

Correcting a Common Misconception About Joel 2 End-Times Prophecy

One of the great promises of the end times is that God will pour out His Spirit on *all flesh*. This was first prophesied by Joel and then partially fulfilled on the day of Shavuot, when Simon Peter preached his first message under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When men accused him of being drunk, he said, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

Yet, Joel’s prophecy was so much more extensive than what took place on Shavuot. There was no “blood and fire and columns of smoke” (Joel 2:30b), and it clearly was not “the great and awe-inspiring day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31b). Yet, like many prophecies, this one had a partial fulfillment in Acts 2, and will have a full fulfillment in the last days.

All Flesh?

In this blog, I want to focus on one misunderstood phrase. In Joel 2:28a (NIV), we see the famous words, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”

The NIV gets closer to the meaning, but it doesn’t really say, all *people*, but in Hebrew “all *flesh*-basar-בָּשָׂר.” This is one reason I like the NIV—they used common sense to help us understand the original intent of the author. Clearly God was not saying He would pour out His spirit on dogs and cats or sheep and goats. Clearly, He meant people. But it doesn’t even mean *all people*.

Prophets, Priests and Kings

Not everyone under the Old Covenant could experience the presence of God at the same level. The Levites were different

from the regular Hebrews. The *cohanim* (priests) were higher than the rest of the Levites. And, of course, there were those who walked in an even higher level of anointing—like the prophets of Israel. When Samuel anointed David as king, the Spirit of came on David, “And the Spirit of the Lord came on David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:13b, MEV). And, of course, there were differences between men and women in society, not to mention servants and slaves.

The Mystery of the New Covenant

What Joel is referring to, at least in the first part of his prophecy, is the advent of the New Covenant. It is the great mystery that even the apostles missed until that fateful day in Cornelius’ house when the Spirit of God did the unthinkable: He filled Gentiles as they spoke in tongues.

The mystery is that under the New Covenant—initiated on the cross, but corporately birthed on Shavuot—is that anyone, no matter their gender, race or standing in society can enjoy a deep experience with the Holy Spirit. Look at Joel’s emphasis:

Your sons *and daughters* will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. *Even on the menservants and maidservant*, in those days I will pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28-29, emphasis mine).

The idea of a servant or a woman being used by God or enjoying deep intimacy with the Spirit of God was very rare under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, it is the norm. So when He says, “all flesh,” He means “without distinction.” The Holy Spirit is not just going to fall on every human being, no matter their desire or lack thereof for God, but rather, anyone who wants more can have more.

“Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name” (John 1:12).

This would be the correct understanding of Paul in Galatians.

“For you are all sons of God through trusting in Messiah *Yeshua*. ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah *Yeshua*.” (Gal. 3:26, 28).

He is not saying there are no longer distinctions between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 11:29) any more than he is saying men and women have no distinctions. He is saying that despite those distinctions, nothing can hold you back from the Spirit of God. No one can tell you, “You can’t prophesy, because you are a woman,” or “You can’t be used of God, because you are a slave,” or “You cannot be as close to the Father as Jewish believers.”

William Seymour

God used a one-eyed, black man to birth the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. He had to overcome all kinds of racism. Forced to sit outside of the door of a bible school, he studied for ministry. White men told him he could not study the word in the classroom because He was black. Instead of getting bitter, he pursued God; and God used him to change the world.

Yes, there needs to be order. I believe in submission to authority. And I believe we all have different roles, functions and gifts. But nothing and no one can hold you back from experiencing God. When it comes to our gifts and callings, God chooses. But when it comes to intimacy with *Yeshua* through the Holy Spirit, there are no limits!

When Joel says that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, he means that any human who wants the Spirit can have the Spirit. In fact, it is God’s great desire to give you more.
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