remainder of Chapter 2, that Peter will deliver a sermon that will **interpret the events of Pentecost in light of the Old Testament promises.**
- ❑ He begins the sermon in a manner that could possibly be intended as somewhat humorous, as he dispels any notion of the 120 being drunk, for he says, ‘...it is only the third hour of the day.’
  - The third hour of the day [9:00 a.m.] was a typical time of prayer in the Jewish day. The Jews would not eat until 10:00 a.m.
  - Furthermore, Verse 15 may reflect a bit of humor in the Book of Acts. It may be as though Peter is saying, ‘They cannot be drunk *yet* – it is too early for that! It is only 9:00 a.m.!’
- ❑ The sermon that Peter, then, delivers is the first Christian sermon ever recorded. It further teaches the modern reader to **read and interpret Scripture in light of Scripture, NOT our 21<sup>st</sup> Century pre-conceived understandings.**

## I. The Signs of the Last Days

- Peter begins his sermon by quoting from Joel 2:28-32.
- Peter introduces the quote by saying, ‘but **this** is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...’
- In other words, **Pentecost was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel.**
- At the beginning of the passage quoted by Peter from the Old Testament book of Joel, it states, ‘And it shall be **in the last days...**’
  - Throughout the Church today, there seems to be an understanding of the ‘end times’ that seeks to force event of the ‘last days’ in the future.
  - However, what is clear from Peter’s sermon, and throughout the New Testament, is that the beginning of the ‘Last Days’ was completion of Christ’s work of redemption (birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension) [‘the ends of the ages’ (1 Corinthians 10:11), ‘these last days’ (Hebrews 1:2), ‘the consummation of the ages’ (Hebrews 9:26); ‘the last times’ (1 Peter 1:20), ‘the last hour’ (1 John 2:18).’

R.C. Sproul, in his book, *The Last Days According to Jesus* wrote: ‘The idea of God visiting his people is closely linked in the Old Testament to the coming ‘day of the Lord.’ The phrase ‘day of the Lord’ figures heavily in Old Testament prophecy. Originally it was a day of redemption that the people anticipated with great joy. As the faith and practice of the nation of Israel degenerates, the phrase undergoes a development. It becomes loaded more and more with forecasts of doom and judgment. Yet it also retains a note of hopeful for the faithful.’

- Then, Peter proceeds to mention four ‘signs’ that the ‘last days’ are upon us:

**(1.) The Pouring out of the Spirit on *all* mankind**

**(2.) The Prophesying of your ‘sons and daughters’**

**(3.) The Granting of Wonders in the Cosmos**

**(4.) Salvation of Everyone who Calls on the Name of the Lord**

- ❖ The first sign Peter mentions is ‘that I will pour forth of my Spirit on all mankind...’
- Yet, we cannot separate the work of Christ from the sending of the Spirit, for, on the Day Pentecost, in accordance with Scripture, it is Jesus, the eternal Son of God who baptizes with the eternal Spirit [the Holy Spirit] of God on the basis of His completed work.

‘For Peter the universal pouring out of the Spirit on the whole Christian group was demonstration that he end time had come. Perhaps the clearest indication that the entire 120 received the Spirit at Pentecost is Joel’s inclusion of daughters as well as sons – *all* were prophesying. Joel undoubtedly had seen the Spirit’s outpouring only as a gift to Israel, and perhaps many of those Jewish-Christians at Pentecost saw it the same way. The remainder of Acts clarifies that the promise applies to the Gentiles as well: it is indeed poured out on ‘all people.’

John Polhill

‘For Luke, the sign of the age to come is the presence of the [Holy] Spirit.’

F.F. Bruce

‘The elapse of the Spirit was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy of the last days. The long-looked for Day of the Lord had arrived; the powers of the age to come were now released. The characteristic feature of this was a distinction in the distribution of the Spirit. He was now ‘poured out’ by Christ in unrestrained measure, and distributed without geographical and ethnic limitation, ‘on all people.’

