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# Middle Horizon

## – The Beginning of the Kingdom

### Joel 2:15-32

**Introduction** One of the lasting memories I have of Africa was the annual baptism service...  
Three horizons...



**Near Future  
to the Prophet**  
Foreshadowing

**Coming of Christ  
Birth to Ascension**  
Birth and Cross

**Second Coming  
Kingdom**  
Resurrection  
to the Crowning

Conclusion of the Day of the Lord:

<sup>12</sup> "Yet even now," declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

<sup>14</sup> Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Return and repent

*Public call*

*Personal response*

Turn and relent

*Possibility*

Leave a blessing

*Grain and drink offering*

*Points to the bread and wine*

We begin sense, way off beyond the darkness that daylight is near. The doom shrouded mountain of condemnation begins to lighten in the dawn of God's mercies and blessings.

**Calling an Assembly****(v.15-17)**

In view of the invitation to repent and return, the prophet calls for an assembly.

<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
<sup>16</sup> gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
assemble the elders;  
gather the children, even nursing infants.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

<sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests,  
the ministers of the LORD, weep and say,  
"Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach,  
a byword among the nations.  
Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' "

**Gathering the People**

There is nothing more important than the assembling, gathering of God's people to explain and experience God among them. There is a great tone of urgency. The Day of the Lord is near and now is the time to gather. Let no one stay away. Let nothing intervene. Suspend even a wedding. Nothing is more important than gathering for corporate repentance.

**Going to the Lord**

So the priests and servants of the Lord go to the Lord and cry to Him. In passionate prayer they plea and plead for God to spare His people. They invoke the covenant. They invoke God's reputation among the nations. In view of the possibility that God will relent of the disasters predicted, they are told to petition the Lord for His mercies.

Don't miss a key question: "Where is their God?" Can the nations rightly say, "Where is the God of Israel?" when the God of Israel is bringing judgment? Do the nations have a framework to evaluate and understand how God deals with His people? Isn't this just the sort of question that gets asked? "Where is God when all these terrible disasters happen? How could God allow them? Is He just absent?"

**Visiting the Land****(v.18-27)**

The answer comes in a most surprising way. God will come and visit the land and bring the blessings He intends. Now this section doesn't lend itself to a straightforward western outline. But the visitation of God brings His sure and certain mercies and most unexpected bounties.

**In the Provision by God****(v.18-20)**

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.  
<sup>19</sup> The LORD answered and said to his people,  
"Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied;  
and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.  
<sup>20</sup> "I will remove the northerner far from you,  
and drive him into a parched and desolate land,

his vanguard into the eastern sea,  
and his rear guard into the western sea;  
the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.

There seems to be a “then” when God moves to answer His people. He is jealous for His land, His inheritance or possession. He has pity on His people. So God moves to provide for them. He sends His blessings to satisfy them.

The means of His judgment he will withdraw. The locusts, northerner, the nation that brought the pestilence and was the severe hand of God will be taken away. He will not only just be removed, but he will be destroyed. So while God makes use of the wickedness of the nations and bends it for His own purposes, he still holds them accountable for the wickedness they commit. There is no excuse for evil, even when God has used your evil for His purposes.

So, even when the predetermined purpose of God delivers up someone to death, those who wickedly carry out the sentence still do so with wicked hands and will suffer the wrath of God. The judgment by God of the wickedness of the nations is one of the great things God has done.

### **In the Fullness from God**

**(v.21-25)**

God visits His people in the fullness He gives.

<sup>21</sup> Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice,  
for the LORD has done great things!

<sup>22</sup> Fear not, you beasts of the field,  
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;  
the tree bears its fruit;  
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

<sup>23</sup> “Be glad, O children of Zion,  
and rejoice in the LORD your God,  
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;  
he has poured down for you abundant rain,  
the early and the latter rain, as before.

<sup>24</sup> The threshing floors shall be full of grain;  
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

<sup>25</sup> I will restore to you the years  
that the swarming locust has eaten,  
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,  
my great army, which I sent among you.

Two great responses are called for. But they are not distinct and different. They are deeply connected in the soul. They were not to fear but were to be glad and rejoice. From fear of the God who judges to joy in the God who blesses. They are commanded both: they must not fear and they must rejoice.

