

## b. Peter's quotation of Joel (2:14–21)

What Luke has described in verses 1–13 Peter now explains. The extraordinary phenomenon of Spirit-filled believers declaring God's wonders in foreign languages is the fulfilment of Joel's prediction that God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. Peter's exposition is similar to what in the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) is called a 'pesher' or 'interpretation' of an Old Testament passage in the light of its fulfilment. So (i) Peter introduces his sermon with the words 'this is that' (16, AV), *i.e.* 'this' which his hearers have witnessed is 'that' which Joel foretold; (ii) he deliberately changes Joel's 'afterwards' (as the time when the Spirit will be poured out) to 'in the last days' in order to emphasize that with the Spirit's coming the last days have come <sup>☞</sup>; and (iii) he applies the passage to [Jesus](#), so that 'the Lord' who brings salvation is no longer Yahweh who shelters survivors on Mount Zion,<sup>35</sup> but [Jesus](#) who saves from sin and judgment everyone who calls on his name (21).<sup>36</sup>

It is the unanimous conviction of the New Testament authors that [Jesus inaugurated the last days or Messianic age, and that the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit, since this was the Old Testament promise of promises for the end-time](#) <sup>☞</sup>. This being so, we must be careful not to re-quote Joel's prophecy as if we are still awaiting its fulfilment, or even as if its fulfilment has been only partial, and we await some future and complete fulfilment. For this is not how Peter understood and applied the text. The whole Messianic era, which stretches between the two comings of Christ, is the age of the Spirit in which his ministry is one of abundance <sup>☞</sup>. Is not this the significance of the verb 'pour out'? The picture is probably of a heavy tropical rainstorm, and seems to illustrate the generosity <sup>☞</sup> of God's gift of the Spirit (neither a drizzle nor even a shower but a downpour), its finality <sup>☞</sup> (for what has been 'poured out' cannot be gathered again) and its universality <sup>☞</sup> (widely distributed among the different groupings of

<sup>35</sup> Joel 2:32.

<sup>36</sup> R. N. Longenecker shows (in *Exegesis*) that 'pesher' interpretation was characteristic of Jesus' own teaching. "The "this is that" fulfilment motif, which is distinctive to pesher exegesis, repeatedly comes to the fore in the words of Jesus' (p. 70). Moreover, the apostles learned this method from him, as they were led by the Spirit. Consequently, 'most characteristic in their treatment of Scripture is pesher interpretation' (p. 98). See also pp. 38–45, 70–75 and 129–132.

humankind). Peter goes on to stress this universality. *All people* (pasa sarx, ‘all flesh’, 17a) means not everybody irrespective of their inward readiness to receive the gift, but everybody irrespective of their outward status. There are still spiritual conditions for receiving the Spirit, but there are no social distinctions whether of sex (Your sons and daughters, 17b), or of age (your young men ... your old men ..., 17c) or of rank (even on my servants, both men and women, 18—who are not just ‘servants’, as in the Hebrew, but whom God dignifies as belonging to him).

*And they will prophesy* (18). This seems to be an umbrella-use of the verb ‘to prophesy’. As Luther put it, ‘prophesying, visions and dreams are *all one thing*’.<sup>37</sup> That is, the universal gift (the Spirit) will lead to a universal ministry (prophecy). Yet the promise is surprising because elsewhere in Acts—and in the New Testament generally—only some are called to be prophets. How then shall we understand a universal prophetic ministry? If in its essence prophecy is God speaking, God making himself known by his Word, then certainly the Old Testament expectation was that in New Covenant days the knowledge of God would be universal, and the New Testament authors declare that this has been fulfilled through Christ.<sup>38</sup> In this sense all God’s people are now prophets, just as all are also priests and kings. So Luther understood prophecy here as ‘the knowledge of God through Christ which the Holy Spirit kindles and makes to burn through the word of the gospel’,<sup>39</sup> while Calvin wrote that it ‘signifies simply the rare and excellent gift of understanding’.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is this universal knowledge of God through Christ by the Spirit which is the foundation of the universal commission to witness (1:8). Because we know him, we must make him known.

Peter continues the quotation from Joel: ‘“*I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke* (19). *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord*”’ (20). It is possible to understand these predictions either literally as upheavals of

<sup>37</sup> Quoted by Lenski, p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> Je. 31:34, ‘they will all know me’; 1 Thes. 4:9, ‘you yourselves have been taught by God’; 1 Jn. 2:27; ‘his anointing teaches you about all things’.

