

CONCORDIA COMMENTARY

A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

JOEL

Thomas P. Nass



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The Restoration Prophecies in Joel and the Prophets

All of the OT prophets include predictions of good things for Israel. These Gospel messages are often called “restoration” prophecies, reflecting the Hiphil of שׁוּב and similar verbs used in the Hebrew text. In Joel 4:1 (ET 3:1), for example, God says that he will “bring about the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem” (see the second textual note on 4:1 [ET 3:1]). To a certain extent, “restoration” is not an ideal term for these prophecies because they do not foretell just a reversal back to a previous, glorious condition. God promises good things that go beyond anything experienced in the garden of Eden or in the halcyon days of Israel’s past. Still, the term “restoration” is commonly used, and so it is used also in this commentary.

More important than what these prophecies are called is how they are interpreted and applied. This is a vital matter since the restoration prophecies are the OT’s expression of God’s precious, life-giving Gospel, and not all Christian expositors handle them in a proper way. It is appropriate to give some special attention to their interpretation and application.

Components of the Restoration

First, it may be useful to summarize what the restoration prophecies predict. They present, as stated by Bruce Waltke, a “kaleidoscope of blessing.”¹ Here is a list of the main components of the coming restoration according to the OT prophets, excluding Joel.

- *Return to the land.* God will gather the Israelites and bring them back to the promised land (Is 43:5–6; Jer 30:3; 31:8; Ezek 34:13; 36:24, 28; 37:25; Amos 9:15; Micah 2:12; Zech 8:7–8). Judah and Israel will be united as one kingdom again (Ezek 37:15–22). The land will be allocated in a new way (Ezek 48:1–29).
- *Cities repopulated.* Jerusalem and other cities of Israel will be rebuilt (Is 61:4; Jer 31:38–40; Ezek 36:10), and precious stones will be used to rebuild Jerusalem (Is 54:11–12). The country will enjoy a large population (Ezek 36:10–11, 37–38).
- *Peace and security.* Israel will enjoy peace (Is 2:4; Zech 9:10). No oppressor will overrun Israel (Zech 9:8) because God will destroy the nations that attack Jerusalem (Zech 12:7–8). There will be no violence (Is 60:17–18) and no savage animals (Is 65:25; Ezek 34:25). There will be no one to make the people afraid (Jer 23:4; 30:10; Ezek 34:28; Micah 4:4).

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 280.

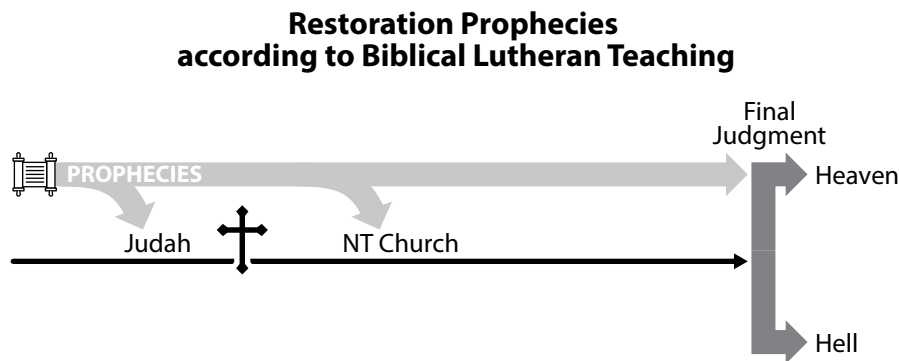
- *Foreigners conquered and included.* Foreigners will no longer taunt Israel (Is 62:4; Ezek 36:15), but they will be in awe of what God has done for Israel (Jer 33:9). Israel will conquer other nations (Is 11:14; 54:2–3; Micah 4:13; Zech 12:6). In addition, people from other nations will be converted to faith in the Lord and will eagerly come to Jerusalem to live there (Is 2:2–3; 11:10; 56:6–8; 60:4–14; Zech 2:15 [ET 2:11]; 8:20–23; 14:16).
- *Prosperity of every sort.* The land will enjoy an abundance of water (Is 30:23, 25; 41:18; 44:3; Ezek 34:26). There will be bountiful harvests (Is 30:23–24; Jer 31:12; Ezek 34:29; 36:29–30; Amos 9:13; Zech 8:12; Mal 3:11) and flocks of sheep (Jer 33:12–13). People will feast on rich foods (Is 25:6) and enjoy long life (Is 65:20).
- *Messianic King.* A descendant of David will sit on the throne (Is 9:5–6 [ET 9:6–7]; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15–16; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24; Amos 9:11). He will be born of a virgin (Is 7:14) in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1–3 [ET 5:2–4]). He will have a world-wide rule (Zech 9:10).
- *Forgiveness of sins.* God will cleanse people from their sins (Is 1:18; 4:4; 43:25; 44:22; Jer 31:34; 33:8; Ezek 36:25; Micah 7:18–19). Forgiveness will be accomplished through God’s Servant who will be punished in place of the people (Is 53:4–6).
- *Wholehearted devotion to the Lord.* The Holy Spirit will be poured out (Is 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29), and the Word of God will be taught (Is 2:3). God will give a new heart to people (Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26) so that they wholeheartedly fear the Lord (Jer 32:39) and trust in him (Is 12:2; 26:3–4; Zeph 3:12). They will follow God’s laws (Ezek 37:24) because the Law of God will be inside of them (Jer 31:33). There will be no idolatry in the land (Ezek 36:25; 37:23; Zech 13:2) and no uncircumcised and defiled people (Is 52:1). People and things in Jerusalem will be holy (Is 4:3; Zech 14:20–21). God will provide leaders (Jer 23:4), and there will be no false prophets (Zech 13:2–6). God will answer the prayers of his people (Is 65:24).
- *A new temple.* There will be a temple in Jerusalem (Is 2:2–3; 44:28; Micah 4:1–2; Zech 6:12–15; Mal 3:1), where offerings will be presented on God’s altar (Is 56:7; 60:7; 66:20). Priests and Levites will serve at this temple (Is 66:21; Jer 33:18). Ezekiel has an elaborate description of a new temple with Levitical priests who offer sacrifices (Ezekiel 40–46).
- *Remarkable changes in nature.* The Mount of Olives will be split in two (Zech 14:4), and Jerusalem will be raised up (Is 2:2; Zech 14:10). A river flowing out of the temple will turn the Dead Sea into fresh water (Ezek 47:1–8), and another river will flow west to the Mediterranean Sea (Zech 14:8). In one passage, Isaiah says that the moon will shine like the sun and the sun will shine seven times brighter (Is 30:26). In another, Isaiah says the sun and moon will not be the source of light because the Lord will be the light (Is 60:19–20). Isaiah also says that God will provide a cloud of smoke and fire similar to those of the desert wanderings (Is 4:5–6), and there will be peace among animals (Is 11:7; 65:25).
- *God living with his people.* God will dwell with his people (Ezek 37:26–28; Zech 8:3), so Jerusalem’s name will be “The LORD Is There” (Ezek 48:35).
- *Joy.* The mood of people in the restoration will be joy (Is 12:3; 35:10; 51:11; Jer 31:4, 13; 33:10–11; Zech 10:7), with no more weeping or crying (Is 25:8; 65:19).

- *No end.* God’s covenant with the people will be everlasting (Ezek 37:26). The people will never again be uprooted or destroyed (Jer 31:40; Amos 9:15; Zech 14:11). Death will be swallowed up forever (Is 25:7–8), and God will set up a new heaven and a new earth (Is 65:17–25).

By my count, Joel includes at least nine of these thirteen restoration components in his little book. Like other prophets, Joel talks about Jerusalem being inhabited again (4:20 [ET 3:20]); plus he adds that it will be inhabited *forever* (4:20 [ET 3:20]). Joel mentions “the temple of the LORD” (4:18 [ET 3:18]), and he describes a miraculous fountain flowing from there to water places that were previously dry (4:18 [ET 3:18]). He encourages the people to have joy (2:23), and he describes how God will protect his people from their enemies (2:20; 4:12–17, 19 [ET 3:12–17, 19]). In my opinion, Joel shines just as brightly as the prophet Amos in predicting the miraculous fertility of the land (4:18 [ET 3:18]; see Amos 9:13). He shines just as brightly as Ezekiel in asserting that the Lord will dwell with his people in Zion (4:17, 21 [ET 3:17, 21]; see Ezek 48:35). With one aspect of the coming restoration, Joel shines more brightly than any other prophet: he gives the fullest glimpse of the marvelous outpouring of the Holy Spirit (3:1–5 [ET 2:28–32]).

The Prophetic Perspective

The best way to think of the fulfillment of these restoration prophecies is to look mainly at God’s people in three eras: (1) the OT Israelites, especially after the Babylonian captivity; (2) the believers in Christ during the NT era; and (3) the saints in heaven for all eternity. Here is a chart that illustrates how the OT prophecies look ahead to these three realities:



To some extent, the OT prophets may have understood the coming sequence of events. Consider Joel’s prophecy. Joel first describes how the damage of the locust plague will be reversed (2:19–26). Then he predicts the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (3:1–5 [ET 2:28–32]). Finally, he talks about Judgment Day and the eternal state (4:1–21 [ET 3:1–21]).

But the OT restoration prophecies for the most part do not distinguish between the various eras. They look ahead and see everything that is coming as one package. This is sometimes called the “prophetic perspective” or the “shortened perspective.”² “Events in the near and the distant future are often telescoped into one picture, like mountain peaks when seen from a distance.”³ The prophets very likely do not realize the distance that separates one from another. This explains why Joel in one section has language that sounds like Pentecost mixed together with language that sounds like Judgment Day (3:1–5 [ET 2:28–32]). He sees the future as one composite picture.

Sometimes an OT restoration prophecy has language that fits better with one fulfillment than another or maybe exclusively with one fulfillment. When Micah predicts that a ruler will come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:1 [ET 5:2]), we do not think of the exiles returning from Babylon, and we do not think of Judgment Day and thereafter. We think of the first coming of Christ. But often we can see multiple fulfillments. For example, when the prophets predict that Jerusalem will be inhabited and protected, we can see a partial, preliminary fulfillment in the actual city of Jerusalem during the postexilic years. We can also think of believers in the NT church as they are protected by God spiritually during the NT era. The ultimate, complete fulfillment is in the glory of heaven for all eternity.

Another way of speaking about the situation is to say that there is one message of restoration that looks ultimately ahead to the eternal glories of the new heaven and the new earth. But there are types which precede the final antitype. The message is unitary, and there is one sense; the prophecies do not have different meanings for different people. Yet God’s one work of restoration shows itself in various ways during human history as God provides foreshadowings of the ultimate fulfillment. What God does in postexilic Judah and in the NT church, in this way of speaking, are types of the final realization of the restoration. And the prophets present all of it as one package.

The New Testament Sees Fulfillment in the Church on Earth and in Heaven

But how do we know that these prophecies look ahead to the NT church and to heaven? This is a pressing question because higher-critical interpreters and dispensationalists disavow the connection. We can be sure about it because of the NT, which frequently indicates that the OT restoration prophecies are fulfilled in the NT church on earth and in heaven.

² “Shortened” because “the eschatological goal of the covenant is often seen as coming soon. It seems to be expected right after and in direct relation to the historical situation of the moment to which the message of the prophet is directed.” See *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism* (Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1989), 10, quoting John P. Milton, *Prophecy Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 15.

³ *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*, 10.

A convincing example is the Pentecost prophecy of Joel. When Peter stood up on Pentecost to explain what was happening, he said: “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Certainly the fulfillment of this prophecy extends beyond that original Pentecost as the Holy Spirit is poured out throughout the NT era from Christ’s first coming until his second coming. But the NT clearly says that the first Pentecost was a fulfillment.

The prime example of a restoration prophecy being applied to the NT church is Amos 9:11–12 as it is quoted in Acts 15:15–18.⁴ In Amos 9:11, God says: “I will restore the fallen shelter of David.” In Acts 15, James indicates that the prophecy is fulfilled in the NT church. Obviously the restoring of David’s shelter or tent is not a literal setting up of a lodging place from a thousand years earlier. David’s fallen shelter is restored spiritually as Christ, the descendent of David, comes to set up the church and to rule over it, gathering people from around the world into his kingdom of grace.

These are not isolated examples. A host of passages can be found where the NT quotes or alludes to an OT prophecy in reference to the NT church, to heaven, or to both. On the next page is a chart with some additional examples.⁵

Of course, some of the OT restoration prophecies have been fulfilled literally. Christ was born of a virgin (Is 7:14) in the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:1 [ET 5:2]). Christ as the Suffering Servant was pierced for our transgressions on the cross (Is 53:5). In addition, we don’t know to what extent some restoration prophecies may be fulfilled literally in heaven. When the Bible says that the heavenly Jerusalem will be built with jewels (Is 54:11–12; Rev 21:11, 18–21), will have twelve gates (Ezek 48:31–34; Rev 21:12–13), and will have a river flowing from God’s throne (Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2), most interpreters assume that this is figurative language, not to be taken literally. But since the glories of heaven go far beyond our comprehension (1 Cor 2:9), we can never say for sure what is literal and what is not.

