

The Spirit Poured upon All Flesh

***“It shall come to
pass afterward,
that I will pour out
my spirit upon
all flesh.”
—Joel 2:28***

Our text reveals that God’s Holy Spirit, his righteous power and holy influence, will be exercised for the blessing of all mankind—“all flesh.” This prophecy is located in a

context of predictions pertaining to the end of this “present evil world” and the establishment of Christ’s millennial kingdom. (Gal. 1:4; Rev. 20:6) The general testimony of the prophecies related to this time is that there would be a great “time of trouble” upon all nations, in which both Jews and Gentiles would be perplexed and distressed. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) The prophecies also reveal that in the midst of this period of trouble the dispersed people of Israel would be returned to their own land.—Matt. 24:32-34; Jer. 24:1-7

The word “afterward” in our text is a most revealing one. On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples, the Apostle Peter quoted this prophecy. Instead of using the word “afterward” he said the “last days”

—in the “last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.” Peter then continued quoting from Joel’s prophecy, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”—Acts 2:17,18

Peter also cited another part of Joel’s prophecy which, in highly symbolic language, describes certain aspects of world conditions leading up to and associated with the time of trouble with which this present evil world comes to an end: “I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.” (vss. 19,20; Joel 2:30,31) Taking all these statements into consideration, when the apostle said, as quoted in verse sixteen, “This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel,” we are not to understand that the entire prophecy that he quoted was fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter wanted his hearers to be sure to recognize the prophecy from which he was quoting, though only a portion of it was being fulfilled at that time.

What actually happened at Pentecost was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord’s “servants and handmaidens.” Afterward, as Joel states it, or in the last days, as Peter interprets Joel, the Holy Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. Thus Joel’s prophecy pertaining to the giving of the Holy Spirit in the outworking of God’s plan covers in brief this entire feature. The giving of God’s Holy Spirit began to be fulfilled at Pentecost, but the

outpouring upon all flesh is yet future, and will take place during Christ's kingdom.

To the Jew First

In pouring out the Holy Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord's providences directed that it first be upon the Jewish believers assembled in the "upper room" in Jerusalem. (Acts 1:13) A short time later there was another outpouring upon the Gentiles, demonstrated by the divine acceptance of Cornelius and his household into the body of Christ. (Acts 10:44,45) The Scriptures indicate that there will be a similar sequence in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.

In Ezekiel 37:1-14, there is an enlightening prophecy depicting the restoration of Israel. In this chapter the "whole house of Israel" is likened to a valley of "dry bones." (vss. 2,4,11) In the vision of restoration given to Ezekiel, he saw the bones come together, "and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath [spirit or life] in them."—vs. 8

Then Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy: "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." (vss. 9,10) This does not portray the resurrection of the dead, but the gradual return of the nation of Israel to God's favor during the "last days." The next verse reads, "Son of man [Ezekiel], these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our

bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.”—Ezek. 37:11

Then Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy further and say to them, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.” (vs. 12) The “graves” here are symbolic, even as are the “dry bones” in the graves. The graves evidently depict the various countries in which the Israelites throughout the many centuries of their dispersion were domiciled. They surely were “cut off”—that is, separated from other segments of their people. Thus all of them symbolically said, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.”

Now that we are living in the last days, this situation has already undergone a marked change. A goodly percentage of all Israel has been brought up out of their graves, symbolically speaking, and have been regathered to their land of promise. As a people they do not feel so cut off, and considerable “flesh” and “skin” have appeared on the dry bones. As yet, however, they do not “live” from the divine standpoint. Indeed, a few of them associate their changed position with the divine promises, but the majority have looked to human leaders and institutions rather than to God. There is one more event in their foretold experiences which is yet to occur, and must occur, before this prophecy is completely fulfilled.