They are to rejoice in the Lord their God for what He has done. They are not rejoicing in God in order that God will respond and bless them. Their joy in God is not designed to manipulate God. Their rejoicing in God is because they have traced from the gifts to the giver. But make no mistake. They are rejoicing. They are to be happy.

Now this is an enormous turn around from the first portion of Joel's prophecy. The dire, dark and dreadful judgments flowing from the holy and righteous wrath of God have now been turned to blessing, bounty and gladness. All the terrible judgments they were subject to will be reversed. God's presence will not only bring blessing, but a massive restoration of all that was lost.

### **In the Presence of God**

**(v.26-27)**

God will visit the land finally with His very own presence.

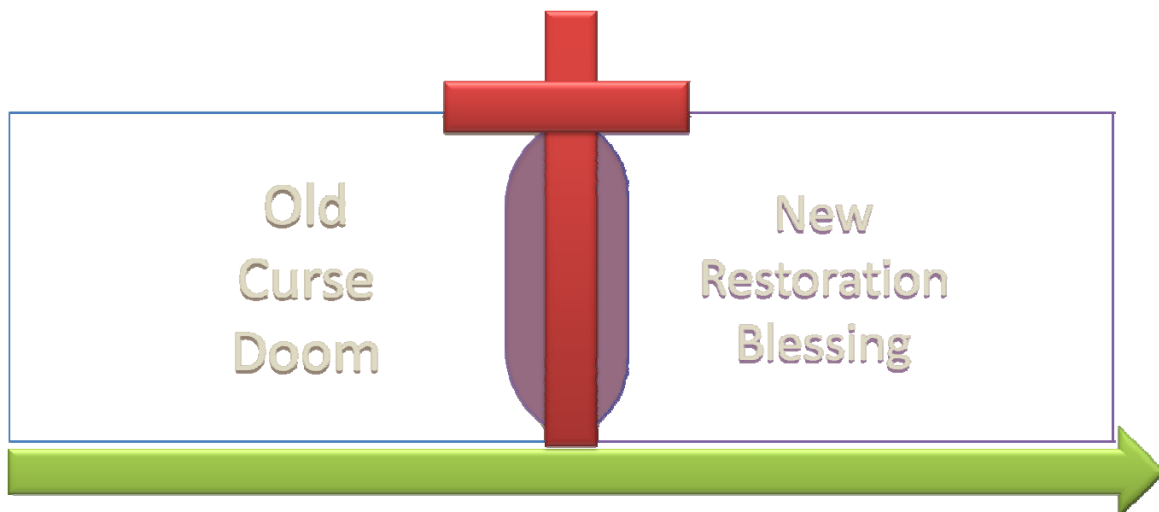
<sup>26</sup> "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,  
and praise the name of the LORD your God,  
who has dealt wondrously with you.  
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

<sup>27</sup> You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,  
and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.  
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

What a wonderful two stanzas. Eat, plenty, satisfied, praise and no longer shamed. What God will do will satisfy His people and will evoke praise of His name and admiration of His work. From the shadow lands of grain and food and happy beasts to the unimaginable wonders of what this text only dimly points to.

But the effect is unmistakable: when God actually fulfills what He is promising here, then they will know for certain that God Himself is in their midst. They will have an unimpeachable witness to the fact that God is God alone and there is no other god.

So what is this pointing to? Do you, through a New Testament lens, see the substance in the words and wonders of the shadows? The old and the new, God's provision at the cross begins the reversal of the curse. From bane to blessing, the crushing of the old creation makes way for the delights, joys and gladness of the new creation.



## Pouring out His Spirit

(v.28-29)

How do I know that what is going on here speaks to more than just going home from Babylon or seeing the land flourish under cultivation?

<sup>28</sup> "And it shall come to pass afterward,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
and your young men shall see visions.  
<sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

### The Time of Fulfillment

The time of the fulfillment of this is indicated by the word, "Afterward". So this is some time after God restores Israel to the land and removes the enemy, whether locust or nation. This is a distinctive time marker. The fulfillment will come in some sense as an *after* what is prophesied up till verse 27.

### The Context of Fulfillment

The New Covenant language marks out the context of fulfillment. Two of the marks of the New Covenant are given here: the outpouring of the Spirit upon all and the ministry to God by all. So we know that the fullness that God will bring will begin to reach its consummation through the coming and indwelling of the Spirit of God.