It is obvious from the passages in the chart, however, that according to the NT, many restoration prophecies are fulfilled in the NT church spiritually, not literally. When Isaiah talks about darkness and light in Zebulun, the NT indicates that he is talking about spiritual darkness that was removed when Jesus visited in person and brought spiritual light (Is 8:23–9:1 [ET 9:1–2]; Mt 4:15–16). When Isaiah predicts that every valley will be raised up and every mountain made low, this was not fulfilled by a literal change in the topography of the land. It was

⁴ See O. Palmer Robertson, “Hermeneutics of Continuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), 89–108. Also Paul E. Eickmann, “Exegesis of Amos 9:11–15 with an Outline for an Advent Sermon,” *WLQ* 102 (2005): 263–78; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 97–111; and Lessing, “The Quotation from Amos 9 in Acts 15,” in *Amos*, 596–600.

⁵ This chart comes from Nass, *End Times*, 252–53. See that volume for discussion that goes beyond this brief excursus.

OT Prophecy	Used in the NT in Connection with the Church	Used in the NT in Connection with Heaven
Isaiah 8:23–9:6 (ET 9:1–7)	Matthew 4:15–16	
Isaiah 11:10	Romans 15:12	
Isaiah 25:8		Revelation 7:17
Isaiah 40:3–5	Luke 3:4–6	
Isaiah 42:1–4	Matthew 12:17–21	
Isaiah 49:6	Acts 13:47	
Isaiah 49:8	2 Corinthians 6:2	
Isaiah 49:10		Revelation 7:16–17
Isaiah 52:7	Romans 10:15	
Isaiah 54:11–12		Revelation 21:11, 18–21
Isaiah 60:19		Revelation 21:23
Isaiah 61:1–2	Luke 4:18–21	
Isaiah 65:17		2 Peter 3:13
Jeremiah 31:31–34	Hebrews 8:8–12	
Ezekiel 37:27	2 Corinthians 6:16	Revelation 21:3
Ezekiel 47:1–12		Revelation 22:1–2
Ezekiel 48:31–34		Revelation 21:12–13
Hosea 2:1 (ET 1:10)	Romans 9:26	
Hosea 2:25 (ET 2:23)	Romans 9:25	
Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32)	Romans 10:13	
Malachi 3:23–24 (ET 4:5–6)	Luke 1:17	

fulfilled by John the Baptist’s preaching of repentance (Is 40:3–5; Lk 3:4–6). When God through Malachi says that he is sending “the prophet Elijah,” this, too, was fulfilled in John the Baptist, not literally in a reappearance of the actual OT prophet (Mal 3:23 [ET 4:5]; Lk 1:17; see also Mt 17:12).

Old Testament Imagery

Of course, the prophets use OT imagery when they write. Their language relates to the context of God’s people at the time. Johann Gerhard says: “The

prophets are in the habit of describing and depicting the heavenly and spiritual blessings of the Messiah in terms of physical and earthly things, using Old Testament terms for New Testament realities.”⁶

For example, when speaking about the blessedness of the coming restoration, the OT prophets frequently speak about abundant rain and water. We must remember that the prophets lived in an agrarian society in a land where there was intermittent rainfall and no chance for irrigation. Water was a precious commodity, and its supply was always tenuous. So “promises of abundant crops and water had a powerful impact as a source of hope.”⁷ But this does not mean the fulfillment will always be literal rain. In the NT era, we receive the water of life through the Savior (Jn 4:10, 14; 7:37–39). The Gospel of God’s grace is like a river that flows from God, transforming spiritually dead people into living, fruitful believers. Ultimately in heaven, “God, through the beatific vision of Himself, shall pour into the blessed *the torrent of pleasure*, the unutterable sweetness of joy and gladness unspeakable in Himself.”⁸ The prophecy finds spiritual fulfillment.

Similarly, the OT prophets talk about a restored temple with Levites and priests. This reflects what they knew to be proper worship of the true God under the old covenant. But the NT book of Hebrews says that the old covenant is now “obsolete” (Heb 8:13) and “the previous command is annulled” (Heb 7:18). There is no longer any need for an earthly temple with animal sacrifices because Christ “has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). He has entered the true sanctuary of God, which is in heaven (Heb 8:2; 9:24). So the fulfillment cannot be literal. The temple of Ezekiel 40–46 is best understood as Christ himself, who makes it possible for God to dwell among people (see Mt 12:6; Jn 2:19–22; Rev 21:22).⁹ According to the NT, all believers in Christ are part of “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9). Again, NT realities are presented with OT language.

Paul Eickmann summarizes well the viewpoint that the NT gives about the restoration prophecies:

The LORD is prophesying New Testament truth in the terms of Old Testament history. . . . The gifts which God gives us by the means of grace through faith in Christ are poetically pictured here in vivid earthly terms. . . . At the same time, the LORD is painting a picture for us of the blessings of eternal life in heaven, using the scenery, colors and shapes of our life on earth. . . . Their words mingle the earthly and the heavenly, time and eternity together, describing the

⁶ The Latin is *Prophetis in more positum, beneficia Messiae coelestia et spiritualia describere et adumbrare rebus corporalibus et mundanis, adeoque de rebus Novi Testamenti vaticinari verbis Veteris Testamenti*. See Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1875), 9:106b, quoted in G. Wolff, “Is the Establishment of the State of Israel a Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy concerning the Return of All Israel to Canaan?” *WLQ* 77 (1980): 46.

⁷ Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 270.

⁸ Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 214.

⁹ *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*, 13.

whole life of the Lord's church from here to eternity. The prophets deliver all God's gifts, so to speak, wrapped up in one box.¹⁰

Boost for Faith

With this interpretation, we can apply the OT restoration prophecies to ourselves as members of the NT church on earth. We can use their Gospel promises to build up our own faith. So when Joel gives the promise from God, "Never again will my people be put to shame," this is talking about you and me (2:27). When Joel gives the promise, "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved," we can stake our confidence for eternal life on it (3:5 [ET 2:32]). When Joel gives the promise, "The LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel," we can find strength there in times of trouble and persecution (4:16 [ET 3:16]). The good news in Joel is precious food for our faith to keep us relying on the Lord every day in our struggles on earth.

Since the restoration promises point ultimately to heaven, they also help us to keep focused on our eternal home. Think of it. There is a place so lavish and abundant in provision that milk, as it were, is flowing down the mountains (4:18 [ET 3:18]). There is a place so secure that there is no fear of any enemies ever invading (4:17 [ET 3:17]). There is a place that is holy, where we will live in the presence of the almighty Lord (4:17 [ET 3:17]). And life in this place will go on and on without interruption for all eternity (4:20 [ET 3:20]). We have something fabulous to look forward to through Christ our Savior.

Eric Hartzell writes well about the perspective that is appropriate for those whose real home is in heaven:

Some think life is all about the journey. It is not. Life is all about the destination and getting to where we are going. No matter the scenery. No matter the accommodations along the way or the comfort of the ride. No matter if the accommodations and means of travel are good. What matters is getting there. What matters is that we fight the fight and finish the race. What matters is hearing that voice say to me one day, "You have reached your destination."¹¹

Looking to the Millennium for Fulfillment

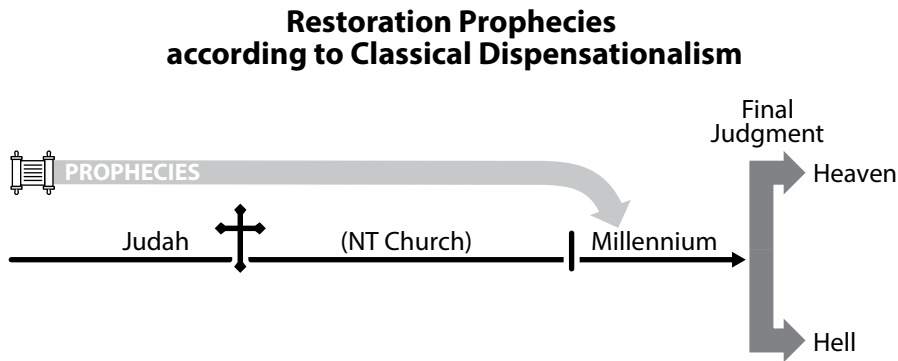
Rather than seeing fulfillment in the NT church on earth and in heaven, many evangelical teachers say that the OT restoration prophecies will be fulfilled in a thousand-year millennium, preceding the final judgment. This is especially common in the United States with dispensationalists. Proponents include A. C. Gaebelein, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, David Jeremiah, and others, with publications like *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and the *Left Behind* series.¹²

¹⁰ Eickmann, *Hosea, Joel, Amos*, 174–76.

¹¹ Eric Hartzell, "Finding My Destination," *Forward in Christ* 103.6 (June 2016): 27.

¹² Joel commentators who are openly millennial include Busenitz, Chisholm, Feinberg, Finley, Gaebelein, Patterson, Price, and Shepherd. A Lutheran expositor who unfortunately stumbled

Traditional dispensationalists refer to the NT era as a “mystery parenthesis,” not mentioned in OT prophecy. The timeline for classical dispensationalism looks like this:



They come up with this through a literalistic interpretation of biblical prophecy. They start with Rev 20:2, insisting that that the “thousand years” must be understood literally. Then they move to the OT, saying that the restoration prophecies will happen exactly as they read—not spiritually in the church or in heaven but physically in an earthly millennium. The chronological framework, as it were, comes from Revelation. Much of the content comes from the OT.

It is distressing to see what dispensational teachers say about Joel’s Pentecost prophecy and its quotation in Acts 2. They commonly say that the quotation by Peter was an “application” of Joel’s prophecy, not a fulfillment, because the fulfillment will come in the millennium. Feinberg writes: “Peter used Joel’s prophecy as an illustration of what was transpiring in his day and not as a fulfillment of this prediction.”¹³ Dwight Pentecost says: “Peter is not citing the experience before them as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, so that they must be considered to be in the kingdom, but rather Peter is citing Joel’s prophecy to substantiate the fact, which Israel knew through her Scriptures, that such an experience as filling by the Spirit was possible.”¹⁴ Needless to say, this looks like special pleading, and it does not do justice to the words of Acts 2.

Due to the difficulty of this dispensational explanation, some dispensationalists have modified their system in recent years. They teach that the OT prophecies have a preliminary, spiritual fulfillment in the NT church on earth, followed by a final, literal fulfillment with the ethnic people of Israel in the millennium. This position has been called progressive dispensationalism. It is no surprise that “most classical dispensationalists refuse to acknowledge

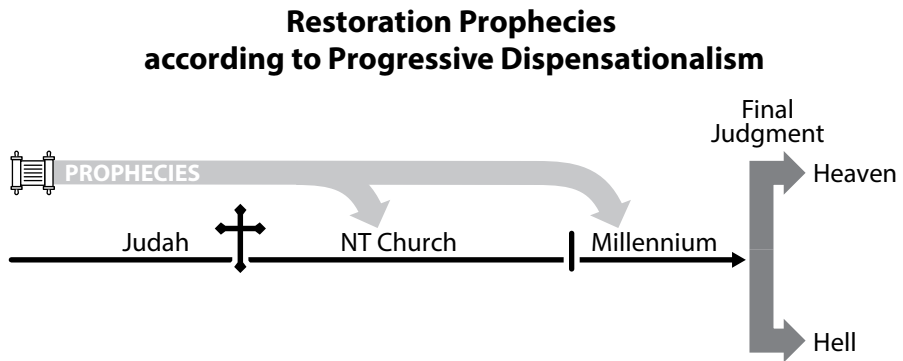
into millennialism was August Dächsel (1818–1901). In his comments about Joel 2:19–27, he says that “the words first come to the complete fulfillment of their meaning in the establishment of the thousand-year reign predicted in Revelation 20.” See Dächsel, *Bibelwerk*, 4:780.

¹³ Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 82.

¹⁴ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 470.

progressive dispensationalism as genuine ‘dispensationalism.’ ... They fault the progressives for abandoning the literal interpretive method in favor of an eclectic method.”¹⁵ In either case, the millennium still is the ultimate fulfillment for all of them.

The timeline for progressive dispensationalism looks like this:



As for what the millennium will be like, you can find significant differences from one millennialist teacher to another. They all agree that it will be a golden age of prosperity and peace, with Jesus Christ ruling and with Satan bound. Commonly the millennium is described as having the following features: abundant rainfall,¹⁶ miraculous fertility,¹⁷ brighter shining of the sun, economic prosperity,¹⁸ health, healing, longevity, no war, freedom from oppression, a unified language (in the Left Behind books, it is Hebrew!), perfect social relations, justice, righteousness, holiness,¹⁹ ethical conduct, fullness of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ the salvation of most people, unified worship, and joy. In the Left Behind depiction, remarkably, resurrected saints with glorified bodies live side by side with people who have never died and still have natural human bodies with sin. The humans with natural bodies reproduce abundantly, and some of them do not believe in Christ and end up dying. In the end, Satan leads millions in a final rebellion against Christ, which is put down when Christ administers the great “white throne” judgment referred to in Rev 20:11.

Of special note (and special regret) is the fact that the millennium focuses on the ethnic nation of Israel and not on the church. According to dispensationalists, God broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles in the present church age, but that does not pertain to the coming millennial age. The millennium “deals with restored Judaism, where Israel is blessed directly, and the

¹⁵ Hays, Duvall, Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times*, 118.

