

Do We Test Joel's Patience?
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Are the ancient heroes able to see us and know what is going on in our lives? Perhaps so. You may disagree strongly. That is all right with me. I am not arguing the point here as I try to imagine the prophet Joel's feelings as we try to interpret his prophecies. Our darkening his meanings by closed minds, ignorance, and misinterpretation may spoil his heavenly peace, if such is possible!

Joel's words in Joel 2:28-32 quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16-21) are familiar to most of us. Peter declared that the happenings on Pentecost were fulfilling Joel's words which Peter paraphrased in part. But Peter either failed to understand or to accept the very words he quoted. And many of us have followed Peter's example! The following four brief examples may challenge you to study this more.

1. Peter rightly declared that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh was prophesied by Joel. All flesh meant the Jews and also the Gentiles__ "all that are far off." But we are familiar with the struggle that Peter and many other Jews had in accepting Gentiles apart from Judaism. It took about ten years for the point to fully register on him. After so long, through divine direction, a vision, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius' household, Peter was able to admit, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

We may wonder if Joel looked on with impatience while Peter defended a barricade to the kingdom. And even in the Twentieth Century there has been rejection due to race!

2. In those last days when the Spirit was to be poured out, women would be among the prophets, according to the prophet Joel. To prophesy was to declare publicly the message of God. We have to wait many more than ten years for a specific mention of women prophets. In telling of Paul's return to Jerusalem there is mention that Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Paul gave women unquestioned permission to pray and prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11 so long as they followed proper decorum in dress. They were to avoid appearance that would identify them with the prostitute priestesses of the temple of Venus in Corinth. Neither were they allowed to be disruptive in the Corinthian assemblies (1 Cor. 14). Nor were the men! But in correcting their rudeness Paul was not forgetting or nullifying what he had written in Chapter 11! Nor was he striking down the prerogative prophesied by Joel. The correcting of an abuse in Chapter 14 no more invalidated Chapter 11 than Paul's correction of the abuse of the love feast in Chapter 11 was a universal prohibition of sharing a meal together at a place of worship.

How long must Joel wait? Nineteen centuries later we still will not permit the fulfillment of that which was spoken on the "birthday of the church" on Pentecost!

3. In his God-given message Joel indicated no exclusive group who alone would receive the outpouring of the Spirit. Nineteen centuries later disciples strongly deny that believers receive the baptism of the Spirit. They claim that it was limited to a few persons vaguely identified in the book of Acts.

Those who called upon the name of the Lord in baptism would receive the gift of the Spirit. Later Paul described the process: "He saved us,

not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in the hope of eternal life" (Titus 2:5f). In Acts 2 the outpouring, baptism, and gift of the Holy Spirit are treated as identical. So all baptized believers are at the same time recipients of the baptism of the Spirit.

Peter indicated that the baptism of the Spirit on Pentecost was fulfilling Joel's prophecy. But many of us still deny that we are baptized by his outpouring on us. Sorry about that, Joel!

4. Most Bible students contend that some of Joel's words about the last days are yet to be fulfilled. They have stretched out the last days for nearly two thousand years and projected them into the indefinite future. Patience, Joel!

But is it not evident that these prophetic words have not come to pass and that Christ has not returned: "And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day."?

Could it be that we have been putting an incorrect meaning to the last days? Consider this suggestion. The last days referred to their current time, or generation, when God's dealing with Israel would be brought to an end. Israel had rejected God and his Christ. God was about to reject them as a nation and a chosen people. It was their last days. Individuals could continue to call upon God and be saved through Christ, but not through Judaism. Biblical Judaism was destroyed in 70 A.D. at the time of the coming of Christ in vengeance. It was the Day of the Lord, the Lord's Day. Numerous references in the epistles indicate that the end was near. Revelation definitely declared the then-imminent fulfillment of God's wrath through the Presence of the Lord (See Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20). This necessarily dates Revelation before the destruction of Jerusalem as a message forewarning the disciples. Messengers who carried the letter probably gave orally the key to understanding. No one has or needs such a key today.

But what of the celestial disturbances that Joel spoke of? Are we so forgetful! Jesus declared those things also! With dramatic symbolism he shocked them: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory..." (Matt. 24:29-30)

In Chapter 24 of Matthew, Jesus dealt at length with the end of the Jewish age culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He used the symbolism common to Hebrew writers in predicting the judgment of the Lord or downfall of nations. (Compare: Isa. 13, 17, 18, 19; Ezek. 32; Zach. 14; Joel 2.) That Matthew 24 deals with the days of vengeance upon Jerusalem seems undeniable when you also compare Mark 13:4, 30; Luke 21:7, 20, 28, 31-32. Jesus told them emphatically that all these things of Chapter 24 would be fulfilled in the lifetime of those present.

When the Jews present on Pentecost were convinced by Peter that they had killed the One sent by God, they cried out, not so much in inquiry as in despair, "What shall we do?" They felt doomed. They were informed that they could escape the wrath of the day of the Lord by

calling on the name of the Lord. In this surprise package they would also find forgiveness of their awesome sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Others had become Jews by a proselyte baptism; now by another proselyte baptism they could commit their allegiance from the fleshly kingdom that was to be shaken to the spiritual kingdom which cannot be shaken. That change would be confirmed by the destruction Jerusalem. Peter's final exhortation to his Jewish brethren on Pentecost was, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." He was pleading that they save themselves from God's vengeance upon Israel as a rejecting people. (Please re-study Acts 2 with these thoughts in mind.)

Conditioning and traditional concepts die only after painful restudy. This is meant to be a challenge to review beliefs and practices relating to the inclusion of all peoples in the body, the prerogative to prophesy given to women, the reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by all disciples, and the identity of the last days.

How long before we can accept the fulfillment of these fundamental things spoken by Joel and confirmed by Peter? How long will we continue to hinder the kingdom by our rejection of these things initiated on Pentecost?

Joel, has your patience run out? The real concern is: Has God's patience with us run out as it did with Israel?
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