

Acts 2:12-21 • The Day of the Lord

Introduction

This is undoubtedly one of the most contested sections of Scripture. It would probably take a lifetime of examination toward becoming an expert in cataloguing and identifying the myriad of interpretations given in all the commentaries and sermons ever written in an attempt to explain Peter's given explanation for what is happening on the Day of Pentecost. The problem can be summed up in the fact that there is near universal agreement that only part of what Peter provided has literally come true, while the rest is yet to be fulfilled. On the surface, it appears that Peter's explanation is incomplete or involving a biblical mystery obscuring our understanding. However, the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. If we can set aside our assumptions and predispositions, and accept Peter's explanation in the same, consistent way in which all of God's Word operates, we just might be able to arrive at a solution to this issue.

¹²And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

¹⁴But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. ¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; ¹⁶but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says,
'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND;
AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY,
AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS,
AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;

¹⁸EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES,
BOTH MEN AND WOMEN,
I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT

And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE
AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW,
BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE.

²⁰THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS
AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD,
BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

²¹AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

[Read Acts 2:12-21]

Q: What has taken place that has caused observers to ask, "What does this mean?"

A: This the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit has been poured out to initiate the birth of the Church.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

— Acts 2:1-4

Point: Whereas God had previously chosen to work exclusively through Israel, this is what many identify as the first day of the "Church Age" when God, for an appointed time will work through the Church composed of both Jew and Gentile believers in Christ. In the Last Days, the "Church Age" comes to an end with the Church's Rapture and God will once again return to using Israel in order to fulfill all the promises He made concerning them which have been temporarily interrupted.

Q: But if this is the "Church Age", why does the birth of the Church begin with signs and a sermon which seem to be exclusively directed to Jews?

A: It is the same reason why Jesus' ministry was primarily to the Jews in that they were first called by God to be set apart exclusively for Him.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

— Romans 1:16

Q: When asked the meaning of the Holy Spirit being poured out on what we might now call the "birthday of the Church", what Old Testament Scripture is Peter inspired by the Holy Spirit to recite as an explanation?

A: Joel 2:28-32.

Q: How might this prophecy of Joel be divided into two main messages or themes?

A: In v.17-18 the main message concerns the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Last Days; in v.19-21 the main message concerns the outpouring of the day of the Lord in the Last Days.

Q: Why do you suppose that so many theologians are divided in their interpretation of Peter's quotation of the Prophet Joel to explain the meaning of what is taking place?

A: Because although the first message of Joel promising the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has taken place, the events associated with the day of the Lord did not occur either on that particular day, nor have been fulfilled to this day.

Q: Why would Peter seemingly quote Scripture as the answer to what was taking place when it does not appear to have ever actually taken place?

A: We have to face the very difficult answer that Peter **IS** providing the **whole** answer and that if there is a lack of understanding, it is on our part.

Q: What would probably be the most important part of Peter's quotation of Joel as far as those present on that day of Pentecost were concerned?

A: "And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". (v.21)

Application: Peter's explanation of what is taking place at Pentecost begins with the fulfillment of God's promise through Joel of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which has literally taken place, but ends with the promise of the day of the Lord, which has not yet occurred.

¹God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

[Read Hebrews 1:1-2]

Q: Even though the writer of Hebrews authored this nearly 2,000 years ago, how did he describe the time he was living in when the Holy Spirit inspired this epistle?

A: "...in these last days..." (v.2)

Point: God does not view time in the same way we do. From His point of view, we are already living in the "last days". Peter reminded us of this when he said, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." (2 Pe. 3:8)

Q: How might this relate to Peter's explanation of the meaning of Pentecost?

A: Peter's explanation, by way of quoting Joel, begins with the caveat, "And it shall be in the last days". (v.17)

Application: Peter's explanation was not limited to just that single, literal day when the Holy Spirit was outpoured, but extends over the whole of the "last days" as God views them.

Observation

In order to fully understand why Peter would quote an Old Testament reference which has partially come true and partially remained unfulfilled, we need to better understand how the New Testament handles the Old Testament.