God did not say that his people would know him when he merely brought them out of their symbolic graves. It is when he has not only uprooted them from the countries where as dry bones they were living, but when he will have put his Spirit in them, that they shall know him and live. “And ye shall

know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, ... Then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.” (vss. 13,14) Our particular interest at the moment is in the fact that here God indicates that he will put his Spirit in the regathered Israelites, and that as a result of this they will “know” that he is the Lord, and will then live.

The following two chapters, Ezekiel 38 and 39, prophetically outline the major developments in a sequence of events associated with Israel’s regathering in the Holy Land. Enemies from various quarters are shown to attack them, and when the attackers are defeated by divine intervention, their eyes will be opened. The Israelites will recognize the providence of their God in the mighty deliverance that is wrought for them. Then, in the last eight verses of chapter thirty-nine, we are presented with an explanation as to the significance of the events foretold in these three wonderful chapters—37, 38, and 39. The principal point in this explanation is that “the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.”—Ezek. 39:22

In the last verse of this chapter, God says, “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.” (vs. 29) That is, as a result of God’s deliverance from a situation which would otherwise have meant utter ruin for the regathered Israelites, they learn to know their God. God’s explanation is, “I have poured out my spirit” upon them, and I will not “hide my face any more from them.”

First upon His Servants

The Holy Spirit, given at Pentecost for the blessing of all the footstep followers of Christ, led to certain gifts of apostles, pastors, and teachers. (Eph. 4:11) These, together with their Head, Christ Jesus, have served as means through which the Holy Spirit of Truth has flowed out to all the consecrated believers. The entire Christ class, in turn, through the ministry of that Spirit, will be the source of the outpoured Spirit upon all flesh—that is, to Israel and then to the entire world.

The pattern designed for the enlightenment and blessing of the church by the Holy Spirit at the present time will have its counterpart during the coming Messianic kingdom. Then, also, there will be “servants and handmaidens” through whom God’s Holy Spirit and instructions in the ways of Truth and righteousness will come to the people. These “servants” will be the ones described in Psalm 45:16 as “princes in all the earth.” In Isaiah 1:26, these are referred to as “judges” and “counsellors,” and the promise is given to Israel: “I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning.”

Israel was served during the period of the judges by individuals who were raised up by God in special times of need, and through these judges the people were delivered from their enemies. A case in point is Othniel, son of Caleb’s younger brother. Through this judge the Israelites were delivered from King Chushanrishathaim, whom they had served eight years. The secret of Othniel’s ability to deliver the Israelites was that the “Spirit of the LORD came upon him.”—Judg. 3:8-10

If judges will be raised up to serve the Israelites “as at the first,” it follows that the Spirit of the Lord will be upon these also, even as, in a special manner, it came upon Jesus at Jordan and upon the apostles at Pentecost. This enabled them to perform miracles of various sorts, which served as signs that contributed greatly to the establishment of the Early Church.

We can envision a similar situation in connection with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh during the earthly kingdom. There will be miraculous demonstrations of God’s power. The divine intervention to save Israel from her enemies in the final phase of the great Armageddon struggle will never be forgotten. This will lead into the manifestation of kingdom authority in the earth, and since the Ancient Worthies, “princes in all the earth,” are to be the human representatives of that kingdom, their awakening from the sleep of death will evidently take place at about this time.

This, in itself, will be a most convincing sign that God’s power is operating on behalf of Israel and the whole world. Through the use of divine power, these heroes of faith who lived prior to Jesus’ First Advent will quickly become the recognized earthly leaders in the kingdom.

What Will Be Accomplished?

The outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit upon all flesh will not accomplish all the things for the world of mankind that it has for the church since Pentecost. It will not be, properly speaking, a “baptism” of the Spirit, because in the church the only way to come under this baptism of the Spirit is individually to

be baptized into the death of Christ. (Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3-5) The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon mankind will, however, lead to full surrender to do God's will.

