

Joel 2:28-32

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The LORD promises to pour out His Spirit on the inhabitants of Judah in the end times. All the Israelites in Jerusalem who invoke the name of the LORD with a heart full of faith will be delivered from His judgment.

Joel 2:28-32 forms a separate chapter in the Hebrew Bible. Joel begins another prediction of renewal, but this time it is of a spiritual renewal. He begins with this introduction, saying of the spiritual renewal that *It will come about after this* (v. 28). This phrase can also be translated “it shall come to pass afterward.” This raises the question “after what?” This section seems to infer that the spiritual renewal will follow the judgement and physical restoration.

Joel predicts a time when God will pour out His spirit on all flesh. And amazingly this is connected with this terrible judgement of Judah, executed by its invasion by a Gentile nation. However, this is God’s pattern. We can see this in Jeremiah 29:11, which is a companion passage to Joel. Jeremiah 29 predicts the coming Babylonian invasion, and in the midst of describing the horror that is about to engulf the land, God says:

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God states clearly that even though the coming invasion is terrible, it will lead to great things for Israel.

The Apostle Paul states this principle in his letter to the church at Rome, saying:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Our God is a God who turns all things into something of benefit for His people.

The LORD is the speaker in this passage. He began with the statement, *It will come about after this* to establish a connection and a sequence. The LORD states an intention, saying, *I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind*. This is astonishing, given that this statement is connected to God judging His people for disobedience, invading nations who ravage the land, and God’s ultimate judgement of those nations. In the midst of all this judgement upon the world, God states that He will *pour out His spirit*. But God will not *pour out His spirit* only upon His nation of Israel. He will *pour out His spirit* upon *all mankind*. That will even include the invading nations.

The verb *pour out* is often used in its literal sense of causing liquids such as water and blood to flow from a container into another vessel (Exodus 4:9; Genesis 9:6). For instance, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses told the people of Israel that when they slaughter animals to eat meat at home, they are to drain the blood from the meat and *pour it out* on the ground like water

(Deuteronomy 12:16). The LORD said He would *pour out His Spirit on all mankind* (literally, all flesh). God's power and vitality would be poured out upon *all mankind*.

The phrase *all mankind*, literally "all flesh," appears to refer to a universal outpouring of the divine spirit upon all of humanity.

In the Old Testament, God's Spirit would come upon selected individuals for a special purpose. For example, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him" (Judges 6:34). This was also true for King David: "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). But this prophesies that one day *all mankind* will have His *Spirit* poured out upon them.

In case there is a question whether people of every station are included, God adds that *Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days*. Male and female servants will have the same access to God's Spirit as their masters. This shows God is no respecter of persons. God values everyone and does not show partiality based on economic or social status (Deuteronomy 5:14; James 2:1-9; Romans 2:11).

The apostle Peter quoted verses 28-32 in his great sermon delivered on the first Pentecost following Christ's ascension. He began the quotation by stating: "this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." Peter quoted these verses in the sermon recorded in Acts 2 when he was explaining the phenomenon of the sound of rushing wind and people hearing their native tongue being spoken by foreigners (the disciples). Some accused the men of being drunk at nine o'clock in the morning. Peter told the gathered crowd of devout, biblically literate Jews that this was the Spirit of God, as predicted by Joel 2:28-32, which describes God pouring out His Spirit upon humanity (Acts 2:17-21). During the Pentecost event, the LORD began to fulfill this promise to pour out His *Spirit* on all mankind (Joel 2:28) giving the Spirit to the Jews gathered at the upper room. Later in Acts, the Holy Spirit was given to Jews who repented, and to Gentiles upon their initial belief (Acts 10).

Since Peter did not say the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled, but only that it was "spoken of" this likely means that Pentecost began the fulfillment, but there are still aspects of this prophecy remaining to be fulfilled in the end times. For one, new generations of humans are born, and then are born again and receive God's Spirit. It seems likely that in the last days there will be another special manifestation of the pouring out of God's spirit.

The pouring out of the divine Spirit will result in prophecy, dreams, and visions: *Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions*.

The term *dream* ["chalom," in Hebrew] refers to the visual and aural sensations that a person experiences while sleeping (Genesis 28:12; Job 33:15). The word *vision* ["chazon," in Hebrew] refers to visual representations, like a video or movie, given by God's directive, that may or may not require interpretation. It seems to occur while people are awake.

There were prophecies in the time of the early church, after the advent of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 19:6; 21:9). In Acts 9 and 10 both the Apostle Peter and the Roman Cornelius saw a vision that brought them together. In Acts 16:9, Paul saw a vision that rerouted his path from Asia to Macedonia. However it is likely that much of the fulfillment of these verses remains to take place in the end times. In the 21st century, there are many reports of visions of Jesus causing multitudes to believe in Him from around the world. This is likely a “birth pang” leading to the end of the age—meaning an increasingly intense cycle of fulfillments leading to a culmination (Romans 8:22).