¹⁶ Supposedly predicted in Joel 2:23–24. See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 509.

¹⁷ Supposedly predicted in Joel 4:18 (ET 3:18). See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 509.

¹⁸ Supposedly predicted in Joel 2:21–27. See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 490.

¹⁹ Supposedly predicted in Joel 4:17 (ET 3:17). See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 485.

²⁰ Supposedly predicted in Joel 3:1–2 (ET 2:28–29). See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 486.

Gentiles only mediately or subordinately to the Jews—a state of things in diametrical contrast with Christianity.”²¹ Jesus will rule visibly in the restored city of Jerusalem,²² and his regent will be King David brought back to life. In Jerusalem, there will be an elaborate new temple, served by priests who are sons of Zadok.²³ Daily animal sacrifices will be offered, and the people will observe Sabbath days, new moon days, the Passover, and the Feast of Tabernacles. And all of this will be initiated by a wholesale conversion of Jews to Christ in connection with his second coming.²⁴

Confessional Lutheran Response

For confessional Lutherans, the dispensational scenario is so outlandish that it takes one’s breath away. There is much that could be said.²⁵ To begin with, it seems out of proportion and bizarre to have a preoccupation with the supposed seven-year tribulation and the millennium when almost nothing is said about the eternal state in heaven. In the sixteen Left Behind novels, the description of the final state in the new heaven and new earth occupies only the final three pages of the last volume.²⁶ In Dwight Pentecost’s 563-page book on eschatology, only the final four pages have information about the eternal city.²⁷ What makes the supposed millennium more exciting and interesting than heaven? It is like a young woman dreaming about being engaged but not thinking at all about being married. It is like a concert goer looking forward to the warmup band without any interest in the main show.

But at the root of the problem is hermeneutics. When God communicates his message in symbols, he does not intend the symbols to be interpreted literally. So when Revelation 20 talks about a thousand years—in a book full of symbols where other numbers are understood figuratively—it is wrong to insist on a literal interpretation, especially when a literal thousand-year millennium is never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible and otherwise clear passages need to be rearranged to accommodate such a millennium. Waltke protests: “Should the Christian theologian construct his theological model from symbolic texts and distort and cut up clear ones to fit his dubious mold?”²⁸

²¹ Merrill F. Unger, “The Temple Vision of Ezekiel,” *BSac* 106 (1949): 170, quoted in Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 527.

²² Supposedly predicted in Joel 4:17 (ET 3:17). See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 508.

²³ According to Gaebelien, Joel 2:17 requires the reestablishment of the priesthood. See *The Prophet Joel: An Exposition*, 112.

²⁴ Supposedly predicted in Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32). See Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 506.

²⁵ For discussion in other Concordia Commentary volumes, see Steinmann, *Daniel*, 51–61, and Brighton, *Revelation*, 542–70.

²⁶ Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Kingdom Come: The Final Victory* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2007), 352–54.

²⁷ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 560–63.

²⁸ Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” 265.

It should be noted that dispensationalists themselves do not take everything literally. In this regard, it is interesting to see what dispensational expositors do with the hills that flow with milk in Joel 4:18 (ET 3:18). Will there literally be streams of milk flowing down the hills in the millennium? Patterson says: “In glowing and hyperbolic terms, Joel described the great fertility of soil of the coming Millennial Age.”²⁹ Busenitz likewise speaks about “poetical hyperbole.”³⁰ Even dispensationalists recognize that some statements are hyperbole and not literal truth.

The same is true with Revelation 20. When Revelation 20 talks about a “key” to the abyss and a “chain” by which Satan is bound, no one understands these items literally. Waltke’s reasoning, therefore, is easy to follow: “If ‘key,’ ‘chain,’ ‘dragon,’ ‘Abyss,’ etc. are symbolic, why should the number 1000 be literal, especially when numbers are notoriously symbolic in apocalyptic literature?”³¹ Many people at Christ’s time erred with the restoration prophecies, understanding them literally (Jn 6:14–15, 26–27; Acts 1:6). Unfortunately, dispensationalists follow Jesus’ uncomprehending audience, rather than Jesus himself (Lk 17:20–21; Jn 18:36).

Finally, it is vitally important to see that the NT talks about the church as the new Israel, which constitutes and continues the people of God in the NT era. Paul says that all who believe in Christ are the true descendants of Abraham (Rom 4:11–12, 16–17; 9:6–8, 24–26; Gal 3:29), and he calls them “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). There is one olive tree, with Gentile believers grafted onto the root of OT Israel (Rom 11:17–24). According to the book of Hebrews, Jeremiah’s prophecy about the new covenant is fulfilled in Christ and the church, not in a Jewish millennium (Heb 8:6–13; see Jer 31:31–34). In addition, Peter takes the special OT titles of Israel and applies them directly to the church (1 Pet 2:9–10). In short, “the dispensationalist view of a radical break between Israel and the church contradicts the Scriptural teaching that the cross of Christ has eliminated forever the distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11–22; Rom 2:25–29).”³²

Tragic Results of Millennialism

Millennialism does not involve just a minor rearranging of a person’s timeline. It is not just a different interpretation of one passage, Revelation 20. Rather, millennialism creates a smog that hangs over a person’s entire theology. Christ and the cross become less all-encompassing and all-sufficient if a new temple is expected where animal sacrifices will be reinstituted. The church is less important if the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people will occupy the prime position in the millennium. Heaven is pushed into the background if the thousand-year

²⁹ Patterson, “Joel,” 265.

³⁰ Busenitz, *Joel and Obadiah*, 210–11.

³¹ Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” 273.

³² *The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*, 43.

reign of Christ on earth is the most cherished goal. The interpretation of the Hebrew prophets is entirely different if their focus is on the physical land of Israel during one time period still in the future.

Here, perhaps, is the greatest tragedy in this misapplication of God's Word, as has already been mentioned. The dispensational scheme forbids the restoration prophecies to say anything to us as NT Christians about our lives today. The prophecies are talking about a different time period (the millennium), and they focus on different people (the Jews). The dispensational scheme robs believers of the Gospel comfort of much of God's Word.³³

When I read millennialist commentaries on the book of Joel, they leave me feeling empty in the way they apply the last verses. Millennialist expositors talk about the exciting days that are predicted in the future, and they say, "Maybe these days will come soon." In a similar way, many commentaries by other evangelicals also leave me empty when they refuse to say anything about how the wonderful ending of Joel can strengthen believers in their faith. Goodness! We have rich food for faith here as believers in Christ. God promises provision, peace, and his presence—now on earth in the church militant and forever in heaven as the church triumphant. Let's eat!

³³ For more on the dangers of millennialism, see Nass, *End Times*, 254–57, 287–88, 306–7.

The Outpouring of the Spirit

Translation

- 3** ¹Afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all people,
and your sons and daughters will prophesy.
Your old men will receive dreams from God;
your young men will see visions.
²Even on male and female slaves
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Textual Notes

3:1 (ET 2:28) וְאַחֲרָיִךְ—“And it will be afterward.” Each of the three singular *waw* consecutive perfects in 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32) seems to introduce a new strophe. The first strophe (beginning with וְאַחֲרָיִךְ in 3:1 [ET 2:28]) predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, the second (beginning with וְנִתְּנָהּ in 3:3 [ET 2:30]) presents the signs preceding the day of the Lord, and the third (beginning with וְהָיָה in 3:5 [ET 2:32]) promises security for God’s people.

The *waw* consecutive perfect וְאַחֲרָיִךְ occurs 406 times in the OT. Often it does not follow an imperfect, but it carries independent force as a marker of future time. As such, it can serve as an “introductory formula” to begin a literary unit (Joüon, § 119 c). Frequently וְאַחֲרָיִךְ is followed by another *waw* consecutive perfect, but even more frequently by a simple imperfect, as is the case here with וְנִתְּנָהּ in the next line (GKC, § 112 y; BDB, וְאַחֲרָיִךְ, I 2 b *a–b*). In this verse and in 3:5 (ET 2:32), the ESV maintains the somewhat archaic rendering of the KJV, “and it shall come to pass,” even though the ESV does not usually do this—in only six other passages (sometimes without “and”). Many English translations, including this commentary’s, do not represent וְאַחֲרָיִךְ since idiomatic English typically begins a new unit without any such introductory formula.

A few interpreters say that וְאַחֲרָיִךְ in this context does not indicate temporal succession but that it functions rather as a simple transition, equivalent to “when” or “and.” The section could be translated like this: “When I will pour out my Spirit, . . . then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”¹ This interpretation is favored by those who are convinced that the physical restoration in 2:19–27 and the spiritual restoration in 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32) are simultaneous, overlapping in time. Among those who follow this interpretation are millennialists, who imagine that all of these prophecies must be fulfilled together in the millennium, not before.²

However, the three standard lexicons all list וְאַחֲרָיִךְ as a temporal preposition meaning “after” when used in combination with the adverb כֵּן, “so” or “thus.” None of them

¹ VanGemeren, “The Spirit of Restoration,” 85, 89.

² Heater, “Evidence from Joel and Amos,” 161.

offer any translation other than “afterwards” or “afterward” for the fifty occurrences of אַחֲרֵי־כֵן in the OT (BDB, אַחֲר, Plur., 2 b; *HALOT*, אַחֲר, B 3; *DCHR*, אַחֲרֵי I, 1 e). The normal use of אַחֲרֵי־כֵן is to indicate temporal sequence, and that use fits fine here. Joel is simply indicating that the outpouring of the Spirit will happen sometime in the future after the locusts are removed and the country’s agriculture is restored. First, God will pour down rain (2:23) and bring relief from the immediate disaster. Then he will pour down the Spirit and bring deliverance from the impending disaster of the coming day of the Lord. With אַחֲרֵי־כֵן, the book of Joel moves into “an eschatological second phase of Yahweh’s blessing.”³

It is true that when the OT prophets look ahead to God’s restoration, they see the events of the future as a package, and they do not present a clear temporal sequence or portray the time gaps in between the various fulfillments. Yet they have a sense that some events—those that pertain to the messianic era—are more distant than others. The prophets sometimes talk about “the end of days [אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים]” (Is 2:2; literal translation) and “the time of the end [תֵּימַת קֵץ]” (Dan 12:4). Later in this chapter, Joel uses the temporal expressions בַּיָּמִים הַהֵמָּה, “in those days” (Joel 3:2 [ET 2:29]), and לְפָנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה, “before the coming of the day of the LORD” (Joel 3:4 [ET 2:31]), seemingly to refer to the same period as אַחֲרֵי־כֵן, “afterward” (3:1 [ET 2:28]). All of these expressions are purposely vague, looking ahead to some indefinite time in the future when the Messiah will come. But these future days very naturally can be regarded as subsequent to the agricultural reversal promised in 2:19–27, regardless of how the expression הַמְּוֹרָה לְצֶדֶק (“the teacher of righteousness” or “the right amount of autumn rain”) in 2:23 is understood. The spiritual blessings of Pentecost come after the material blessings of grain, wine, and oil.

When Peter quotes this prophecy on Pentecost, it is interesting that he changes the temporal expression. Instead of a Greek term for “afterward,” he says, ἐν ταῖς ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις, “in the last days.” With this rendering, he is not following the LXX, since the LXX translates אַחֲרֵי־כֵן quite literally with μετὰ ταῦτα, “after these things.” The change simply clarifies things for Peter’s audience and does nothing to alter the meaning of the OT prophecy. Peter makes clear that with the first coming of Christ and with Pentecost, the world has entered its last chapter. The messianic era predicted by the prophets has begun, and the final great Day of Judgment is impending. This is the same way that other NT authors use the expression “the last days,” referring to the entire NT era from the first coming of Christ until his second coming in judgment (see 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3).

אֶשְׁפּוֹךְ אֶת־רוּחִי—“I will pour out my Spirit.” The key verb in the Pentecost prophecy is שָׁפַךְ (3:1–2 [ET 2:28–29]). This verb occurs 115 times in the OT with the idea of “pouring out” a liquid or a dry material from a container. Liquids that are poured out include blood (often), water, and broth; solids include dirt for siege ramps (סִלְלָה, e.g., 2 Sam 20:15) and dust. The verb שָׁפַךְ is also used metaphorically for the pouring out of anger or of one’s heart. The form אֶשְׁפּוֹךְ is a Qal imperfect first person singular,

³ Pettus, “A Canonical-Critical Study of Selected Traditions in the Book of Joel,” 157.

with the *holem* spelled *plene* (-י-). The subject is God the Father, and here we see evidence of the triune God.

The verb **שָׁפַךְ** is ideal in this context for two reasons. First, it communicates vividly the notion of abundance with the giving of the Spirit. God promises to give not just a trickle or a drizzle of the Spirit. Rather, there will be a sudden and generous torrent—a flow, rather than a few isolated drops. Second, this verb follows nicely on the heels of the rain prophecy in 2:23. After God has poured down rain onto thirsty fields, God will pour down his Spirit onto thirsty souls. The rain and the Spirit are analogous gifts. Both are poured out by the Father, the one for physical blessing and the other for spiritual blessing.⁴

This is not the only place where God makes this promise. Ezek 39:29 and Zech 12:10 use the same verb when God promises, “I will pour out” (**שָׁפַכְתִּי**) the “Spirit” (**רוּחִי**). Isaiah also predicts that God will “pour out” his Spirit, but he uses the verbs **יָצַק** (Is 44:3) and **שָׁרַף** (Is 32:15).⁵ Not surprisingly, the NT picks up this language. The LXX uses ἐκχέω in Joel 3:1–2 (ET 2:28–29), and Peter copies that in Acts 2:17–18, 33. Paul does likewise in Titus 3:6: “He poured out [ἐξέχεεν] his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (see also Acts 10:45).