Sinclair Ferguson

‘At the Jordan, the Spirit was given to Jesus, by the Father (Luke 3:22), as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church; at Pentecost, the Spirit, received by Jesus, from the Father, as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind him, was given by him to the church as the (promised) gift (of the Father). The fully Trinitarian complexion of Pentecost is plain.’

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

- However, not only is the Spirit poured out, He is poured out **on all mankind**.
  - This presents the first of several interpretive challenges in this passage. The statement begs the question, ‘What constitutes **all mankind**, for surely it is not **all without exception**.
  - Yet, in his description of the activity of the Spirit, Joel explains what is meant, in this context, by ‘all.’ Joel writes, ‘your sons and daughters...young men...old men...bond slaves...men and women.’
  - In other words, in this context, ‘all mankind’ means **all mankind without distinction of race, nationality or gender** – a radical concept for ancient Judaism.
- It is this universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant that fulfills other passages in the Old Testament, such as Ezekiel 36:24-32.
- ❖ The second sign of the ‘last days’ is the sign of prophecy.
  - It is quite clear that, in this context, Peter associates the tongues-speaking of the 120 with prophecy.
  - This is a clear indication that we must allow the text to determine what ‘prophecy’ is rather than our pre-conceived understandings.

‘...What is clear in this context [Acts 2:17-18] is that Peter understood the prophesying to which Joel referred to be fulfilled in the phenomenon of the speaking in tongues in a manner that people could understand. Peter thus regard tongues, when understood naturally by the hearers or interpreted for them, as the functional equivalent of prophecy.’ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*

- ❑ Furthermore, the ‘gift of prophecy’ ‘in the last days’ will not be limited to the male prophets of old, it occurs in connection with the receiving of the Spirit [on Pentecost].
- ❑ This is why Joel says ‘your sons and daughters will prophesy.’
- ❑ This truth is certainly a fulfillment of the Old Testament as well:

Jeremiah 31:34:

No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,’  
declares the LORD.  
‘For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more.’

‘In the old covenant, the typical effect of the Spirit’s coming was prophecy, with its various modes of production (Numbers 11:24-29; 1 Samuel 10:10-11). It was, generally speaking, limited to only a few, almost exclusively men. Now, in the new covenant, the boundaries of the Mosaic economy within which the Spirit had, by and large, previously manifested himself are rendered obsolete. Both sons and daughters prophesy; young men have visions, old men have dreams. These were, of course, modes of communicated the knowledge of God under the old covenant. Now, in Christ, the old distinctions are nullified. Now all of the Lord’s people possess the knowledge of God formerly experienced only by the prophets. This was exactly what Moses himself had longed for, although it could never have been experienced under the Mosaic economy: ‘I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them’ (Numbers 11:29). Now it was a reality.’

‘That which came to the people by and large through official channels in the Mosaic economy (*via* prophets, priests, and kings) now belongs to all the Lord’s people by Christ through his Spirit. A status (prophet) and relationship (intimate knowledge, cf. Amos 3:7) with God, known at first hand only by the few under the old covenant, could now be enjoyed by all.’

‘Now all have received the messianic anointing. This is the sense in which the new covenant promise is fulfilled: ‘Now longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother saying ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest’ (Jeremiah 31:34). No longer is an anointed human mediator required to teach us to know the Lord; now all who receive the Spirit of Jesus, the exalted Prophet-Messiah, share the prophetic anointing (cf. 1 John 2:20, 27). In Christ, they have immediate personal knowledge of God. All, in this sense, are prophets as well as priests and kings.’