<sup>39</sup> Lenski, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, I, p. 59.

nature (which already began on Good Friday,<sup>41</sup> and more of which Jesus foretold before the end<sup>42</sup>), or metaphorically as convulsions of history (since this is traditional apocalyptic imagery for times of social and political revolution<sup>43</sup>). Meanwhile, between the Day of Pentecost (when the Spirit came, inaugurating the last days) and the day of the Lord (when Jesus will come, concluding them) there stretches a long day of opportunity, during which the gospel of salvation will be preached throughout the world: ‘“*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*”’ (21).

### *c. Peter’s testimony to Jesus (2:22–41)*

The best way to understand Pentecost, however, is not through the Old Testament prediction, but through the New Testament fulfilment, not through Joel but through Jesus. As Peter summons the *men of Israel* to listen to him, his first words are *Jesus of Nazareth*, and he goes on to tell the story of Jesus in six stages:

#### *(i) His life and ministry (2:22)*

He was truly *a man*, yet he was *accredited by God* to them through supernatural works, which are given three names—*miracles* or literally ‘powers’ (*dynameis*, their nature being a demonstration of the power of God), *wonders* (*terata*, their effect being to arouse astonishment) and *signs* (*sēmeia*, their purpose being to embody or signify spiritual truth). *God did these through him*, and publicly (*among you*), *as you yourselves know*.

#### *(ii) His death (2:23)*

Peter describes *this man* as having been killed, partly because he had been *handed over* to them not by Judas (though the same verb is used of his betrayal) but *by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge*, and partly because they *with the help of wicked men* (presumably the Romans) had then *put him to death by nailing him to the cross*. Thus the same event, the death of Jesus, is attributed simultaneously both to the purpose of God and to the wickedness of men. No developed doctrine of the Atonement is yet expressed, but there

<sup>41</sup> Lk. 23:44–45.

<sup>42</sup> Lk. 21:11.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Is. 13:9ff.; 34:1ff.; Ezk. 32:7ff.; Am. 8:9; Mt. 24:29; Lk. 21:25–26; Rev. 6:12ff.

is already an understanding that through Jesus' death God's saving purpose was being worked out.

### (iii) *His resurrection (2:24–32)*

*It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (24; Peter sees this moral impossibility without explaining it). So although men had killed him, God raised him from the dead, and thereby freed him from the agony of death. 'Agony' means literally 'birth pains', so that his resurrection is pictured as a regeneration, a new birth out of death into life.*

Peter next confirms the truth of Jesus' resurrection by appealing to [Psalm 16:8–11](#) in which, he claims, it was foretold. David cannot have been referring to himself, when he wrote that God would not abandon him to the grave or let his Holy One see decay (27), because David had *died and was buried*, and his tomb was still in Jerusalem (29). Instead, being a prophet and remembering God's promise to place a distinguished descendant on his throne,<sup>44</sup> *he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ (30–31)*. Peter's use of Scripture probably sounds strange to us, but we need to bear three points in mind. First, all Scripture bears witness to Christ, especially to his death, resurrection and world-wide mission. That is its character and purpose. Jesus himself said so both before and after his resurrection.<sup>45</sup> In consequence, secondly, not least because of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching, his disciples came naturally to see Old Testament references to God's anointed or king, to David and his royal seed, as finding their fulfilment in Jesus.<sup>46</sup> This is what Dom Jacques Dupont has called 'the radically christological character of early Christian exegesis'.<sup>47</sup> And, thirdly, once this foundation is granted, a Christian use of the Old Testament like Peter's of [Psalm 16](#) is 'scrupulously logical and internally coherent'.<sup>48</sup>

Having quoted these verses of [Psalm 16](#) and applied them to the resurrection of Jesus, Peter adds: *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact (32)*. Thus the spoken testimony of the apostles and the written prediction of the prophets con-

<sup>44</sup> Cf. [2 Sa. 7:16](#); [Ps. 89:3ff.](#); [132:11–12](#).

<sup>45</sup> E.g. [Lk. 4:21](#); [Jn 5:39–40](#); [Lk. 24:27](#), 44ff.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. [Psalm 2:8](#); [16:10](#); [110:1](#).

<sup>47</sup> Dupont, p. 120.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109; and pp. 103–128, 136, 154–157. See also Dr Longenecker's comments in *Acts*, pp. 279–280, and in *Exegesis*, especially pp. 85–103 and 205–209.

verged. Or, as we would say, the Old and New Testament Scriptures coincided in their witness to the resurrection of Christ.

