

Israel and the Outpouring of the Spirit

by Art Katz

The outpouring of the Spirit is a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, and it brings with it the sense of the future.

Scripture: Acts 2:17

Topics: "Israel's Role in God's Plan", "Outpouring of the Spirit"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the significance of the outpouring of the Spirit as prophesied by Joel, highlighting that it is a precursor to the ultimate fulfillment for Israel in the last days. He explains that while the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, it was merely a down-payment for a future, fuller outpouring upon all Jewish flesh. Katz warns against the arrogance of Gentile believers who misinterpret this prophecy as already fulfilled, urging humility and recognition of Israel's central role in God's redemptive plan. He stresses that the church must live with an awareness of its future and the coming of the King, as a church without a future becomes stagnant and loses its identity. Ultimately, Katz calls for a restoration of the understanding of the Spirit's gifts within the context of God's intentions for Israel and the church's role in that narrative.

Transcript

"And it shall be in the last days," God says, "that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind [alt. 'flesh']; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.

And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Acts 2:17-21) Peter is quoting from the prophet Joel, who spoke of an outpouring of the Spirit in the last days immediately prior to the day of the Lord--the coming of the Lord as Judge. Cataclysmic signs in the heavens were to mark this event. Biblically-minded Jews of that generation anticipated an apocalyptic conclusion to the age; that when they saw one of the signs of the Spirit being poured out on the Jewish believers present there that day, they assumed that the other signs would soon follow, and that indeed the apocalyptic end of the age was imminent.

Peter's message to his listeners was clear: If they wanted to be saved from the judgments coming upon the world, then they needed to be "saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40b) The context of Joel's prophecy suggests that the "all flesh" spoken of is "all Jewish flesh." On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on some Jewish flesh, but it was only a down-payment of something that was reserved in full for the empowering of a restored Israel in the last days!

History has shown that the prophecy alluded to in Joel was not completely fulfilled on the day of Pentecost because the other signs did not take place. In other words, we have not yet seen the outpouring of the Spirit on all Jewish flesh. Gentile believers have been guilty of interpreting Joel's prophecies as being fulfilled in themselves rather than upon all Jewish flesh in the last days. This is just not compatible with the scriptural facts. Gentile believers need to know that the Spirit was given them as a down-payment and a foretaste of the fulfillment that would come in the last days upon Jewish flesh.

I sympathize with untold numbers of evangelicals worldwide, who have been turned off by the self-important mentality and spirit that has been expressed by the Charismatic movement. Instead of the appropriate humility of a people who have been privileged to receive a down-payment, charismatics have tended to look down upon those who do not have what they consider to be the evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit. They have not recognized the context for the gifts of the Spirit in the future destiny of Israel as a nation in the purposes of God.

The Spirit as a Pledge To the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:12-14) It is quite clear that Paul understands the outpouring of the Spirit, not as a thing in itself, but as a pledge of a fullness that would come later as an inheritance in the redemptive and final workings of God for Israel.

Nevertheless, the pledge we have received is significant, for the Spirit is very God Himself, but the full outpouring has its final and ultimate fulfillment with the nation Israel. Gentile believers presently have a foretaste of what is yet to come with the coming of the King and the establishment of His kingdom. The Lord is not coming to provide escape for the church through a convenient rapture before His judgments fall. Those who remain at His coming will meet him in the air, but the Greek word *parousia* used here is best understood as a rising to meet and accompany a dignitary as he comes to his place of honor, and there to rule and reign with him.

If Jerusalem is going to have the honor of being the location of the seat of divine rule, and Israel participating with Him in extending that rule to the nations, they will need the outpouring of Spirit in full measure. Though Gentiles have received the Spirit in part, it is a most precious part, and not to be denigrated or ignored. The gift of the Spirit is the fulfillment of Israel's covenant promise. A true understanding of that ought to humble us. The outpouring of the Spirit brings with it the sense of the future, and a church without a future is a depleted entity.

A church that does not anticipate the consummation of the age has lost its identity as the church. Therefore, when we do not have that future because we do not have the Spirit, we stagnate at the level of conventional and predictable church life, nothing more than a succession of Sunday services. The evidence of that can be most pointedly seen in our children who are bored with church life, and we often

have to drag them by the scruff of the neck to our functions. They would not be sitting in our congregations waiting for the thing to end, nor would they be drawn off and attracted to other questionable amusements, if we were living in the context of an end.

The general character of our meetings is a terrible indictment against us because we have not raised up for our own children a standard and quality of life that compels their attention and their participation. We have not persuaded our children that what we are about is earnest and authentic. Though they may not articulate it, we are to them no more than some kind of adult Sunday culture. Like Paul, our gospel needs to be one that is according to the revelation of the mystery that was hidden in other ages; that had an apocalyptic framework of understanding.

The context was of an Israel that would stumble, of a Son of Man who would be rejected and crucified by His own nation, and then a calling out of a Gentile people, a "foolish" nation, to move Israel to jealousy. Paul preached his gospel in that context, and it is a context that should compel and direct our attention to the issue of death and resurrection, which then restores the gospel as "Christ-centered." It restores Jesus to the true center as King, because it recaptures the theocratic context, and this is what is implied in the "gospel of the kingdom."

Unless the Spirit of God and the gifts of God are understood and seen in the context of the apostolic framework of God's intention as a besieged community in the midst of a sea of hostility and worldly hatred, then we make the Spirit of God and His gifts serve a lesser purpose. They accommodate us rather than God, and one wonders if God is in that business, providing that accommodation. How often have we let a dubious power come in its place without the discernment to distinguish the difference?

A measure of excitement, enjoyment, and healing can all be provided by the powers of this world to bring us into deeper and deeper deception. The outpouring of the Spirit needs to be restored to the context of God's intention, centering in the restoration of a people who have not even the faintest notion of their eternal destiny, or a desire for it, and want only to be as other nations. Nevertheless, God's word toward them will be fulfilled; His gifts and callings are irrevocable, or God voids Himself as God.

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