The number of interpreters who render **רוּחִי** with lowercased “spirit”—indicating that this is not a reference to the third person of the triune God—are legion. One expects this from higher-critical commentators. In their opinion, it would be a wrong to read the NT theological construct of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit back into the OT. It is disheartening to see that also some evangelical authors and publishing houses do the same. Hubbard in the Tyndale series published by InterVarsity says that **רוּחִי** refers to “God’s own power and vitality.”⁶ Ogden in a commentary published by Eerdmans says **רוּחִי** is God’s “energizing power given for use in his service.”⁷ Goldingay in his Baker commentary translates the clause as “I will pour my breath on all flesh,”⁸ and Pohlig does not even mention the Holy Spirit as a possibility when he catalogs the different possibilities for **רוּחִי**.⁹

There are compelling reasons, however, for Christians to understand this verse as a prophecy of the sending of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God. First and foremost, that is how the NT understands it. On Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, Peter said that this prophecy was fulfilled (Acts 2:14–18). In addition,

⁴ For the same sequence, see Is 44:3.

⁵ Steinmann sees another example in Prov 1:23: **אֲפִיעָה לָכֶם רוּחִי**, which he translates: “I will pour out my Spirit for you.” See *Proverbs*, 77, 79. Isaiah has several expressions for the Spirit coming to the Messiah: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him [רוּחַ יְהוָה]” (Is 11:2); “I have put my Spirit on him [רוּחִי שָׁלַחְנִי]” (Is 42:1); and “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me [רוּחַ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה עָלַי יָשָׁן בְּשֹׁשׁ יְהוָה אָנִי]” (Is 61:1).

⁶ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 68.

⁷ Ogden, “Restoring the Years: A Commentary on the Book of Joel,” 37.

⁸ Goldingay, “Hosea–Micah,” 232.

⁹ Pohlig, *Exegetical Summary of Joel*, 149–50. A recent Zondervan commentary that does not capitalize “spirit” is Barker, *Joel: Despair and Deliverance in the Day of the Lord*, 134.

Christians who read the Bible as the inspired Word of God know that the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT (see the excursus “The Trinity in the Old Testament” following this pericope). The Holy Spirit is not a NT construct; he is “coeternal” with the Father and the Son (Athanasian Creed, 25), and he has been active from the beginning of time. The truth is that the Holy Spirit is mentioned frequently in the OT. The CSB, ESV, and NIV are all remarkably close with the number of times they have “Spirit” with a capital “S,” with each translation having the capitalized form about eighty times in the OT.

For years, I have taken the capitalization of “Spirit” in this passage and others like it as a litmus test for a Bible translation, to see if it is operating with conservative Christian principles. Translations that never capitalize “spirit” in the OT include CEB, NJPS, NABRE, NJB, NRSV, and REB. Translations that do capitalize “Spirit” include CSB, ESV, GW, NASB, NIV, NKJV, and NLT. For years, I have warned Hebrew students about BDB’s entry for passages like this, which is “spirit of God” (BDB, 717, 9).

What this verse predicts about the Holy Spirit is that he will be poured out to a fuller degree in the NT era than he was in the OT era. Though it is not the easiest to describe the difference, somehow the NT era will experience the Spirit’s working in a way that is beyond the OT. For thoughts on this topic, see the excursus “How Is the Spirit’s Activity Different since Pentecost?” following this pericope.

A curious translation idiosyncrasy in the LXX can be noted here. The LXX translates: “I will pour out *from* my Spirit upon all flesh [ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου].” Perhaps the translators were uneasy with the thought of God pouring the entire Spirit into believers. Perhaps they assimilated the thought to Numbers 11, where God, literally, “took *from* the Spirit who was on him [LXX: παρείλατο ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ],” that is, on Moses, and gave it to the seventy elders (Num 11:25; see also Num 11:17). At any rate, Peter follows the LXX wording in his Pentecost sermon, literally: “I will pour out *from* my Spirit [ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου]” (Acts 2:17). Very likely Peter used the LXX wording because he was speaking to Jews from the Diaspora who were familiar with the LXX. In other words, he used the translation of choice for his audience, knowing that there was no doctrinal reason why the LXX had to be avoided. It would be hard to see a difference in substance between “I will pour out my Spirit” and “I will pour out from my Spirit.” Most English translations skip the preposition “from” in their translation of Acts 2:17.

עַל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר —“Upon all flesh.” This expression provokes extensive discussion in commentaries. Many expositors insist that “all flesh” in this passage is limited to the Israelites. Then the new thing predicted by Joel in the messianic era is that the special working of the Spirit will not just be on a few select individuals among the people of God (that is, the prophets), but upon everyone. For support, they point to the pronominal suffixes on בְּנֵיכֶם וּבָנוֹתֵיכֶם, “your sons and your daughters” (in the next line), which refer to Joel’s Israelite audience. These expositors typically make much of the fact that judgment is predicted for the Gentile nations in chapter 4, indicating that the Holy Spirit must not be poured out on the Gentiles. When Joel 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32) is referred to in the NT as including Gentiles (very likely Acts 2:39; for sure Rom 10:13), these expositors say that the NT apostles extended the meaning beyond what was intended by the

OT prophet Joel. Some talk about the NT finding a fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) beyond the original OT context.

In my opinion, however, there are three good reasons not to limit the expression to the Israelites.¹⁰ First, almost everyone admits that in the OT, the expression כָּל־בָּשָׂר, “all flesh,” never means “all Israelites” in any of its other thirty-nine occurrences. It often refers to all living creatures, humans and animals together, as it does in Gen 7:21, when the Bible uses it to say that “every living thing” perished in the flood. Equally often it refers to all mankind, as in Gen 6:12, which uses it to say that “all people” had corrupted their ways prior to the flood (see also Is 40:5; 49:26). Several times in the flood account it refers just to the animals (Gen 7:15–16). In all of these uses, the expression is inclusive, never limited just to Israel.

Second, the context does not demand a narrowing. If the opening statement “all flesh” is considered to be broad, including Israelites and Gentiles, the “your” pronouns on בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיכֶם are still true, even if they refer just to Israelites. The immediate context actually hints at an expansion beyond Israelites when it says that the Spirit will be poured out on male and female slaves. To the extent that there were slaves among the Israelites, it is likely that non-Israelites would have been included. Lev 25:39–46 states that Israelites were not to own fellow Israelites as slaves, but only people from other nations. As for the judgment on Gentiles in chapter 4, this judgment could refer to those Gentiles who reject the Holy Spirit, not denying that other Gentiles will be saved through the working of the Spirit and incorporation into the believing community.

Third and most important, since the NT indicates that the fulfillment of this prophecy involves the Spirit being poured out beyond the nation of Israel, it is fitting to see this broader understanding as part of the text from its beginning. It seems odd to say that God with an inspired message intended one thing to people in one era, and then with the same words intended something different to people in a different era.

But then the question needs to be asked: in what way is the Spirit poured out on all humanity? Since the Bible does not teach universalism but that only believers will be saved, we know that the Spirit does not work faith in the heart of every single individual.

One possible way to explain the Spirit being poured out on all people is that the Gospel invitation is offered to all people through the Holy Spirit. This interpretation was presented by Luther in his commentary on Zechariah from 1527:

Christianity goes no farther nor is it more confined than the Spirit of Christ goes and is offered, and that is this spiritual measuring [referred to in Zech 2:2 (MT 2:6)]. The Spirit, however, goes as far as the world goes, as He says through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28 [MT 3:1]), “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh,” that is, upon all the people in all the world. Not that all men receive the Holy Spirit, for the greater part persecute Him. But He does not say, either, that He will pour out or give His Spirit into everyone’s heart but that He will pour it out upon all flesh. And that simply means this: the Holy Spirit is sent out upon all men in all the world through the Word of the Gospel

¹⁰ Even Barton and the Jewish Soncino commentary (Lehrman) concur that the expression should not be limited: Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 96; Lehrman, “Joel: Introduction and Commentary,” 72.

and is offered to all of them. Poured out in this way, it hovers over all men in the world wherever the Gospel is preached. ...

This measuring, then, and the fact that the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh mean this: through the Word the Holy Spirit has been offered to all men throughout the world; He hovers over them all and is present and ready to help them; the heavens are open as far as the world reaches; no place is excluded. (AE 20:182–83; see also AE 18:107)

With this understanding, כָּל־בָּשָׂר includes every single human being. The Holy Spirit is poured out even on unbelievers, though for them the outpouring will result in judgment because of their rejection of the Gospel (see Jn 16:8). Hoenecke uses this verse as a proof passage for God’s antecedent will of love toward all people. God’s earnest desire to save all sinners is shown by the fact that he “sends his Spirit to all people for strengthening in this salvation.”¹¹

Otherwise, כָּל־בָּשָׂר could be understood to mean “all mankind” in that people from all nations, races, and social conditions are converted and brought to faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Spirit does not bring just Jews to faith in Christ but also Gentiles of all kinds from around the world. The use of כָּל־בָּשָׂר, then, would be similar to its use in Is 66:23–24, where it refers to “the redeemed who will forever worship before Yahweh,” including all believers from all nations and generations.¹²

Abraham Calov (1612–1686) understands Joel 3:1 (ET 2:28) in this way—as a prophecy about the NT outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles together with Jews. In his *Biblia illustrata*, he writes:

All people are to be understood with “all flesh [*omnem carnem*]” (Gen 6:12; ... Ps 145:21; Is 40:6; Rom 3:20), with the result that the promise is *universal*. No one is to be excluded from it since God wishes that all become sharers of the gift of the Holy Spirit and that all who do not resist God be taught by God. ... In this way, a fundamental difference is indicated between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was not poured out upon all flesh, but primarily in Judah upon God’s people. But now the Holy Spirit is predicted to be poured out not just in some narrow corner of the world, but throughout the whole world.¹³

This interpretation is favored in the excursus “How Is the Spirit’s Activity Different since Pentecost?” following this pericope. With the widespread inclusion of Gentiles in the NT church, the Spirit is poured out “on all flesh.”

Joel’s prophecy, then, is similar to many other OT prophecies that look ahead to the conversion of the Gentiles in the messianic era. According to the prophets, the Messiah will not just restore Israel, but he will also be a “light for the nations” in order to bring God’s salvation “to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6; see Is 2:2; 42:6; 51:4–5). When the Messiah comes, preceded by the forerunner in the desert, then “the glory of the LORD will appear, and all humanity [כָּל־בָּשָׂר] together will see it” (Is 40:5; see Lk 3:6). None

¹¹ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 3:9.

¹² Lessing, *Isaiah 56–66*, 473, 481.

¹³ Calov, *Biblia Testamenti Veteris illustrata*, 2:783.

of these prophecies imply that every single Gentile will be saved, just as כָּל־בָּשָׂר, if limited to the Israelites, would not imply that every single Jew will be saved. However, the Gospel will go to Jews and Gentiles alike, and the NT church will include people of all sorts from “all humanity [כָּל־בָּשָׂר].” No segment of the human population will be excluded.

As for the noun בָּשָׂר, expositors and preachers should be careful to note its similarities and its differences from the NT Greek noun σάρξ, “flesh.” Both words can refer to the material that covers the bones of a human or animal body. Both words can refer to the human body as a whole. But בָּשָׂר does not carry the nuance of “the sinful nature” that is often conveyed by σάρξ in the NT. The Hebrew word בָּשָׂר can be used to refer to humans as weak and mortal in contrast to God, who is רִחוּץ (Pss 56:5 [ET 56:4]; 78:39; Is 31:3; 40:6). But the connection of “flesh” with “sin” is something reserved for the NT, so preachers should be careful not to drag this nuance into their comments about בָּשָׂר.¹⁴

וְנִבְּאֵי בְנֵיכֶם וּבָנוֹתֵיכֶם—“And your sons and your daughters will prophesy.” Joel proceeds to give three concrete examples of the all-inclusive nature of the outpouring of the Spirit, elaborating on what is included in “all flesh.” The Spirit will come on both genders, on all age groups, and on all social strata.

This first clause indicates that men and women will be treated equally. The word בְּנֵיכֶם, “your sons,” is the plural of בֶּן with a pronominal suffix. The word בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם, “your daughters,” is the plural of בַּת with a suffix. The plural בָּנוֹת shows that the word is connected with בֶּן. Originally the noun for daughter was presumably בַּת, with the נ being lost over time. On a feminine plural noun with a suffix like בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם, there are two plural markers: the וֹת- ending and the ם in connection with the suffix.