*(iv) His exaltation (2:33–36)*

Peter now jumps straight from Jesus' resurrection from the dead to his exaltation to God's right hand. From this position of supreme honour and absolute power, having received the promised Spirit from the Father, Jesus has poured out the Spirit.

*'Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. <sup>34</sup>For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

*' "The Lord said to my Lord:  
Sit at my right hand  
<sup>35</sup>until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet." '*

*<sup>36</sup>Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'*

Peter again clinches his argument with an apt Old Testament quotation. As he has applied [Psalm 16](#) to the Messiah's resurrection, so he now applies [Psalm 110](#) to the Messiah's ascension. For David *did not ascend to heaven* (34), any more than he had been preserved from decay by resurrection. Yet he designated as 'my lord' him whom Yahweh had instructed to sit at his right hand. Jesus had already applied this verse to himself,<sup>49</sup> as did Paul and the writer to the Hebrews later.<sup>50</sup> Peter's conclusion is that all Israel should now be assured that *this Jesus*, whom they had repudiated and crucified, God had made *both Lord and Christ*. Not of course that Jesus became Lord and Christ only at the time of his ascension, for he was (and claimed to be) both throughout his public ministry. It is rather that now God exalted him to be in reality and power what he already was by right.

<sup>49</sup> [Mk. 12:35–37](#); [Lk 20:41–44](#).

<sup>50</sup> [1 Cor. 15:25](#); [Heb. 1:13](#).

(v) *His salvation (2:37–39)*

Luke now describes the crowd's response to Peter's sermon, together with Peter's reply.

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'*

*<sup>38</sup>Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'*

*Cut to the heart*, that is, convicted of sin and conscience-stricken, Peter's hearers asked anxiously what they should do (37). Peter replied that they must *repent*, completely changing their mind about Jesus and their attitude to him, and *be baptised* in his name, submitting to the humiliation of baptism, which Jews regarded as necessary for Gentile converts only, and submitting to it in the name of the very person they had previously rejected. This would be a clear, public token of their repentance—and of their faith in him. Though Peter does not specifically call on the crowd to believe, they evidently did so, since they are termed 'believers' in verse 44, and in any case repentance and faith involve each other, the turn from sin being impossible without the turn to God, and vice versa (cf. 3:19). And both are signified by baptism in Christ's name, which means 'by his authority, acknowledging his claims, subscribing to his doctrines, engaging in his service, and relying on his merits'.<sup>51</sup>

Then they would receive two free gifts of God—the forgiveness of their sins (even of the sin of rejecting God's Christ) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (to regenerate, indwell, unite and transform them). For they must not imagine that the Pentecostal gift was for the apostles alone, or for the 120 disciples who had waited ten days for the Spirit to come, or for any élitist group, or even for that nation or that generation alone. God had placed no such limitations on his offer and gift. On the contrary (39), *the promise*—or 'gift' or 'baptism'—of the Spirit (1:4; 2:33) was for them also (who were listening to Peter), and for their children (of the next and subsequent generations), and for all who were far off (certainly the Jews of the dispersion and perhaps also prophetically the distant Gentile world<sup>52</sup>), indeed *for all* (without exception) *whom the Lord our God will call*.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, I, p. 85.

<sup>52</sup> As in Is. 49:1, 12; 57:19; cf. Eph. 2:13, 17.

Everyone God calls to himself through Christ receives both gifts. The gifts of God are coextensive with the call of God.

(vi) *His new community (2:40–41)*

Luke adds that this was not the end of Peter's sermon, for *with many other words* he both *warned them* and *pleaded with them*. And the essence of his warnings and pleadings was the appeal: '*Save yourselves from this corrupt generation*' (40). That is, Peter was not asking for private and individual conversions only, but for a public identification with other believers. Commitment to the Messiah implied commitment to the Messianic community, that is, the church. Indeed, they would have to change communities, transferring their membership from one that was old and *corrupt* to one that was new and *being saved* (47).

The amazing response to Peter's appeal is now recorded. Large numbers of people *accepted his message* (i.e. repented and believed), and in consequence *were baptised*. In fact, *about three thousand were added to their number* that day (41). The body of Christ in Jerusalem multiplied twenty-six times, from 120 to 3,120. They must also, according to Peter's promise, have received forgiveness and the Spirit, although this time apparently with no supernatural signs. At least Luke makes no mention of phenomena like wind or fire, or of languages.