Both *dreams* and *visions* were modes of transmitting prophecy in the ancient world. This passage indicates that this activity is expected to revive again in the end times. It appears that Acts 2 opened the last age of the current earth, and the events predicted in Revelation and Daniel will close this age, and pave the way for a new age in a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

The gift of the *Spirit* will be accompanied by powerful signs. God stated that He *will display wonders*. The term *wonder* refers to a special display of God’s power. In the book of Exodus, God used Moses and Aaron to perform many *wonders* before Pharaoh to demonstrate that He [God] alone is all-powerful (Exodus 11:9, 10). In our passage, God *will display wonders in the sky and on the earth* to announce His judgment. This prediction was fulfilled in part at the death of Jesus, when there were earthquakes and supernatural darkness (Matthew 27:45-54). Revelation records signs that exceed those shown to Pharaoh in Exodus; these signs will be displayed unto the entire earth.

In those days, there will be *blood, fire, and columns of smoke*. These terms are associated with horrors of war. Blood flows in the streets, houses burn, and the devastation results in columns of smoke rising from the city, viewable for miles. These *wonders* suggest a crisis on earth and precede God’s judgment on all disobedient people. Revelation describes this sort of devastation that will come upon the earth (Revelation 14:20; 18:18; 9:18). There have been many prior instances of this sort of activity, creating a pattern of “birth pangs” (Romans 8:22) leading toward a culmination of the age when the existing heavens and earth will be consumed in fire (2 Peter 3:12).

Additionally, there will be cosmic wonders: *the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood*. These could describe solar and lunar eclipses. But such events occur in predictable patterns, so it is more likely describing the effect of great disturbances, such as smoke and debris in the air from devastation upon the earth, causing the sun to darken and the moon to appear red.

These *wonders* will take place *before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*. The phrase *great and awesome day of the LORD* refers to the time when the LORD will reveal His supreme power and authority over human power and human existence. There have been many days of the Lord, including the day of the LORD when invaders overran Judah. The phrase *great and awesome day of the Lord* might point to the very last day of the Lord, which is described by Peter, in which the earth we know is destroyed:

“But 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. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking 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! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”
(2 Peter 3:10-14)

During that time, God will judge the wicked and deliver the righteous. *And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered.* This is in the context of the *great and awesome day of the LORD*. It is made clear even to the end of the age that the free grace of God is available to all who will receive:

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (Revelation 22:17)

The prophecy from Joel stating that *whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered* is likely a general principle. This principle has had numerous fulfillments, including a fulfillment as recorded in Acts. It will also have a fulfillment at the end of the age (Revelation 22:17). In the Acts 2 fulfillment it would refer to those Israelites in Jerusalem empowered by the Spirit of God (vv. 28-29). However, God made it clear that His grace also applied to all of humanity by pouring out His Spirit upon the Gentiles, even as He had poured His Spirit upon the Jews (Acts 15:8-9).

The Apostle Paul quotes Joel 2:32, to make the same emphasis that *whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered* for all people, stating that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” (Romans 10:12). Paul quoted Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13, where the verse is rendered “whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” This is appropriate since “saved” means “something is delivered from something.” So the translation as “saved” (as in Romans 10:13) or “delivered” (as in Joel 2:32) is synonymous. In Romans, Paul wants believers to be delivered from the adverse consequences of walking in sin, by walking in faith.

In Romans 10:13, Paul is speaking of believers being delivered/saved from the power of sin in their daily walk. Thus, Paul explains the theme of Romans, which is that “the righteous man shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17), emphasizing that the entire book is about daily decisions believers need to make in order to walk by faith. Paul connects Romans 10 with Deuteronomy 30, which also emphasizes making life-giving decisions based on faith.

In Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Moses set forth a decision Israel must make, whether to choose life or death as the consequence for their actions while living in the Promised Land. In the case of Romans 10:13, the context would apply to believers being delivered from the power of sin through walking by faith. Paul echoes the message from Deuteronomy 30:11-20, to believe what is true, then speak what is true. This, according to Romans 10, is what the “righteousness of faith” looks like, which is the true path to righteousness.

The way to choose life, according to the Deuteronomy 30:11-20 passage, is to believe what was true, speak it, then do it. Living this way did not earn Israel the right to be chosen by God—God chose them because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Paul used this verse to demonstrate that walking in God's ways, believing they are the best for us, saves us from the destructive ways of sin. The world makes sin to appear as life, when it is death.

So it is for the immediate application of this prophecy of Joel. Israel was and is God's people, which He took for His own possession. Their obedience was not necessary for them to be chosen of God – that is a matter of God's grace (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Rather, it was a matter of whether Israel would walk in God's ways and receive His blessings, or walk in the sinful and exploitative ways of the surrounding nations, with the attendant consequences of death.