The verb וְנִבְּאֵי is a Niphal *waw* consecutive perfect third common plural from the root נָבֵא. The נ of the root assimilates and is represented by the *daghesh forte* in -ב-. The נ that is seen is the Niphal preformative. The verb נָבֵא occurs eighty-seven times in the OT in the Niphal and twenty-eight times in the Hithpael, with the meaning “prophesy” in both stems. It never occurs in the OT in other stems. For discussion about this very important verb and what is meant by this clause, see the excursus “‘Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophesy’” following this pericope.

In Numbers 11, when it was reported to Moses that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, Joshua told Moses to stop them. Then Moses responded: “If only all the LORD’s people were prophets and the LORD would place his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). According to Joel, this wish of Moses is to be realized in the messianic era, when there will be universal prophesying by both men and women. What God led Moses to wish for, God led Joel to predict.

וְזִקְנֵיכֶם חֲלֻמוֹת יַחֲלֹמוּן בְּחֻזֵּיכֶם חֲזִיּוֹנוֹת יֵרְאוּ—“Your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions.” Here is the second example of how the outpouring of the Spirit will be universal. There will be no distinction in age; young and old will share the blessing equally.

In this context, we should not think that the חֲלֻמוֹת, “dreams,” of the old men are anything different from the חֲזִיּוֹנוֹת, “visions,” of the young men. The point of the line is

¹⁴ Some translations render בָּשָׂר as “corrupt” in Gen 6:3, but it can be debated whether a negative moral nuance is necessary there. Such a nuance is not seen elsewhere in the OT for בָּשָׂר.

not to identify different gifts of the Spirit, but to highlight different age groups as recipients of the Spirit. The noun **חֲלֹמִים** occurs sixty-five times in the OT and the verb **חָלַם** twenty-six times. Both words can be used for ordinary nighttime dreams, but they usually refer to revelatory dreams in which God conveys information to people. The verb **חָזַה**, “to see,” has five different nouns as offshoots meaning “vision” (BDB): **חֲזוֹת**, **חֲזוֹן**, **חֲזוֹת**, **חֲזוֹת**, and **חֲזוֹת**. The dictionary form of the plural absolute noun here, **חֲזוֹת**, is the singular **חֲזוֹן**. Just as with **חֲלֹמִים**, these words are often used for revelatory visions. Sometimes these visions may be given while the recipient is in a waking state, but quite often the visions are said to be at night, so it is hard to distinguish **חֲלֹמִים** from **חֲזוֹת**. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that the Aramaic cognate nouns **חֲלֵם** and **חֲזוֹ** appear in Daniel 2–7, where they are used interchangeably for the same experiences.

Though seemingly simple, there is much to consider when translating this line—as is regularly the case with thoughtful translating. Often English translations have instinctively mimicked the Hebrew and translated the first clause as “your old men will dream dreams,” but this is not really idiomatic English. It is a Hebrew idiom to have a direct object from the same root as the verb, a phenomenon that grammarians call an internal object or a cognate accusative (GKC, § 117 p; *IBHS*, § 10.2.1f). Natural English simply says “to have a dream.” In addition, the English words “dream” and “vision” are unlike the Hebrew **חֲלֹמִים** and **חֲזוֹן** in that they do not naturally carry with them the notion of divine revelation. To “have a dream” in English commonly means to have an aspiration or a goal, which is definitely not what is meant in this context. For purposes of clarity, therefore, although it is not perfect, I suggest the following as an English equivalent for the first clause: “your old men will receive dreams from God.” What is most important is to realize that visions and dreams were a way in which God frequently communicated to OT prophets. In the future outpouring of the Spirit, this gift is promised abundantly to people of all ages and not just to the prophets. For more on this topic, see the excursus “Dreams and Visions” following this pericope.

Every time the noun **זָקֵן** occurs, translators need to decide between the leadership office of elder and elderly people in general (see the first textual note on 1:2). Here, for **זָקֵן** in contrast with **בְּחֹרִים**, it is best to stick with age; the noun **בְּחֹרִים** refers to a young man, “fully-grown, vigorous, unmarried” (*HALOT*). The nouns **זָקֵן** and **בְּחֹרִים** side by side in this context can be said to be a merism—a literary device in which totality is expressed by contrasting parts, like “high and low” or “east and west.” Joel intends to say that people of all ages will have dreams from God, not just the young and old.

There is nothing surprising with the grammar of these two clauses. The verb **יִחְלְמוּ** is a Qal imperfect third masculine plural from **חָלַם**. This is the last of nine verbs in Joel with a paragogic *nun*, with the other eight clustered in 2:4–9 (see the second textual note on 2:4). The verb **יִרְאוּ** is a Qal imperfect third masculine plural from **רָאָה**, the only place where this common verb occurs in Joel. The plural form of **בְּחֹרִים** is distinctive in that the **ב** is pointed with a *pataḥ*, **בְּחֹרִים**, rather than being shortened to a *shewa*. Grammarians say that the **ו** is “virtually doubled” or that it has a “*daghesh forte implicitum*,” necessitating a short vowel in the closed, unaccented syllable that precedes (GKC, § 22 c;

Joüon, § 20 a). This pointing peculiarity allows the word for “young men,” בְּחִירִים, to be distinguished from the abstract noun “youth,” which is pointed בְּחִירִים (Joüon, § 136 h). **3:2 (ET 2:29)** וְגַם עַל-הָעֲבָדִים וְעַל-הַשִּׁפְחֹת —“And even upon the male slaves and upon the female slaves.” Here is the third example of how broadly the Spirit will be distributed. The Spirit will be poured out even on people from the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder—the slaves. The adverb גַּם can be translated as “even,” and that fits nicely here as the train of thought reaches its climax. In the OT, there are no explicit references to the Holy Spirit ever coming upon a slave.¹⁵ But in the future, things will be different. All of the normal categories of human distinctiveness such as gender, age, and social position will be irrelevant when it comes to the Spirit’s work. The special outpouring of the Spirit will be given even to people of low rank and menial earthly importance. Viewed from the perspective of the OT, Joel’s prophecy is unexpected and shocking.

Christians familiar with the NT immediately think of how this part of Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled in the early church, with abundant documentation in the NT. From the NT epistles, we come to realize that the early congregations had slaves worshipping side by side with free people (1 Cor 7:20–24). According to Paul, these slaves were given the same Holy Spirit as everyone else: “We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13). Paul could announce: “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; see also Col 3:11). It seems that the congregation at Corinth, and perhaps others as well, was populated to a high degree by people from lower social strata. Paul says:

Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence. (1 Cor 1:26–29)

There is a significant translation issue with וְעַל-הָעֲבָדִים וְעַל-הַשִּׁפְחֹת. Should this be translated as “upon male slaves/servants and upon female slaves/servants” or “upon *my* male slaves/servants and upon *my* female slaves/servants”? This issue is on our radar because Peter, when he quotes this verse on Pentecost, says: ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου, including the pronoun “my” twice (Acts 2:18). In doing so, he seems to be following some LXX manuscripts. Both the Göttingen Septuagint¹⁶ and Rahlfs¹⁷ present the verse without the pronoun μου, and they indicate that this is the first reading in Codex Sinaiticus and other witnesses. But other LXX texts include

¹⁵ Isaiah does say that the עֲבָד of the Lord—the Messiah, referred to as “the Servant of the Lord”—will be endowed with the Spirit (Is 42:1).

¹⁶ Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, vol. 13: *Duodecim prophetae* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1943), 235.

¹⁷ Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935), 522.

the pronoun,¹⁸ as do some (but not all) manuscripts of the Vulgate. Some people speculate that the pronoun “my” may have been inserted by LXX transmitters who were troubled by the thought of God’s Spirit being poured out on slaves, since this was such a radical idea.

All in all, there are compelling reasons not to include the pronoun in the OT translation. Though some grammarians allow for the Hebrew definite article sometimes to be equivalent to the possessive pronoun (Joüon, § 137 f), other grammarians do not mention this possibility (see GKC § 126), and Hebrew certainly does not need this construction given the ubiquitous presence of pronominal suffixes throughout the language. More important, the context here works better with the concept of “slaves/servants,” rather than “my slaves/servants.” This phrase shows the remarkable extent to which the Spirit will be outpoured—even to slaves, a group that otherwise might not be expected to receive the Spirit. This nuance would be lost with the translation “my servants,” which then would refer to a group that could be expected to receive the Spirit, either God’s people in general, or possibly God’s prophets, who are often called “my [God’s] servants” in the OT (עֲבָדַי, e.g., Jer 7:25; 26:5; Ezek 38:17; Zech 1:6).

Of course, to translate an OT passage differently than a NT quotation of it can cause a person to feel uneasy. However, it happens with regularity that the NT quotes or alludes to the OT somewhat freely, so the precise wording of the OT translation ends up different from the NT quotation. This situation does not need to cause alarm because everything in both Testaments is true, equally inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit can adapt or add to his messages in whatever way he would like. Without exception, when the OT is quoted in the NT, the main point of the quotation accurately represents the OT. Minor details may differ. In Acts 2:18, it may be that Peter followed the LXX wording that was familiar to his hearers, using the translation of choice for his audience when there was nothing objectionable in it.

A lesser translation issue is whether “slave” or “servant” is better for the masculine and feminine nouns. This decision faces translators wherever עֲבָד occurs in the OT and δοῦλος in the NT because the biblical languages have one word that covers both “slave” and “servant,” where in English we have two. For people in America, given the country’s history, the word “slave” is an irredeemably negative word, carrying much baggage. For that reason, it does not sound right to refer to a believer as God’s “slave,” and modern translations generally use “servant” in such contexts. Also in other contexts where the relationship between a master and a עֲבָד or δοῦλος is not harsh and demeaning, the word “servant” may be better. For example, the messianic title עֲבָד in Isaiah is usually rendered as the “Servant” of the Lord because the Messiah’s relationship to the Father is one of willing, perfect obedience (e.g., Is 42:1; 49:3–6; 52:13; 53:11). In a context like this one, without any such concerns, there is no reason to avoid the word “slave.” Slavery as an institution was very prevalent throughout the ancient world in all periods of Bible history. For male slaves, עֲבָד is the standard Hebrew word. For female slaves, there are two words: שִׁפְחָה and אִמָּה. It is difficult to see a clearcut difference between

¹⁸ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (1851; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 1083.

these near synonyms, and in some contexts, the two terms are used interchangeably (e.g., Gen 30:3–4; 1 Sam 1:16–18). If a differentiation is attempted, the word in Joel 3:2 (ET 2:29), **שָׂפָה**, seems to be used especially “when the female slave is viewed as a possession and a laborer,” in a “lower status” than the **אִמָּה**.¹⁹

אֶת־רוּחִי **בַּיָּמִים הַהֵם** **אֶשְׁפֹּךְ**—“In those days, I will pour out my Spirit.” The expression **בַּיָּמִים הַהֵם/הָהֵם**, “in those days,” occurs some forty times in the OT, often in reference to a time in the past. In the prophets, it usually is a vague time designation looking ahead to the future.²⁰ In Jer 5:18, it is used for the near-at-hand invasion of the Babylonians, but otherwise in Jeremiah, it is used for the indefinite future time of restoration. In Joel 3:2 (ET 2:29) and 4:1 (ET 3:1), it is comparable to **אַחֲרֵי־כֵן**, “afterward” (3:1 [ET 2:28]); **לְפָנֵי בֹא יוֹם יְהוָה**, “before the coming of the day of the LORD” (3:4 [ET 2:31]); **בְּעֵת הַהִיא**, “at that time” (4:1 [ET 3:1]); and **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא**, “on that day” (4:18 [ET 3:18]). The word **יָמִים** is the plural of **יֹם**. The term **הַהֵם** is the demonstrative adjective masculine plural meaning “those”—the “far” demonstrative as opposed to the “near” demonstrative **אֵלֶּה** meaning “these.” The pointing of the article on **הַהֵם** is peculiar. Usually the definite article is pointed with a *pataḥ* when it precedes the letter **ה** (e.g., **הַהוּא**), but it always has a *qamets* on **הַהֵם** and **הָהֵם** (GKC, § 35 f; Joüon, § 35 d).

This strophe ends with a nice *inclusio*, **אֶת־רוּחִי אֶשְׁפֹּךְ**, harking back to the beginning of 3:1 (ET 2:28). Wendland sees this as a clue that the two verses are a distinct discourse unit.²¹

Commentary

The Second Gospel Section: The Outpouring of the Spirit

The second Gospel section begins here (see “The Book Turns from Law to Gospel” in the commentary on 2:18–20) with the most well-known passage of the book. After the restoration of the country’s agriculture, Joel predicts that the Holy Spirit will be poured out in abundance. This section is familiar to nearly all Christians because it was quoted by Peter on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. Without a doubt, with Joel 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32), we come to a high point in the book.

This section also opens up the remaining content of the book since everything from this point forward seems to be eschatological—pointing to the end times when God will bring about judgment and salvation in connection with the day of the Lord. In the first part of the book, Joel lays out two disasters: the immediate disaster of the locust plague and the impending disaster of the coming day of the Lord (see the commentary on 2:1–2 and the excursus “The Day of the Lord” following the commentary on 1:15–16). In the second part of the book, Joel seems to give the Lord’s answer to his believers for each disaster. Joel 2:18–27 presents how God will undo the damage of the locusts. Starting in Joel 3:1 (ET 2:28), God presents what he will do to deliver his people from

¹⁹ Richard Schultz, “שָׂפָה,” *NIDOTTE* 4:212.