Mankind's endowment of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom will not be an "anointing" of the Spirit, for an anointing signifies appointment to a special office. For the Christian, their anointing now during the present age is that of ambassadorship, and later to reign as kings and priests in the kingdom. (II Cor. 5:20; Rev. 20:6) The world of mankind will not be thus commissioned to serve in the kingdom. The Holy Spirit will not beget believers of the next age to a new, spirit life, for the willing and obedient then are to be restored to human perfection, not exalted to the spirit nature. The "witness" and "seal" are also functions of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth, which apply specifically to its working in and for the footstep followers of Christ of the present age.—Rom. 8:16; Eph. 1:13

Spirit-begotten believers of the present age find themselves surrounded by an unfriendly, and often antagonistic, world. Satan is the "god of this world," and the "prince of this world." (II Cor. 4:4; John 12:31) Satan's spirit, or influence, among the people is far from holy. Instead, it induces sin. It is the spirit of deception, ignorance, superstition, anger, malice, hatred, and strife. Today the spirit-begotten children of God have to resist these influences of Satan with which they are surrounded. (I Pet. 5:8,9) In order that the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, meekness—may manifest themselves, the spirit of Satan has to be overcome.—Gal. 5:19-25

It is Satan who, in his attacks against the seed of promise, stirs up enmity and persecution against those who are now blessed by the Holy Spirit. During Christ's kingdom, however, Satan will be bound, "that he should deceive the nations no more." (Rev. 20:1-3) No longer will it be necessary to suffer for righteousness' sake. No longer will all the Satan-inspired, unholy influences that war against the people of God now, be permitted to hinder progress in righteousness by those upon whom God pours his Spirit during the kingdom. Isaiah wrote of that time when the Lord will take away the "rebuke of his people ... from off all the earth."—Isa. 25:8

While there will continue to be a measure of imperfection manifested in the world until the work of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh is completed, righteousness and Truth will predominate. That is why Peter foretold that it would be a world—a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:13) How different, then, will be the position of the people in that age from what it is today!

Then, even as now, believers in Israel and throughout the world, if faithful to the privileges granted to them at that time, will become filled with God's Holy Spirit. This will not mean the same for them, however, as it does for the spirit-begotten ones of this age. Now, to be filled with the Holy Spirit implies, among other things, zeal in sacrificing the flesh and its interests, and the setting of affections on things above, on heavenly things, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. (Rom. 12:1; Col. 3:1,2) It will not be so during the Messianic kingdom. Then the righteous will not be called upon to sacrifice

earthly blessings and joys, but will be encouraged to “plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them,” to “build houses, and inhabit them,” and to “long enjoy the work of their hands.”—Isa. 65:21,22

At the present time, the calling of God, through the Holy Spirit, leads those who accept that call to enter into a covenant “by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) In the next age, beginning with Israel and then encompassing the entire world, those who come under the influence of the Holy Spirit as poured out on all flesh, will enter into what is called a “New Covenant.” This covenant arrangement will not call for sacrifice. The promise is, “After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:31-34

This beneficent work of righteousness in the hearts of the people will be accomplished by the Spirit of God. Just as God’s Spirit since Pentecost has ministered to the church through the written Word of Truth, we may know that in the next age there will be a definite program of instruction for the people. That instruction will reveal to them the holy precepts of God, and will inspire mankind to obedience. This is clearly implied in the prophecy which states of that time when “the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Then, the desires of the people will be met, and they will say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain

[kingdom] of the LORD, ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” (Micah 4:2) Isaiah, in a very similar prophecy informs us that “all nations shall flow unto it.”—Isa. 2:2

It has long been recognized by students of the Bible that the “Zion” of this prophecy symbolizes the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. (Rev. 14:1) “Jerusalem” represents the earthly phase. (Luke 21:24; Zech. 14:2-17) The ancient heroes of faith—Ancient Worthies—will be the princes and judges in the earthly phase of the kingdom. Through these, the “word of the LORD” will go out to all people, and we can be certain that this “Word” will be inspired by the Holy Spirit, even as it reaches true Christians now.