Sinclair Ferguson

‘...in Acts we find indications of a definite association between prophecy and tongues, indications of the same pairing of the two present in 1 Corinthians. This at least suggests that the phenomenon in each case is the same. The conclusion to Luke’s account of Paul’s encounter with the disciples at Ephesus is that after the Holy Spirit came upon the latter, ‘they were speaking in tongues and prophesying’ (Acts 19:6). This appears to parallel the description of what took place among the Gentiles: after the Holy Spirit fell upon them, they were ‘speaking in tongues and magnifying God’ (10:46; 44). This apparent interchange of ‘prophesying’ with ‘magnifying God’ (‘acclaiming the greatness of God,’ NEB) points back to Pentecost, where tongues-speaking itself is ‘declaring the great things of God’ (Acts 2:11). The assumption here is that tongues are the same language phenomenon in chapters 10 and 19 that they are in Chapter 2, an assumption warranted, at least for chapter 10, by 11:15 (‘just as upon us at the beginning’; cf. 10:45). Acts, then, displays an association between prophecy and tongues like that found in Paul. This suggests that the language phenomenon in each instance is of the same kind (known human languages).

Not only does Acts closely associate prophecy and tongues. In chapter 2 tongues are prophecy. This is clear from Peter’s sermon where tongues, as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32), are within the scope of ‘your sons and daughters will prophesy’ (v. 17), a point emphasized by Peter’s interpretive gloss on the Joel-citation at the end of verse 18: ‘and they shall prophesy’ (cf. also the indication of the prophetic nature of tongues in v. 11, noted in the preceding paragraph). This ties in with what has emerged repeatedly in our discussion of 1 Corinthians<sup>14</sup>, namely, the functional equivalence of prophecy and interpreted tongues, and permits the generalization that New Testament tongues are a form of prophecy. Tongues are a mode of prophecy, if the latter is taken in a slightly expanded but essentially unchanged sense.’  
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

- Next, when Joel [and Peter] speak of ‘visions...dreams’ he is referring to the common modes of prophecy in the Old Testament.

#### Numbers 12:6:

‘he said, ‘Listen to my words:

‘When a prophet of the LORD is among you,  
I reveal myself to him in visions,  
I speak to him in dreams.’”

John Calvin writes: ‘...for we gather from the twelfth chapter of Numbers, that these were the two ordinary ways [visions and dreams] whereby God did reveal himself to the prophets.’

- However, as Hebrews 1:1 indicates, God speaks to us ‘in these last days’ **not through the prophets**, but through the Son; and therefore, there is a real sense that we are all prophets.

Hebrews 1:1: ‘In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.’

- Because the New Testament reveals the revelatory nature of tongues [as prophecy], the Church must understand the implications of affirming the continued existence of tongues-speaking.

'In the New Testament, translated tongues are treated as the equivalent of prophecy (an indication embryonically present in the reference to prophesying in Acts 2:14-18 as an explanation of the tongues at Pentecost). Unless there is translation or interpretation, prophecy is clearly superior to tongues. But if there is interpretation, then 'revelation or knowledge or prophecy' is shared (1 Corinthians 14:6). When interpreted, therefore, tongues-speaking is the functional equivalent of prophecy and is revelatory in nature.'

Sinclair Ferguson

- Therefore, if such gifts exist today, it would essentially undermine the concept of the sufficiency of Scripture, the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states, 'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men...'

- ❖ The third sign of the 'last days' is the granting of wonders in the cosmos. This can best be understood in light of apocalyptic judgment.

## II. Judgment in the Last Days

- In order to understand the judgment theme in Joel 2:28-32, one must first realize the context in which the passage was originally written.

Joel was written on the occasion of a disaster that had come upon Israel. There had been a locust invasion, and the plague had destroyed every green thing in the land. In a rural, agricultural economy this destruction was an extremely serious thing. It was a matter of life and death for most people. So Joel talks about it. But instead of saying, as some of us might say under those circumstances, 'Well, every cloud has a silver lining. Things will get better. Don't worry about it,' Joel actually says, 'As a matter of fact, things are going to get worse; judgment by locusts is only a foretaste of a greater, final judgment to come.'

James Montgomery Boice

In the middle of this very gloomy book Joel talks about a blessing that is to come in the latter days. He says that God is going to restore the years that he locusts have eaten. There is going to be a time when God blesses the people so that they will be satisfied. It is at this turn in the prophecy, as Joel begins to speak comforting words, that the verses that became Peter's first text on Pentecost occur.'