¹³Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy

[Read Matthew 2:13-15]

Q: Whom does Matthew quote as having prophesied of this very thing to take place concerning the Messiah?

A: Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1.

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Him.”

¹⁴So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

¹⁶And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
¹⁹TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”

²⁰And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Q: But in the original context, to whom did Hosea’s words first and foremost apply?

A: They were originally given specific to the nation Israel.

Point: The Holy Spirit reveals through Matthew that God’s prophetic Word, which originally applied to literal Israel in its given historical context, **also** has an additional, future fulfillment to be applied to the Messiah as well.

Application: The New Testament specifically quotes what applies to an event fulfilled in the New Testament.

[Read Luke 4:16-21]

Q: Whom does Jesus quote as having prophesied of this very thing to take place by the Messiah?

A: Isaiah 61:1-2.

Q: What does He do which corroborates the way that Matthew used and quoted the Old Testament?

A: Jesus quotes from the Old Testament exactly what is being fulfilled here in the New Testament.

Q: But what might be different about Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah?

A: Although footnotes in most Bibles say He is quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, if we compare His quote with the original text in Isaiah, we find that Jesus did not quote all of Isaiah 61:2, but stopped in mid-sentence.

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
— Isaiah 61:1-2*

Q: Why did Jesus stop mid-sentence and not quote the rest of Isaiah 61:2?

A: Jesus only quoted what qualified by saying, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. (Lk. 4:21) This last part, “And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn” in Is. 61:2 was not, at that time, being fulfilled.

Point: That which Jesus quoted was fulfilled at His first coming; that which He stopped short of quoting was not to be fulfilled until His second coming.

Application: The New Testament quotes the Old Testament so far as what has been fulfilled at Christ’s first coming, anticipating that which remains as yet to be fulfilled at His second coming.

To Summarize

Q: How does the New Testament handle the Old Testament?

A: The New Testament quotes what has specifically been fulfilled in the course of Christ’s first coming, allowing for as yet unfulfilled Scripture to take place in the course of Christ’s second coming.

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Q: How would this then apply to Peter's quotation of Joel as to the meaning of what took place on the Day of Pentecost?

A: It means that Peter is quoting something that is being literally fulfilled *in its entirety*.

Q: But then how do we account for the fact that the first part of Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has already literally taken place, but the second part concerning the day of the Lord has not?

A: It ties into the fact that, as the writer of Hebrews informs us, we are already living "in these last days". (Heb. 3:2) We have to see this in the same way God views it, as a fulfillment of Scripture.

Application: Peter's answer provides not just an explanation of when the "Church Age" **begins**—with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but when it **ends** with the onset of the day of the Lord. We are not just in the Last Days in general, but specifically in that period which will end with the events directly associated with Christ's second coming.

⁹Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,
Cruel, with fury and burning anger,
To make the land a desolation;
And He will exterminate its sinners from
it.

¹⁰For the stars of heaven and their
constellations

Will not flash forth their light;
The sun will be dark when it rises
And the moon will not shed its light.

¹¹Thus I will punish the world for its evil
And the wicked for their iniquity;
I will also put an end to the arrogance of
the proud
And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

[Read Isaiah 13:9-11]

Q: How is this description of the day of the Lord similar to that given through Joel?

A: In the heavenly signs such as "the sun will be dark and the moon will not shed its light". (v.10)

Q: What is further explained here as to the purpose and character of the day of the Lord?

A: Its purpose is to "punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity". (v.17) This is further revealed in the list of those who will experience the consequences of this day:

1. "...He will exterminate its **sinners** from it." (v.9)
2. "...put an end to the arrogance of the **proud**..." (v.11)
3. "...abase the haughtiness of the **ruthless**." (v.11)

Application: The purpose of the day of the Lord is for the punishment of sin.

¹⁴Near is the great day of the LORD,
Near and coming very quickly;
Listen, the day of the LORD!
In it the warrior cries out bitterly.

¹⁵A day of wrath is that day,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of destruction and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,

[Read Zephaniah 1:14-15]

Q: How does this description of the day of the Lord affirm what we have learned from Joel and Isaiah?