The humble and sincere attitude of the people who then will say, “he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths,” is also revealing. Just as the Holy Spirit at the present time has no power over those who do not submit to its directions, even so it will be in the next age. Only those who yield themselves in obedience, declaring their determination to walk in his ways, will have the law of God written in their hearts. “The law shall go forth of Zion,” the prophet declares. This will be the law of the New Covenant. The Word of the Lord which goes forth from Jerusalem—the earthly phase of the kingdom—will be the interpretation of that law in the sense of its proper application in the lives of the people.

Then, even as now, in order to enter into covenant relationship with God it will be necessary to repent of sin, and accept Jesus as the Redeemer and Savior from sin and death. Jesus, together with his body

members, the Christ class, will be the mediator of that New Covenant, and will have to be recognized as such by all those who wish to obtain life under its terms.—Acts 3:23

A Pure Language

Zephaniah 3:8,9 is another prophecy pertaining to the time of trouble which immediately precedes the establishment of Christ's kingdom. It shows that in that kingdom the Word of the Lord will be diffused among the people in order that all may have an opportunity to serve him. In this prophecy, all the nations of the earth are mentioned, and the indignation of the Lord is shown to come upon them, with the whole symbolic earth—present earthly institutions—being “devoured with the fire” of God's “jealousy,” or zeal.

All the prophecies pertaining to the time of trouble with which the “present evil world” ends, reveal in one way or another the later outpouring of God's blessings upon the people. Thus, in this prophecy of Zephaniah, we are assured that after the present earthly institutions come to an end, the Lord will “turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” This “pure language” is God's message of Truth, the Word of the Lord, which will go forth from Jerusalem—that is, from the earthly phase of the kingdom.

The pouring out of God's Spirit upon all flesh will be reflected in the knowledge of the “pure language,” which will then fill the earth. It will be this true understanding of God and his laws that will enable the people of all nations to call upon and to

serve him “with one consent”—that is, shoulder to shoulder. When all serve the Lord in unity of purpose, and are in covenant relationship with him, there will be peace and joy everywhere. Isaiah wrote, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom]: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

In Revelation 20:12, the diffusion of the knowledge of the Lord, which will result from the Holy Spirit being poured out upon all flesh, is symbolized by the opening of “books.” The truths contained in these “books” will be the basis of judgment among the people—all the people, including those who have died and will then be awakened from death. (John 5:28,29) Those who yield themselves in obedience to the truths in the opened books will have their names enrolled in the “book of life.” This also is symbolic language. The thought is that obedience to the law of God, the law revealed in the books which are then opened by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, will lead to life—not spiritual life, but restored, earthly life.

It is this full obedience to the pure language, the knowledge of the Lord, and the truths revealed by the opened books, which is described in the promise of the New Covenant as the law of God being written in the hearts of the people. This means a return to human perfection. It is this work of restoration that is described by Peter as the “restoration of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:20,21) Then the human race will be in the same covenant relationship with God as

Adam was before he sinned.—Hos. 6:7, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

In Christ's kingdom, through agencies beyond our ability to comprehend, the Holy Spirit of God will provide all the assistance needed in order that the glorious objective of the divine purpose for the recovery of mankind from sin and death might be accomplished. It will reach down into the tomb and restore the dead to life. This will be done by the same mighty power that accomplished the original creation. The psalmist said concerning God and his human creation, "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works." —Ps. 104:29-31

It is because sin and death will be destroyed, and the earth filled with a perfect and happy people in keeping with God's original design in Creation, that he will "rejoice in his works." Then, too, his name will be honored and glorified by all. Isaiah wrote, "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh"—all flesh upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will then be poured out—"shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."—Isa. 40:5

What a glorious prospect! May we continue to rejoice in it, and pray for it, "until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."—Isa. 32:15-17 ■