²⁰ See Jer 3:16, 18; 31:29; 33:15–16; 50:4, 20; Joel 3:2; 4:1 (ET 2:29; 3:1); Zech 8:6, 23.

²¹ Wendland, *Discourse Analysis*, 255.

the threats of the coming day of the Lord. In other words, just as the locusts in chapter 1 are a harbinger of worse future enemies in chapter 2, so the agricultural recovery at the end of chapter 2 is a prelude to greater future blessings in chapters 3 and 4 (ET 2:28–3:21).

Here is a chart to show the outline. With this perspective, the book of Joel presents itself as a masterfully organized composition with a well-conceived literary structure and a readily apparent literary unity. And “afterward” (אַחֲרָיָהוּ) in 3:1 (ET 2:28) introduces the whole rest of the book.

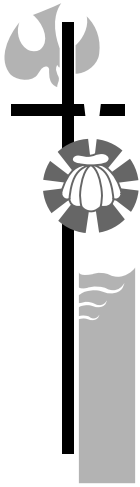
Disasters	The Lord Promises Deliverance
Immediate Disaster (Locusts): 1:2–20	Reversal of the Locust Disaster: 2:18–27
Impending Disaster (The Day of the Lord): 2:1–17	Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32)
	Judgment on the Nations: 4:1–16 (ET 3:1–16)
	Eternal Blessedness: 4:17–21 (ET 3:17–21)

What can be said in a general way about the outpouring of the Spirit and the subsequent prophecies of restoration is that God is predicting something extraordinary and wonderful here. It is great for God to pour down rain and provide abundant crops. But here is something more spectacular—that God should pour down his Spirit to lead people of every sort to prophesy. When God provides for physical needs, it is magnificent. But when he also provides for spiritual needs, it is heavenly, sublime, and glorious.

Often the term “restoration” is used as a handy catchword for the Gospel promises of the prophets, and the term is used in that way in this commentary. However, in one sense, the term is not the best because God promises to bless people beyond anything ever experienced previously. With the outpouring of the Spirit in the NT era, we enjoy something beyond anything experienced in the OT. With the splendor of eternal life in heaven and the new creation, believers enjoy blessedness beyond anything experienced on earth. It is not just a matter of God taking us back to recover something that was lost. He takes us into a new era and gives us more than was ever enjoyed before. Let it simply be said that with this section of the book, we are embarking on a thrilling ride, with the richest of Gospel content—all designed to give us joyful, courageous faith in our loving God.

Peter’s Quotation on Pentecost and the Fulfillment of the Prophecy

Joel’s prophecy about the Holy Spirit has the unique honor of being one of the key OT Scriptures used in the first sermon preached in the Christian church after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 2:16–21). At nine in the morning on Pentecost,



when the disciples were speaking in tongues and the crowd suspected that they were drunk, Peter used the words of Joel to explain the strange phenomena. What was happening on Pentecost was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all mankind in the last days.

Of course, Pentecost is not the only fulfillment of the prophecy. Pentecost is only the beginning, ushering in the NT era, which in its entirety is characterized by the generous outpouring of the Spirit. Believers in Christ in every generation can find themselves included in Joel's prophecy. As Hummel writes:

We confess ourselves, by God's grace, to be among the beneficiaries of this and similar promises. The end-time event prophesied by Joel and Ezekiel [Ezek 39:29; cf. Ezek 36:26–27] took place already at Pentecost and recurs every time a person is baptized in the triune name of God (Mt 28:19) and so receives the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, along with the forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation in Christ. ... We are already in the "latter days" (e.g., Ezek 38:16) envisioned by the OT prophets, the interim between Christ's first and second advents. During this time, God's people are called, gathered, and preserved in faith by the Holy Spirit.²²

Among all the Hebrew prophets, the special privilege of predicting Pentecost and the NT ministry of the Spirit was granted to Joel. Isaiah was privileged to predict the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Is 7:14). Micah predicted the Messiah's birthplace (Micah 5:1 [ET 5:2]). To Joel was given the prize of announcing the Spirit's coming. To this day, pastors can easily find themselves preaching on Joel because 3:1–2 (ET 2:28–29) commonly appears in lectionaries for Pentecost. Joel is remembered all the more because, in Peter's NT quotation, Joel's name is explicitly mentioned in connection with the prophecy. It happens only one other time in the NT that one of the writers of the Minor Prophets is mentioned by name when his book is quoted (Hosea in Rom 9:25).

Peter's quotation of Joel in connection with Pentecost is significant for another reason—a hermeneutical one. Peter shows that the OT restoration prophecies in general were intended by God to find fulfillment in the NT church. The prophets did not just predict events for their own time. They were not just looking ahead to the second coming of Christ and eternity. Their prophecies included the first coming of Christ and the establishment of the NT church. In other words, Peter's use of Joel offers a helpful paradigm in the interpretation of the OT, a paradigm that is especially useful when reacting to millennialism.

Many millennialists, especially dispensational premillennialists, say that the OT restoration prophecies have nothing to do with the NT church but rather refer to the Jewish people in the millennium. They say that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit predicted by Joel will be evidenced in the millennium, where there will be an extraordinary level of enlightenment by the Spirit. When Peter quotes Joel, Peter supposedly does not consider Pentecost to be a fulfillment of the prophecy, but he quotes Joel simply to indicate that the Holy Spirit, and not wine, is responsible for the speaking in tongues. To support this interpretation,

²² Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, 1145, commenting on Ezek 39:29.

Ryrie says: “Peter does not use the usual Scriptural formula for fulfilled prophecy as he does in Acts 1:16 (*cf.* Matt. 1:22; 2:17; 4:14).”²³

In response, it can be noted that there are no rigidly established formulas in the NT to indicate that a prophecy is fulfilled; the apostles use a variety of expressions. In addition, when Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2:16, he says: “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel [τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ].” By saying “this is what,” Peter naturally leads people to conclude that it is a fulfillment. Even some millennialists and dispensationalists in recent years have come to see Pentecost as a partial fulfillment, although they still see the millennium as the ultimate fulfillment. For more on this topic, see the excursus “The Restoration Prophecies in Joel and the Prophets” following the commentary on 2:25–27.

It is fascinating to scrutinize Peter’s extended quotation and to compare the Greek of Acts 2:17–21 with the LXX and the Hebrew of Joel 3:1–5 (ET 2:28–32). For the most part, Peter’s quotation follows the LXX, which is close to the Hebrew. There are a number of little differences, however, as is often the case in such NT quotations. See the chart on the next page.

The main thrust of the passage and the points needed by Peter are transferred in a way that no one could fault. Still there is a degree of freedom, which is typical for such NT quotations. This is nothing to cause concern, especially since we know that the Holy Spirit is inspiring Peter—the same Holy Spirit who inspired Joel. The divine author has the right to do what he wants when he is quoting himself.

Given the intense discussion that surrounds the phrase “all flesh [כָּל-בָּשָׂר]” (see the third textual note on 3:1 [ET 2:28]), it is no surprise that scholars try to figure out how Peter understood this phrase on Pentecost. Did he imagine that the Spirit was for all people including Gentiles or only for Jews of all social strata? Of course, we cannot look into Peter’s mind. But it is interesting that Peter ends the quote with the first line of Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32)—“then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”—without referring to Mount Zion and Jerusalem as the place where deliverance would occur, which is the next line of Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32). Also, at the end of his sermon, he says that “the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off [πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακρόν]” (Acts 2:39). With the last phrase, he likely is referring to Gentiles (see the use of μακρόν, “far away,” in Eph 2:13, 17). Of course, it seems to be a surprise for Peter when God later sends him to Cornelius and makes clear that Gentiles are to be incorporated into the church on an equal footing with Jews (Acts 10). In Antioch, Paul needs to admonish Peter for siding with the Jewish believers over against the Gentile believers (Gal 2:11–14). Perhaps Peter was aware of the wide-open promise of Joel and the other OT prophets, but it took time and divine guidance for the implications to sink in, as it did for others who were steeped in OT patterns of thought and practice (see Acts 15).

²³ Charles C. Ryrie, “The Significance of Pentecost,” *BSac* 112 (1955): 334. The same arguments are found in Blum, “Joel 2:28–32: The Messianic Outpouring of the Spirit,” 1184.

Hebrew OT	LXX	Acts 2:17–21	Evaluation
אַחֲרֵי־כֵן, “afterward”	μετὰ ταῦτα, “after these things”	ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, “in the last days”	Change by Peter
אֶת־רוּחִי, “my Spirit”	ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου, “from my Spirit”	ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου, “from my Spirit”	Peter follows the LXX with the preposition
וְקִנְיֹנְכֶם ... בְּחֻרֵיכֶם, “your old men ... your young men”	οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ... καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν, “your old men ... and your young men”	οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ... καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν, “your young men ... and your old men”	Peter switches the order of the clauses about “old men” and “young men”
וְגַם, “and even”	καί, “and”	καί γε, “and even”	Peter has γε to represent וְ, though γε is not in the LXX
עַל־הַעֲבָדִים וְעַל־הַשִּׁפְחֹת, “upon the male slaves and upon the female slaves”	ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας, “upon the male slaves and upon the female slaves” (some later manuscripts add μου twice)	ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου, “upon my male slaves/ servants and upon my female slaves/ servants”	Peter adds “my,” as also do some later LXX manuscripts
		καὶ προφητεύσουσιν, “and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18)	Addition by Peter
		ἄνω ... σημεῖα ... κάτω, “above ... signs ... below”	Three words added by Peter
אֲפֹרָא, “dreadful,” from יָרָא, “to fear” (3:4 [ET 2:31])	ἐπιφανῆ, “notable,” as if from נִרְאָה, “to see”	ἐπιφανῆ, “notable”	Peter follows the LXX with its misreading

Also noteworthy is the fact that Peter includes in his Pentecost sermon the verses from Joel about wonders in the heavens and on the earth—for example, the sun going dark and the moon turning red (Acts 2:19–20, quoting Joel 3:3–4 [ET 2:30–31]). Some interpreters are puzzled by this since these events are thought to be associated with Judgment Day and not Pentecost. Several possible explanations can be given. It is evident that Peter wanted to include the first line of Joel 3:5 (ET 2:32) in his sermon: “then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This promise sets the stage for Peter’s invitation at the end of his sermon that listeners repent, be baptized, and be saved (Acts 2:38–40). The promise of salvation most certainly is *for everyone* (Acts 2:38–39). Maybe Joel 3:3–4 (ET 2:30–31) came along naturally in Peter’s quote simply because he needed to get to the first line of 3:5 (ET 2:32). Another possibility is that the verses do fit Pentecost to some degree since the people had recently experienced a number of unnerving extraordinary events. There is no explicit record of the moon turning to blood, but on Good Friday, the sun did go dark and there was an earthquake (Mt 27:45, 51). On Pentecost, “a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven,” and “they saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them” (Acts 2:2–3). Finally, with the outpouring of the Spirit, Peter knew that the world had entered “the last days” (Acts 2:17) and that the final great Day of Judgment is just around the corner. So Pentecost and Judgment Day belong together as part of one package as events of the end times. Joel 3:3–4 (ET 2:30–31) fits nicely in Peter’s sermon, then, as a warning to the people of what is soon coming and of their need to repent and believe in Christ.

Different Chapter Numbering

A nuisance for readers of the Bible who go back and forth between Hebrew and English is the fact that the chapter and verse numbers are different beginning at this section and continuing until the end of the book. Such differences occur quite commonly in the OT, and each situation has its own circumstances behind the difference.²⁴

The Hebrew OT as transmitted by the Jews through the first millennium AD did not have chapter numbers. The Masoretes (ca. AD 600–900) did divide the text into verses, indicated by the accents and the *soph pasuq* marks at the end of verses. The Masoretes also put in paragraph breaks (see the fifth textual note on 1:12). For larger divisions, they broke the OT into 452 *sedarim*. The word סֵדֶר, *seder*, is an Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew word for “order,” “arrangement,” or “portion of Scripture” (the same word is used for the Jewish Passover liturgy). The start of each new *seder* in the Masoretic manuscripts and in our printed editions is marked by a large ס in the margin. The Leningrad Codex has twenty *sedarim* in the Minor Prophets, and these breaks often come at unlikely

²⁴ For a list of differences in versification between English, Hebrew, and Greek, see *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 265–68.

places. What is marked in the Leningrad Codex as the second *sefer* of the Minor Prophets (ספרי) begins at Hos 14:6 (ET 14:5), what is marked as the third (ספרי) begins at Joel 2:26, and what is marked as the fourth (ספרי) begins at Amos 2:10.²⁵

The first chapter numbers, as we know them, were added to the Latin Vulgate in AD 1205 by Roman Catholic cardinal Stephen Langton, working as a professor at the University of Paris before becoming the archbishop of Canterbury. Langton's numbering gradually spread, and when the Hebrew OT began to be published and made available to Christians, the numbering was also incorporated into the Hebrew text. In this process, however, some discrepancies arose.