James Montgomery Boice

Peter quotes from [Joel 2:28-32](#). 'Joel's prophecy was originally given after a locust plague had ravaged the land, creating a severe famine. Joel called the people to repentance, promising the restoration of their prosperity and going on to foresee the coming of the Day of the Lord, the dawn of the messianic age, when the Spirit would be poured out on all of Israel.'

John Polhill

- Although it seems rather easy to pass this prophecy off to some future fulfillment, the context does not allow for such flippancy.
- As F.F. Bruce writes, ‘The wonders and signs to be revealed in the world of nature may have more relevance in their immediate setting [Pentecost] than is sometimes realized.’

According to B.J. Hubbard, ‘It is remarkable how Peter’s quotation from Joel alludes to so many of the phenomena which characterize Luke’s version of Christian origins.’

F.F. Bruce continues, ‘More particularly, little more than seven weeks earlier the people of Jerusalem had indeed seen the darkening of the sun, during the early afternoon of Good Friday; and later in that same afternoon the paschal full moon may well have risen blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom. These phenomenon are now interpreted as harbingers of the advent of the day of the Lord – a day of judgment, to be sure, but more immediately the day of God’s salvation to all who invoked his name.’

In their article, ‘Dating the Crucifixion,’ in *Nature*, C.J. Humphreys and W.G. Waddington explain the blood-red appearance of the moon by a lunar eclipse on April 3, A.D. 33.

- The language of Joel 2 is most certainly consistent with the Hebrew apocalyptic imagery throughout both the Old and the New Testaments.

‘The signs below are the blood, fire, and thick smoke, which could...easily be related to the events in Jesus’ passion and at Pentecost.’  
John Polhill

- However, to assert that the language is apocalyptic, does not mean that it is metaphorical with no real content or meaning.

John Calvin, writing concerning similar apocalyptic language elsewhere in the New Testament, wrote:

In what manner *the sun will be darkened* we cannot know conjecture, but the event will show. He does not indeed mean that *the stars* will actually fall, but according to the apprehension of men; and accordingly Luke only predicts that *there will be SIGNS in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars*. The meaning there is, that here will be such a violent commotion of the firmament of heaven, that *the stars* themselves will be supposed *to fall*. Luke also adds that there will be a dreadful commotion of the sea, *the sea and the waves roaring, so that men will faint through fear* and alarm. In a word, all creatures above and below will be, as it were, heralds to summon men to that tribunal, which they will continue to treat with ungodly and wanton contempt till the last day.

- **As R.C. Sproul writes, ‘...the language employed in biblical prophecy is not always cold and logical as is common in the Western world, but adopts a kind of fervor common to the East. Scripture commonly describes the visitation of God’s judgment with images of convulsions and cataclysms.’**

□ In his commentary on the apocalyptic language of Acts 2:19-20, John Calvin wrote: 'Furthermore, whereas he says that the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, they are figurative speeches, whereby he doth give us to understand thus much, that the Lord will show tokens of his wrath through the whole frame of the world, which shall bring men even to their wit's end, as if there should be some horrible and fearful change of nature wrought.'

□ Similar apocalyptic language is found in Amos 5:18-20:

Amos 5:18-20:

'Woe to you who long  
for the day of the LORD!  
Why do you long for the day of the LORD ?  
That day will be darkness, not light.

It will be as though a man fled from a lion  
only to meet a bear,  
as though he entered his house  
and rested his hand on the wall  
only to have a snake bite him.

Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—  
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?'

'Amos uses the Hebrew literary device of the oracle. This is an oracle of doom, prefaced by the word *woe*. Graphic images describe the irony that will befall those who have a false expectation. They will be like the man who flees from a lion only to be confronted by a bear.' R.C. Sproul

- Given the understanding of apocalyptic imagery, it becomes clear that Peter is associating judgment with the events of Pentecost.
- The events of Pentecost reflected a judgment on the Jewish people, as the Gospel message went forth from Jerusalem **in foreign Gentile languages**. Read also Isaiah 33.
- Furthermore, the presence of tongues of fire underscores this reality.

