

Questions on Acts 2

A friend sent me four questions that I attempted to answer below...

I have a question that was brought up during my Care Group's Bible study...

The question is the prophecy of Joel in Acts 2:17-21 (cf. Joel 2:28-32). We have the following points of which we are uncertain:

1. Who does "all mankind" in verse 17 refer to? All believers? Everybody, both believers and non-believers? Or the saved in the millennial kingdom?

Joel's prophecy up to Joel 2:28 refers to the future time of judgment and restoration of Israel, also known as Daniel's seventieth week (cf. Dan. 9:27), or the seven-year Tribulation. "After" that time (2:28a), there will be a pouring out of the Spirit that the world has never seen when everyone will receive the Spirit regardless of sex (sons and daughters), age (young and old), or rank (even on my servants). Jeremiah spoke of the same period that we know as the millennial age (cf. Rev. 20:1-6) when he said that everyone will know the Lord (Jer. 31:34). In other words, at the beginning of the millennium, every person on earth will believe in the Lord! Wow! Before Joel's time the Spirit had come only on certain leaders to empower them for ministry—and that only for a limited time. But the Spirit indwelling now and in the future is eternal (John 14:16).

2. When does "those days" in verse 18 refer to? Pentecost and after? Or during the days when Christ returns?

Joel's prophecy details the coming of a "day of the LORD," which follows a recent locust invasion in Judah. The prophet's point is that while the people are concerned about the existence of their crops due to the locusts, even more serious "locusts" (eschatological armies) are coming that threaten the existence of their nation.

Then Joel declares that in the last days, the LORD will pour out His Spirit on all flesh (all of Judah or all of the earth) so that young men will have dreams and old men see visions (2:28-32). This is a clear prophecy of the Holy Spirit's coming and eschatological dimensions. In other words, deliverance in Joel's time foreshadows deliverance in the end times.

When Peter and the apostles saw the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, several unusual things also occurred. Each of the apostles praised God in new languages that could be understood by pilgrims visiting Jerusalem at that time (e.g., from Pontus, Cappadocia, Rome, and other distant places). Further, tongues of fire appeared on their heads. With these new languages and strange fiery phenomena, the accusation came that the apostles were drunk with wine. Peter refuted this claim by quoting Joel 2:28f. He declared that what they witnessed was an actual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is clear in his designation, "This is that which was spoken..." (Acts 2:16), which leaves no question that the reception of the Spirit was what Joel had in mind.

However, Joel also prophesied strange events in the sky—the sun darkened, and the moon reddened. Acts 2 records no such phenomena because the prophecy was left incomplete due to Israel's unbelief. These certain elements are reserved for a future time when the nation will believe just before the return of Christ. (For a study of five views on this issue, see Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the OT Prophets*, 154-56.)

But why does Peter apply this yet-future event to his own age? The Spirit was bestowed on all people even in his day, which announced that the "last days" had already arrived.

3. Does the "Day of the Lord" in verse 20 refer to the return of Christ?

The coming day of the LORD, a time of awesome judgment upon people who have rebelled against God, is the preeminent theme of Joel's prophecy (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14, 18). The day of the LORD theme pervades this prophecy perhaps more than any other with the possible exception of Zephaniah (e.g., Zeph. 1:14-18; chaps. 2-3) and finds mention throughout the Bible (cf. Amos 1:3-2:3; Zech. 12-14; Isa. 13:6, 9; 14:28-32; 17:1ff.; 20:1-6; 31:1-5; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3ff.; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). Joel mentions this "day" several times (1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14, 18), indicating that it refers to a period that "is to be a day of wrath and judgment upon the wicked and a day of salvation to the righteous" (Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the OT Prophets*, 146).

So, the "glorious day of the Lord" noted here refers to the latter part of this "day." In other words, after the sun turns dark and the moon turns red (during the judgment part of the "Day"), then the "great and glorious day..." will arrive when Christ rules.

4. Was the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, or will it be fulfilled when Christ returns?

When is this day? The mention of apocalyptic phenomena such as wonders in the heavens (i.e., the sun being turned to darkness and the moon to blood; 3:20-21) indicate that while to some extent near judgment would strike Judah for disobedience, the ultimate judgment would befall the nation at Christ's second advent (cf. Matt. 24:29-30). However, this will not just be a day of wrath upon the unbelieving but of blessing as well for the righteous (Joel 2:32; Zech. 14; Zeph. 3:8-20; Isa. 2, 11; 65-66; Amos 9:11-15; Ezek. 20:33-44, etc.; idem., 147). I think Pentecost only put in place the events that will culminate at the return of Christ. Therefore, we have partial fulfillment during Peter's time, but full fulfillment will occur upon Christ's return.

I trust I didn't confuse you more! Good questions!

Still learning with you,

Rick