The book of Joel was divided into three chapters by Langton—the numbering that has been perpetuated in most English translations. In the fourteenth century, this three-chapter division was brought into the Septuagint and was included in Daniel Bomberg's first Rabbinic Bible, which was edited by Felix Pratensis and published in Venice in 1516–1517.²⁶ For whatever reason, when Bomberg published the second Rabbinic Bible in 1524–1525, edited by Jacob ben Hayyim—the Hebrew text that became the standard until the twentieth century—Joel was broken into four chapters. As far as we know, the divergence starts there. In the facsimile of the Rabbinic Bible of 1525, you can see a small ג on the line with וְהָיָה אֶחָד־יָמֶיךָ אֶשְׁפּוֹף אֶת־רוּחִי (3:1 [ET 2:28]) and a small ד on the line with כִּי הִנֵּה בָיְמֵיךָ הָהֵמָּה (4:1 [ET 3:1]).²⁷ The Hebrew letter ג stands for the number 3, and ד for the number 4. It was a younger age, when scholarship did not have the accumulated centuries that we have now. Perhaps ben Hayyim wanted to highlight the Pentecost prophecy by giving the prophecy its own chapter. Regardless, there have been two systems ever since. This decision illustrates the truism that a small matter in the beginning can lead to big consequences later. Ever since 1525, Bible readers have had to put up with two numbering systems for the entire last portion of the book of Joel!

It is fascinating to see that some publications follow the Hebrew numbering. Predictably, the NJPS and Jewish commentaries do, as well as the Targum. More surprising is the fact that some later LXX editions (see Rahlfs) follow the four-chapter Hebrew numbering system, as well as some modern Roman Catholic translations such as the NJB and NABRE. In the end, OT scholars have to quietly cope with this variation in numbering, realizing that all of the same text is presented in every version. The variation is nothing of substance, just a nuisance.

²⁵ *BHQ* meticulously presents the Leningrad Codex. See *BHQ*, 5*.

²⁶ Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 5.

²⁷ Ben Chayyim, *Biblia Rabbinica*, 3:358.

How Is the Spirit's Activity Different since Pentecost?

Modern evangelical Bible translations commonly recognize about eighty places in the OT where the Holy Spirit—the third person of the triune God—is explicitly referred to.¹ The Spirit was “hovering over the surface of the waters” at the original creation (Gen 1:2). The Spirit gave special skill to craftsmen and governmental leaders. The Spirit inspired prophets to speak God’s Word. Already in OT times, the Holy Spirit was known and active.²

On Pentecost, however, the activity of the Holy Spirit took a dramatic step up, as prophesied by many. Joel 3:1 (ET 2:28) predicted that in the messianic era, God would “pour out” his Spirit and expand the Spirit’s work. Other prophets, like Isaiah (Is 32:15; 44:3) and Ezekiel (Ezek 36:27; 37:1; 39:29), made similar predictions. In sync with these OT prophets, John the Baptist said about Jesus: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8). Jesus himself talked about the time “when the Spirit of truth comes” (Jn 16:13), and shortly before his ascension, he stated: “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days” (Acts 1:5). On Pentecost, the fulfillment of all of these prophecies commenced with the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and ever since the Holy Spirit’s working has been amplified beyond his working in the OT.

With this in mind, it is natural to wonder in what way the Spirit’s activity is different since Pentecost. In other words, how exactly does our experience of the Holy Spirit in the NT era differ from the experience of people in OT times? In reality, it is not the easiest to know how to articulate this difference beyond saying in a general way that the Spirit’s activity is greater or deeper or fuller. But given what the NT says, there are some explanations to avoid and some that can be entertained.

No Difference in Creating and Preserving Faith

Many interpreters say that in OT times, the Holy Spirit empowered select people for positions of leadership and special service, but he was not active in all

¹ See the second textual note on 3:1 (ET 2:28) for a discussion about how English translations vary with “Spirit” or “spirit” in the OT.

² Wood points out that the word “Holy” is present in Hebrew descriptions of the Spirit only three times in the OT (Ps 51:13 [ET 51:11]; Is 63:10–11), in contrast to the Greek NT, where ninety-four out of 261 references have “Holy.” See Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 20.

believers.³ They say, for example, that when David in Ps 51:13 (ET 51:11) mentions that the Holy Spirit is with him, he is speaking as the specially anointed king, not as an ordinary Israelite believer. Some interpreters make a distinction between regeneration and indwelling. They admit that the Spirit works regeneration for all OT believers, but they deny that the Spirit dwells within them because the Spirit dwells in the tabernacle and the temple in OT times.⁴

One reason these interpreters deny the Spirit's work in ordinary believers is because whenever the OT has references to the Spirit's activity in individuals, the references are restricted to selected leaders. There are four categories of people who are specially equipped by the Spirit in the OT. The Spirit empowers the judges Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34), Jephthah (Judg 11:29), and Samson (Judg 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). The Spirit gives skill to craftsmen like Bezalel (Ex 31:3; 35:31). The Spirit comes upon civil administrators like Moses (Num 11:17), Joshua (Num 27:18; Deut 34:9), Saul (1 Sam 11:6; 16:14), and David (1 Sam 16:13; Ps 51:13 [ET 51:11]). Finally, the Spirit gives prophetic messages to prophets. Apart from these examples, it is true that the OT does not talk explicitly about the Holy Spirit creating and preserving faith in ordinary believers.

Such interpreters also make much of statements in the Gospel of John indicating that the Spirit will be given only after Jesus is taken to heaven. For example, Jn 7:39 says: "Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified." Also, Jesus tells his disciples in Jn 16:7: "It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I do not go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you." The conclusion is drawn that the Holy Spirit must not have been working in all believers. Some interpreters especially build their case about "indwelling" on Jn 14:17, where Jesus says that the Counselor "remains with you and will be in you." They insist that the Holy Spirit must not have been dwelling in believers previously because Jesus promises that he will be "in you" only in the future.

This line of thinking needs to be rejected, however, for several reasons. Even though the OT does not explicitly say that the Holy Spirit is active creating and preserving faith in all believers, the NT makes clear that the salvation of OT saints happens in the same way as that of NT believers—through faith in the Savior (Romans 4; Hebrews 11). In addition, the NT makes clear that no one can believe apart from the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Titus 3:5). If the Holy Spirit was not active in OT times creating and preserving faith, how are we to think that the OT believers came to faith and were saved? Did they do it from their own spiritual powers? This would fly in the face of what the Bible

³ For two examples, see Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, 1:119, and Hays, Duvall, and Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times*, 230.

⁴ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: BH Academic, 2006), 163.

says about human nature after the fall into sin. “The person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him” (1 Cor 2:14). What we know about the human condition and the nature of saving faith leads inescapably to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit was active in all believers in OT times, bringing them to faith and remaining in them to preserve them in faith.⁵

There also are scriptural hints to this in both Testaments. In the OT, there are passages that imply that God’s Spirit was active in teaching and guiding everyone in the nation of Israel throughout its history. Nehemiah says that the Spirit instructed and warned the Israelites when they were in the wilderness and when they settled in the promised land (Neh 9:20, 30). Isaiah likewise indicates that God put his Holy Spirit among the Israelites in the days of Moses (Is 63:11) and that the Spirit was the one who gave the Israelites rest in the promised land (Is 63:14). When the Israelites rebelled against the Lord, in the wilderness and later, they “grieved his Holy Spirit” (Is 63:10). These OT verses dovetail with Stephen’s speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin, in which he accuses his listeners of resisting the Holy Spirit, just as their ancestors had done (Acts 7:51). As for David’s comments about the Spirit in his psalms, it could be argued that he is pouring out his heart as a believer and not as the officially ordained king and that with these psalms, he is providing words that are appropriate for all believers to pray (Pss 51:13 [ET 51:11]; 143:10).

In the NT, the Gospel of Luke states that Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon have the Holy Spirit, and these are believers still operating under the principles of the OT (Lk 1:41, 67; 2:25). During his nighttime visit with Nicodemus, Jesus says that people cannot become children of God apart from the Holy Spirit: “Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5; see also Jn 3:6; 6:63), and Jesus insinuates that Nicodemus should have known this as a “teacher of Israel” (Jn 3:10). Jesus later tells his disciples: “The Spirit is the one who gives life” (Jn 6:63). And about the Spirit, Jesus says to his disciples: “But you do know him, because he remains with you” (Jn 14:17). Would Jesus have said these things if the Spirit was not really active in people’s lives until Pentecost?

When the Gospel of John talks about the Spirit coming after Jesus departs, these statements can easily be explained as referring to the extra measure of the Spirit that is coming on Pentecost and throughout the NT era until Judgment Day. The disciples did not yet have the more powerful working of the Holy Spirit that is characteristic of life after Pentecost. It can also be noted that in Jn 14:17, there is a variant reading that is quite well attested. Instead of the future tense verb ἔσται, “he *will be* in you,” some manuscripts have the present ἐστιν, “he *is* in you.” This variant makes it unwise to put too much weight on the future tense in Jn 14:17 for any doctrinal point.

⁵ Lessing comes to the same conclusion. See *Isaiah* 56–66, 373.

All of this lays bare the difficulty in trying to nail down the differences between the Holy Spirit's activity in the OT and in the NT. There are abundant evidences of faith and fruits of faith in the OT, and we trust that the Holy Spirit was behind all of it. So how is his work different since Pentecost? If we think that it is a matter of power in preaching, then we remember Jonah turning Nineveh upside down (Jonah 3:4–5). If we think that it is courageous witnessing, then we remember Naaman's Israelite servant girl (2 Ki 5:2–3). If it is a variety of church ministries, then we remember all the Levites, priests, musicians, and gatekeepers who were organized by David to carry out worship at the temple (1 Chronicles 23–26). If it is wholehearted devotion to the Lord and his work, then we remember how the Israelites gave so many offerings for the construction of the tabernacle that they had to be told to stop (Ex 36:2–7). The Holy Spirit was active in OT times in creating and preserving faith and in moving believers to serve the Lord.

Two theoretical possibilities present themselves for what is different. First, maybe the scope of the Spirit's activity is expanded so that the Spirit is poured on additional people beyond the norm in OT times. Second, maybe the Spirit is poured out on the same sort of people who had the Spirit in OT times but in fuller measure. To find the answer, all we can do is to stick to the language of the Bible and to glean from there, as well as we can, how the Bible itself presents the difference. From my reading, I conclude that both possibilities are true.

On All Nations

The main difference, it seems to me, is the scope of the Spirit's activity—that the Spirit since Pentecost has been converting Gentiles in large numbers. In OT times, it was God's intention that the Israelites share the message of salvation with other nations (1 Chr 16:8, 23–30; 2 Chr 6:32–33), and the Mosaic legislation had provisions for proselytes (Ex 12:48–49; Num 15:14–16). Throughout OT history, there were occasional Gentiles who came to worship the God of Israel, like Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and the queen of Sheba. Yet we get the impression that these Gentile believers were quite few in number. The means of grace were by and large limited to the people of Israel. All of this changes after Pentecost as the floodgates of heaven are opened and large numbers of Gentiles enter the church.

Of course, Jesus predicted this. In his discourse on the end times, Jesus said: "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14). Jesus commissioned the disciples to "go . . . and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19), and he stated that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk 24:47). These are the last recorded words of Jesus on earth before his ascension: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The outreach strategy in the OT seems to be "centripetal," with unbelievers attracted to the worship center in Jerusalem. But Jesus laid out a "centrifugal"

mission strategy for the NT era, with believers being sent out to the far corners of the planet.⁶

That the admittance of Gentiles into God's family was something new and different in the years immediately after Pentecost is shown by the surprise of the apostles and the earliest believers. When Peter was preaching in the home of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit came down on his Gentile hearers, and "the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" (Acts 10:45). When Peter reported on the incident in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers remarked in wonder: "So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles" (Acts 11:18). Here was something novel and unexpected.

It is also worth noting that when the book of Acts records the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles in a new location, three times Acts explicitly mentions that there was a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit in connection with this advancing of the Gospel. In addition to Cornelius in Joppa (Acts 10), the Spirit is mentioned when the Gospel comes to believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14–16). Likewise when the Gospel comes to believers in Ephesus (Acts 19:6).

This new phenomenon of Gentile inclusion then becomes a major topic throughout the NT. The book of Acts records the missionary journeys of Paul, who regards himself as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). Rom 11:17–24 elaborates on the incorporation of Gentile believers, comparing them to wild olive branches that have been grafted onto the cultivated tree. Eph 2:11–22 revels in the breaking down of the "dividing wall of hostility," so that believing Jews and Gentiles are united in the one church of God. In short, if you sit back and ponder what is new and different in the NT after Pentecost, this truth is front and center: salvation is freely going to people of all nations.

Revelation 20 confirms that the worldwide spread of the Gospel is to be a prominent feature of the NT era, making it different from the previous OT era. In the vision recorded in that chapter, the apostle John saw an angel (understood by this commentary writer to be Jesus himself) bind the devil for a thousand years (Rev 20:1–3). This thousand years represents the complete period of the NT era between the first and second advents of Christ, and the binding of Satan is the victory over Satan that Jesus won through his death and resurrection (Heb 2:14–15; 1 Jn 3:8). In connection with this binding of Satan, Rev 20:3 states: "He [Jesus] threw him [Satan] into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed." Prior to the saving work of Jesus, the devil was able to "deceive the nations" in a way that he cannot any longer. Now in the NT era, Satan cannot slam the door shut to prevent the spread of the Gospel around the world.