'...while the ascent in the Pentecost fulfillment is no doubt on the Holy Spirit as blessing, the presence of the fire in the form of tongues resting on each one present (Acts 2:3) should not be forgotten. Without trying to settle the question here, this phenomenon should be understood against the backdrop of John's prophecy, either as indicating that the baptismal fire of destructive judgment has been exhausted in the case of the church and will not consume it, or as signifying the refining, purifying aspect of the Spirit's work in the church.' Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

□ Also, as John the Baptist foretold:  
Luke 3:16-17 states, 'John [the Baptist] answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'



‘Messianic Spirit-and-fire baptism is of a piece with God’s great discriminating activity of cleansing the world-threshing floor or, to vary the metaphor slightly, harvesting the world-field, at the end of history.’ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

- ❑ This view of judgment in light of the first advent of Christ is also consistent with the biblical testimony:

Luke 12:49-51: ‘I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.’

‘The coming day is a ‘burning oven’ that will consume the wicked, yet this day will also herald the Son of Righteousness, who will come with healing in his wings. Elijah will appear before this ‘great and dreadful’ day. The day of the Lord will be a great day for Israel, but it will also be a dreadful day. This is the crisis of the coming of the Son of Man.’ R.C. Sproul

- ❑ The ‘great and glorious day of the Lord’ spoken of by Peter in Verse 20 is most certainly a reference, ultimately to the return of Christ. However, one cannot escape its fulfillment during the Fall of Jerusalem [and the temple] in A.D. 70.
- ❑ In light of all of this, it becomes clear that the fall of Jerusalem [less than forty years after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost] and destruction of the Temple [with its sacrificial system] was profoundly significant with respect to God’s judgment on the nation of Israel.

Concerning Acts 2:20, John Gill writes, ‘...when he shall come in power and great glory, as he did in a few years after this [in A.D. 70], to take vengeance on the Jews, and destroy their nation, city, and temple; in which there was a display of his greatness, and power, and which was awful and ‘terrible’ to them...’

- ❑ Nearly every futuristic prophecy in the Old Testament had a near-term fulfillment. The reason for this was to determine whether the prophet was genuine or false, in accordance with Deuteronomy 13.

### **III. Salvation through Judgment in the Last Days**

- ❑ Peter’s quotation from Joel’s prophecy; however, does not end with judgment and doom, but rather with the hope of salvation.
- ❑ The judgment of God is nothing short of the demonstration of His wrath towards sin.
- ❑ Because God is just, sin **must** be punished. God does not simply wave a ‘magic wand’ to forgive sin; for this would violate His divine justice. This is why the concept of salvation through judgment is so central throughout Scripture, culminating in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

- Salvation through Judgment in Scripture [certainly not an exhaustive list below].
  - **The Flood** [God saves Noah and his family in the ark through his judgment via the flood]
  - **Passover** [God saves His people through the death of a Passover Lamb]
  - **Exodus** [at the Red Sea] [God saves His people through the death of the Egyptian Army at the Red Sea]
  - **The Sacrificial System** [God forgives sin through the death of an innocent animal]
  - **Wilderness Wanderings** [God saves, specifically, Caleb and Joshua through the judgment on the nation who remained in the wilderness 40 years.]
  - **Conquering the Land**
  - **Jonah**
  - **Period of Babylonian Exile**
  - **The Life, Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ**
  - **The spreading of the Gospel Message**

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15:**

‘Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.’

- The supreme act of salvation through judgment was in the life and death of Christ Himself.
- It is because He satisfied the demands of the Father that we are saved through His judgment.

‘For the Spirit-and-fire baptism, eventually realized at Pentecost, to be one of blessing rather than destruction for the messianic people, the Messiah himself must first become identified with them as their representative sin-bearer (the point of Jesus’ being baptized by John, from which John recoils; and be endowed with the Spirit, in order to bear away the wrath and condemnation of God their sins deserve. If they are to receive the Spirit as a gift and blessing, then he must receive the Spirit for the task of removing the curse on them.’

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

- Ultimately, it is because of Christ’s vicarious work that we can enjoy the eternal blessings [not judgment] of the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.