“Sozo” is the Greek word translated “saved” in Romans 10:13, in which Paul quotes Joel 2:32. It is a word that requires context to determine what is being delivered from what. “Sozo” is sometimes translated as “healed” or “made whole” as in Matthew 9:21 when a woman was delivered from an illness. In the case of Deuteronomy 30 and Romans 10, the context focuses on choices that lead to life or death, righteousness or unrighteousness. To walk in obedience, believing God's ways are best, leads to life and peace, which is righteousness.

The LORD is a compassionate and gracious God. He gives grace to those who genuinely turn from their evil ways and return to Him. In the last stanza of Joel 2, Joel addresses a group that is *among the survivors*. This makes clear that in each of the invasions, by the four nations to come, there will be those among Israel who will survive. This will be in keeping with God's covenant to Abraham (Genesis 12 and 15). Among the *survivors* there will be those *whom the Lord calls*.

There will be a group who *will escape* from *among the survivors whom the Lord calls*. This is something that *the Lord has said*. This will occur in Israel, as evidenced by the phrase *For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem*. Since there is a group who will *escape* that is a subset of *the survivors*, the phrase *escape* would not refer to escaping from death, as that would apply to all *survivors*. *Those who escape* likely refers to Israelites who will *escape* from sin, and turn to God in repentance. God will maintain a remnant of those who are faithful.

This would apply to any who invoke *the name of the LORD* with a heart full of faith. There will be those *among the survivors* who call on the name of the Lord, and will be restored to fellowship in their walk with God.

This reflects a principle God conveyed to Israel from the beginning, that death is less to be feared than the adverse consequences of choosing to walk in sin. God made this clear on Mount Sinai, when He responded to the people asking God to speak through Moses, rather than directly to them, lest they die:

“Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.’”
(Exodus 20:20)

This statement by God is made to His covenant people whom He had chosen. But there is still a consequence for sin in this life, as well as a consequence in the presence of God in the next life. God makes it clear that His people should view the consequence of sin as substantially worse than the consequence of death. As Jesus says in Revelation:

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
(Revelation 2:10)

This principle could apply to any and all of the episodes of invasion and occupation. There will be four nations predicted by Joel who would invade and occupy/dominate Judah (Joel 1:1-4). God appears to predict here that He will prevent total destruction of the people, since there will be *survivors*. Then, among the *survivors* there will also be a faithful remnant; those who call on the Lord. In the looming Babylonian invasion, an example of those from among the survivors who called on the Lord would include the prophet Jeremiah, who remained in Judah, as well as some who were captured and exiled to Babylon, such as Daniel and Ezekiel.

The principle that those who call on the name of the Lord will be delivered from the adverse consequences of sin applies to New Testament believers as well. As Jesus stated in the Lord's Prayer, God will forgive those who forgive others (Matthew 6:14). And as John states in his epistle, God will forgive sins that believers confess and repent (1 John 1:9). In each case, this refers to believers being restored to fellowship with God.

Mount *Zion* is in the southeastern part of the city of *Jerusalem* where David built his citadel when he made Jerusalem the nation's capital. It symbolized the nation and people of God. Similarly, *Jerusalem* was the site of God's presence among His people, until His Spirit departed prior to the temple being destroyed by the Babylonians (Ezekiel 10:18-19). So this prediction would apply to all of Israel.

God said that there will be those on *Mount Zion* and *Jerusalem* who survived invasion. In the New Testament, many Jews who believed fled Jerusalem due to persecution and had their lives spared from the mass devastation that took place during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Romans were likely the fourth of the nations to invade and dominate Israel, as pictured by the four types of locusts Joel describes in Joel 1:4. In this case, these followers would have survived because they had called upon the name of the Lord.

In modern times, anyone can be delivered, or saved, from our separation from God by believing upon Jesus. Just as Israel in the wilderness was delivered from death from snake venom by having enough faith to look at a bronze snake Moses lifted up, anyone can receive deliverance from the venom of sin through having sufficient faith to look at Jesus lifted up on the cross, hoping to be healed (John 3:14-15). This is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). God calls those who come, and whoever calls on the Lord will be saved. Jesus says in the book of John, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44). He also says that anyone who “believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16b). Then those who are in Christ are fully accepted in His sight, just as Abraham was declared righteous through belief (Genesis 15:6).

Those who are fully accepted by grace through faith then have the power to walk in fellowship with God, in the works which He prepared for us, and receive great rewards (Ephesians 2:10). When we fail, we can call on the name of the Lord, and be restored to fellowship (1 John 1:9). This delivers us from the adverse consequences of sin, both in this life as well as when we stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ, to receive rewards for what we have done in this life, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Biblical Text

**“It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.
29 “Even on the male and female servants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
30 “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.
31 “The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood
Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.
32 “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Will be delivered;
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
There will be those who escape,
As the Lord has said,
Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.**