Church history attests to this very fact. No matter how many opponents of the church have arisen, the church has quietly moved around the earth, spreading

⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), 102.

from one continent to the next, welcoming Gentiles of all nations and races into the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages, and today we are thrilled to know that the Gospel is traveling to every square inch of the earth through radio, television, and the internet.

This expansion of the Spirit's work to include Gentiles can also be seen in Joel's prophecy, when God says: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (3:1 [ET 2:28]). Though the full ramifications of this prophecy may not have been grasped by Joel or even by Peter when he quoted it on Pentecost, the concept of a worldwide distribution of the Spirit is inherent in these words (see the discussion of "all flesh [כָּל-בָּשָׂר]" in the third textual note on 3:1 [ET 2:28]). Arthur Clement states:

Joel prophesied that in the new era the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all people and would not be restricted in his operation to just one nation, the Jews. This outpouring enables believers to bear witness to the gospel out in the world and also enables those who hear the gospel to believe it. ... Joel prophesied the universal nature of the Christian church.⁷

Here is one unmistakable difference in the Spirit's activity in the messianic era, arguably the keynote: the Spirit is active around the globe in Gentiles from all nations. For any of us who are Gentiles, this is hugely significant; it means that we are beneficiaries of God's salvation.

Activity in Individual Believers

Apart from a more widespread distribution, there is also a difference in the Spirit's operation within believers. The Spirit does the same work of converting sinners and sanctifying them, but the role and importance of the Spirit in believers' lives is expanded. This change is illustrated simply by the number of references to the Spirit in each Testament. Whereas the entire OT has about eighty references to the Holy Spirit, there are more than eighty references in the NT books of Acts and Romans alone, not to mention the other twenty-five books. The details of the difference are not spelled out in Scripture, and the difference resists neat and simple categorizations. But loosely, one can say that the Spirit's operation is deeper, richer, greater, and fuller in the NT era.⁸ And a number of specifics can be identified.

First, it is legitimate to say that the Spirit gives increased *power* to believers since Pentecost since power is what Jesus promised would come to his disciples through the outpouring of the Spirit. On Easter evening, Jesus said: "I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high [ἐνδύσησθε ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν]" (Lk 24:49). At his ascension, Jesus said: "You will receive power [λήμψεσθε δύναμιν] when the Holy Spirit has come on you" (Acts 1:8). This power shows itself in

⁷ Clement, *Pentecost or Pretense*, 177–78.

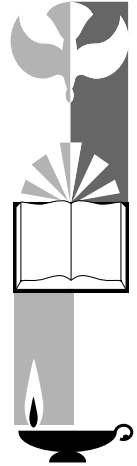
⁸ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 287.

speaking and in actions—in Christian ministry and in Christian living. Through the Spirit's power, the apostles performed miraculous healings and pushed the Gospel forward into new territories. Through the Spirit's power, all believers can break the dominion of sin and can be courageous witnesses for Christ.⁹

Second, Jesus promised greater *insight* and *understanding* through the Spirit. He told his disciples: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you" (Jn 14:26). Later he said: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). In a special way, these promises were fulfilled in the apostles. Before Pentecost, their understanding was fuzzy and incomplete, especially with regard to the *work* of Jesus to provide redemption through the forgiveness of sins, not so much about his *person* as the Son of God.¹⁰ After Pentecost, they clearly proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and they become the authoritative, foundational teachers of the church and the inspired authors of the NT. The Spirit also gives a level of spiritual knowledge to every NT believer that is higher than what was available for OT believers. Through his *magnum opus*—the New Testament—the Spirit is able to teach the full story of God's plan of salvation with its glorious fulfillment in Christ.

Next, the Bible alludes to an *inner working* of the Spirit in the hearts of NT believers that goes beyond the OT paradigm. Already in the OT, God wanted his followers to "circumcise [their] hearts" (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4) and to have "a new heart and a new spirit" (Ezek 18:31). But the OT worship of God was loaded with outward laws because God was treating his people as if they were minor-aged children (Gal 3:23–24; 4:1–3). Now in the NT era, God treats his people as fully grown sons, and rather than keeping them on track with a detailed law code, he puts his Spirit into their hearts to guide and rule them (Gal 4:4–6). For people in the new covenant, God promises through Jeremiah: "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. . . . No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them" (Jer 31:33–34). And this inner heart knowledge is provided by the Spirit, as God promises through Ezekiel: "I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances" (Ezek 36:27; see also Ezek 11:19–20). Here is a difference between the OT and the NT: in a way that goes beyond the OT with its tablets of stone and its complicated Levitical legislation, God's Law is on the hearts of believers, put there by God's Spirit.

Another heightening of the Spirit's operation, gleaned from the NT, is seen in the distribution of *spiritual gifts* to all believers. In the NT era, according to Paul, "a manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common



⁹ For some useful pages on the "new covenant empowering" of the Holy Spirit and also "baptism in the Holy Spirit," see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 766–73.

¹⁰ Frederick William Wenzel, *The Wenzel Commentary* (Bemidji, Minn.: Arrow Printing, 1986), 792.

good” (1 Cor 12:7). Paul rattles off lists of spiritual gifts in two of his letters (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10, 28–30), without any hint that these lists are comprehensive and all-inclusive—they simply present some of the gifts present in the Roman and Corinthian congregations. About such spiritual gifts, Paul says: “One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills” (1 Cor 12:11). It can simply be said that there is nothing comparable to this in the OT. The new work of the Spirit includes passing out special gifts, with no believer excluded.¹¹

The one spiritual gift highlighted in the book of Joel is *prophesying*. Through Joel, God says: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people, and your sons and daughters will prophesy” (3:1 [ET 2:28]). Universal prophesying is central in the new arrangement. In the OT, there was a prophet here and there with a special gift of the Spirit. In the end-times outpouring of the Spirit, everyone among the people of God will have a deep, profound gift of the Spirit comparable to the OT prophets—whether male or female, young or old, slave or free. Because of the importance of this topic and the need for a careful explanation of what is meant by “prophesying,” a separate essay has been prepared on the matter. See the excursus “‘Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophesy’” following this excursus.

All of these features of the Spirit’s NT activity in individuals—power, insight, inner guidance, spiritual gifts, and prophesying—can be said to be oriented toward one goal. They all contribute to the Lord’s worldwide evangelism program inasmuch as they all support the work of spreading the Gospel to all nations. So we come back to the keynote. When he ascended, Jesus said: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The intense, bold, and personal nature of the Spirit’s activity in individuals equips them to be Christ’s witnesses throughout the world.

Connected to Jesus

A final difference in the Spirit’s activity in NT times is that everything is wrapped up with the real-life, historical work of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose for mankind’s salvation. Of course, the Spirit’s work was always focused on the God-appointed Savior. But in the OT, the Spirit had to make use of foreshadowings and preliminary sketches, involving human priests, animal sacrifices, and the like (Heb 8:1–6; 10:1). Now the Spirit is connected to the finished masterpiece as completed in the redemptive work of Christ on earth.

It is fascinating to study the relationship of the Holy Spirit with Jesus during his earthly ministry. According to the NT, the Spirit accompanied and helped

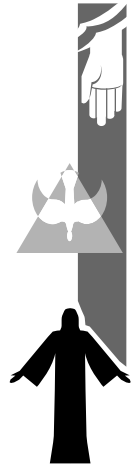
¹¹ That does not mean that every spiritual gift listed in the NT will continue throughout the entire NT era. The gift of “apostles” (Eph 4:11), for example, was only for the early church, and some of the other gifts were associated with this office. For a discussion of “foundational” and “confirmatory” gifts, see the excursus “‘Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophesy’” following this excursus.

Jesus at every step of the way. To begin with, Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary through the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). Then the Holy Spirit came on Jesus at his Baptism (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:9–10; Lk 3:21–22). At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Lk 4:1). When Jesus preached at his home synagogue in Nazareth, he read the messianic prophecy of Is 61:1–2—“the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor”—and Jesus said that the words were fulfilled in himself (Lk 4:16–21). Jesus drove out demons and performed other miracles “by the Spirit of God” (Mt 12:28; see also Acts 10:37–38). When he died, he offered himself to God “through the eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14), and when he rose, he was “made alive by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18; cf. Rom 1:4). During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit shows for the first time what his fuller outpouring in the NT era will be like.

This victorious Jesus is also the one who, together with the Father, sends the Holy Spirit on Christians in the NT era. John the Baptist announced about Jesus: “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8; see also Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). This “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is the special NT impartation of the Holy Spirit that is given to people when they are converted to faith in Christ, either through the Word (Acts 10:44–45) or through Baptism (Acts 2:38–39).¹² Because this special gift comes from Christ and distributes the forgiveness of sins won by Christ’s atoning work, it could be distributed only after Christ’s glorification and ascension (Jn 7:39; 16:7). As Hengstenberg says: “It was only after God’s relation to the world had been changed by the death of Christ that the Spirit of *Christ* could be bestowed.”¹³ With this in mind, what happened on Easter evening when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples makes perfect sense: “He [Jesus] breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ ” (Jn 20:22).

But the Spirit’s connection with Jesus is not just a matter of being sent by him. When the Spirit works among people, the Spirit also seeks to magnify Jesus, not himself. The Spirit is happy to remain in the background, as Jesus is glorified. When Jesus predicted the coming of the Spirit, he said: “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me” (Jn 15:26; see also Jn 14:26). In the same discourse, Jesus continued: “He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16:14).

It is instructive to see how things went on Pentecost. When the Spirit was poured out and the Spirit’s astonishing presence was evident on every hand—with the sound of wind, with tongues of fire, and with speaking in tongues—Peter got up to preach. In his sermon, as he is filled with the Holy



¹² The NT shows that people who were converted to faith in Christ through the Word were then also baptized (e.g., Acts 8:34–38; 10:44–48).

¹³ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 1:331.

Spirit, Peter does not elaborate on who the Holy Spirit is and how others could speak in tongues and enjoy the special visible evidences of his presence. Rather, Peter directs people to the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and he encourages his listeners to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Then they will receive the promised gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:22–39).

Vogt summarizes the point this way: “As the Holy Spirit does his work, he doesn’t call much attention to himself. Rather, he calls attention to Jesus, our Savior.”¹⁴ And this is how the Spirit’s activity is fuller and richer in the NT than in the OT: the Spirit is connected with the glorified Christ and his perfectly completed work.

Application

This essay has endeavored to answer a curious question: how is the work of the Holy Spirit different since Pentecost? Coming upon the answer, however, is not done just to satisfy curiosity or to exercise Bible knowledge. The better we understand the special working of the Spirit since Pentecost, the more we can appreciate what we personally enjoy as members of the NT church with the enhanced activity of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. Jesus has baptized us in the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit lives in us. This Spirit works faith in Christ, leads us to grow in sanctified living, and equips us to be of service to others. In this way, we are blessed beyond God’s people in OT times.

As we are reminded of the Spirit’s rich work, we can also be encouraged to seek a fuller measure of the Spirit as he comes through the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Every Christian is baptized in the Holy Spirit at conversion, but the NT talks about believers having moments when they are “filled” in a special way with the Spirit (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:52; Eph 5:18). The Spirit can always be received to a greater degree, and Jesus promises that the Father likes to send the Holy Spirit to those who ask him for the Spirit: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Lk 11:13). One Christian author mentions a commendable practice: “I think I may say with truthfulness that it has been my practice for many years to pray every day that God will fill me with his Spirit and cause more of the Spirit’s fruit to appear in my life.”¹⁵

Yet, when we receive the Spirit in greater measure, the Spirit never becomes the main focus because the Spirit testifies about Christ and glorifies Christ (Jn 15:26; 16:14). Writing for Lutheran pastors, Paul Eickmann says:

As preachers we may sometimes feel remiss for speaking much more of the Son than of the Spirit, but in so doing we only follow the lead of the prophets

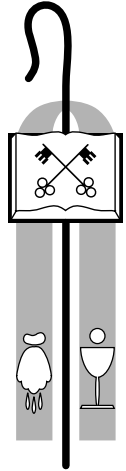
¹⁴ Vogt, *Holy Spirit: The Giver of Life*, 7.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978), 118.

and apostles. It is notable that whenever the Spirit occupies the forefront of a church's message, the Gospel is deformed. The Spirit gives the church power to witness to *Christ* (Acts 1:8).¹⁶

The end result is that we love Jesus more and more and we want to share the message of Jesus more and more with people of all nations.

Then we come again to the crowning feature of the Spirit's NT activity—the spread of salvation to people of all nations, including Gentiles. As we have participated in that marvelous spread, with the Gospel remarkably coming to us, so we can take up our role in sharing Christ with others near and far. This is the Spirit's work. God said through Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (3:1 [ET 2:28]).



¹⁶ Paul E. Eickmann, "God the Holy Spirit Acts Spiritually to Comfort and Eternally to Glorify the Church," in *God the Holy Spirit Acts*, ed. Eugene P. Kauffeld (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1972), 209.