A: It is not only "a day of darkness and gloom" (v.15) as portrayed in Joel, but specified as "a day of wrath is that day" (v.15) as provided in Isaiah.

Application: The day of the Lord is best understood as "a day of wrath".

Q: Why might this be particularly important where Believers in Christ are concerned?

A: Scripture repeatedly assures us that although everyone undergoes judgment, Believers never experience God's wrath. That is the greater doctrinal purpose of the Rapture of the Church, to ensure that the Body of Christ does not experience God's wrath.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

— Romans 5:9

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
— 1 Thessalonians 5:9

²⁹“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

¹²I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶and they said to

[Read Matthew 24:29-31]

Q: What event does Jesus Himself say will take place as a prelude to His second coming?

A: Jesus describes the day of the Lord and the main associated signs with it as provided in many other Scriptures.

Application: The day of the Lord is a prelude to Christ's second coming.

[Read 2 Peter 3:10-13]

Q: What additional characteristic about the day of the Lord is provided by Peter?

A: It “will come like a thief”. (v.10)

Q: Why might this sound familiar to us? What else is expressed as coming “like a thief”?

A: It is repeatedly used in association with the return of Christ. (Mt. 24:43-44; Lk. 12:39-40; Rev. 3:3; Rev. 16:15) It is also used by Paul to describe the arrival of the day of the Lord. (1 Th. 5:2-6)

Q: How does Peter turn what will be the worst event for the world into something positive for Believers?

A: Peter reminds us that we are not living in this world, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth”. (v.13) True followers of Christ live **IN** the world but not **OF** the world.

Application: The timing of the day of the Lord is expressed in the same manner as Christ's return.

[Read Revelation 6:12-17]

Q: What appears to be taking place with the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation?

A: The exact, same events Scripture elsewhere describe as belonging to the day of the Lord finally take place.

Point: What is probably a majority, mainstream teaching within the Church today is that the final seven year period most commonly called the “Tribulation” and “the day of the Lord” are the exact, same thing. Can you see from Scripture that they are not? What begins with God's judgments on everyone as a result of the seals escalates into the expression of God's wrath—“the day of the Lord”, which finally comes as a prelude to His divine wrath unleashed through the trumpets and bowls in Revelation.

the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

⁹After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; ¹⁰and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²saying,

“Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

¹³Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?”

¹⁴I said to him, “My lord, you know.”

And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Application: *The day of the Lord and the Tribulation are not the same thing; the day of the Lord finally comes in the course of the Tribulation.*

[Read Revelation 7:9-17]

Q: What is being described as taking place in the shadow of the initiation of the day of the Lord?

A: The Rapture of the Church.

Q: So what would the overall sequence of End Times events look like?

A: Everyone enters into the Tribulation and experiences the judgments which result from the opening of the seals. These judgments are the same kind of judgments God employed in the Old Testament using earthly things in a final attempt to warn people they need to return to Him. Then the day of the Lord is initiated in concert with the onset of the judgments of the trumpets and bowls which differ from the seals in that they come through divine agency, the expression not just of judgment, but God’s divine wrath of **final** judgment. Notice how God no longer uses earthly things but how they are invoked by angelic means on His behalf. Between the seals (judgment) and the onset of the trumpets and bowls (wrath), the “*great multitude*” is removed and therefore exempted from God’s wrath.

Q: Is there any other parallel scriptural example which may help confirm this interpretation?

A: Just as we have three sets of judgments in Revelation followed by final judgment, so in the course of freeing Israel from Egypt there were three sets of judgments followed by a kind of final judgment in the Passover. Everyone experienced the first set of judgments, but before the second set began, God exempted His people so that they alone did not experience what came afterward.

“For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians will be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they dwell. But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign will occur.”

— Exodus 8:21-23

Application: *The “Church Age” ends with “the day of the Lord”, which occurs with the advent of the sixth seal in the Tribulation.*

Overall Application

Because some incorrectly assume that the day of the Lord and the Tribulation are the same thing, but correctly know from Scripture that the Church will not experience God’s wrath so closely associated with the day of the Lord, they do not believe they will enter into the Tribulation nor experience any part of it. How should we actually prepare?