### The Consequence of Fulfillment

Spirit enabled ministry by all is the consequence of the fulfillment. The giving of the Spirit is going to cause ministry by all by the empowering of all. In the New Covenant, God will not just give ministry to priests nor His Spirit upon a few, here and there and far apart. All in the covenant, all in the kingdom of that day, all flesh, Jew and Gentile, will receive the giving of the Spirit. The central focus of the Spirit-enabled ministry will not be in the offering of sacrifices but rather in the prophesying or preaching of God's Word.

The presence and power of the Spirit enables the preaching of the Word

**Saving His People****(v.30-32)**

The restoration in blessing during Joel's day is a shadow, a prefiguring of the salvation God will grant through faith.

<sup>30</sup> "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. <sup>32</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**The Signs of His Salvation****(v.30-31)**

From Joel's perspective, this is prophecy. He is telling what will happen in the period of time before the Day of the Lord.

From our perspective, this is history. Most of this has already happened. We are now living in the last days between the cross, the giving of the Spirit, the inauguration of the Kingdom and its consummation when Jesus comes, having saved all His people. At that time, the Day of the Lord will come and wrath of God will fall. But just as the middle horizon of the cross is followed by a period of mercy so the future Day of the Lord will be followed by an eternity of blessing.

So, the day of the Lord is preceded by a time of God's mercy. The wrath of God will fall. But in apocalyptic language, Joel points to a day that the New Testament writers pick up as both the time in which we live and a time that is yet to come.

**The Significance of His Salvation****(v.32)**

So the day of the Lord is preceded by the last days in which anyone may believe in the Lord and be saved.

How are we to understand this text? Is this merely referring to some future time when the nation of Israel will be saved? What does all this language of restoration and refreshing mean? We know on the face of it how it would have been heard and understood by a Jew living during and immediately after Joel's day. Does the New Testament endorse the bare surface of this text? Does anyone in the New Testament exposit this text for us?

**Reflect and Respond**

This is That (Acts 2:14-41)

Yes, Luke records for us Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost which is an explanation of the outpouring of the Spirit and the powerful and public demonstrations of multi-lingual preaching of the gospel which continued the inauguration of the Kingdom of God under the New Covenant.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

<sup>15</sup> For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

He then quotes Joel 2:28-32. After which he goes on to say:

<sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

We need to settle an important question: Is Peter merely using the text as a pretext for calling on people to believe? Or, is he rightly dividing, understanding and explaining the text with a text based call?

***Afterward:***

- Pentecost is what Joel prophesied; *this is that*.
- The "Last Days" began at the resurrection.
- The Last Days continue until the final Day of the Lord.
- The death and resurrection of Christ is the central feature of the kingdom.
- During this period, God's people are those who believe.
- During this period, God's people are marked by baptism.

So when God, in the last days, inaugurates His kingdom through the death and resurrection of His Son:

- Gathers His people calling them to repent;
- Visits His people in the person of His Son;
- Pours out His Spirit to indwell them as the continued manifestation of His Presence;
- And saves His people through faith.

But notice what Peter believes is central to what has happening in that day. His focus is not on the coming of the Spirit but rather the story of the gospel. With the very outpouring of the Spirit happening before His very eyes, he surveys his Bible and uses this event and the Word of God to spotlight the main thing. The central feature of redemptive history is the redemptive work of the cross.

The gospel's story...

Jesus is the one who fulfilled the signs and wonders in His miracles. He was then certified as the Messiah, the promised One of the Old Testament and anointed One by God.

Jesus was nailed on a Roman cross and died a criminal's death, not because of anything He had done for He was sinless. His death was on behalf of sinners. He was taking on Himself the wrath of God due to sinners

Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. For forty days, he walked among, was seen and touched by His followers. He taught them how His life, death and resurrection fulfilled what the Old Testament predicted. At the end of the forty days, He ascended bodily into heaven in full view of His followers.

He is now seated on the throne of God, the throne of David in heaven, exalted there by God as Priest and King. He has sent His Holy Spirit to bring His people spiritual life, to seal, enable, sustain and gather them until Jesus returns.

The gospel's call...

So, know then for certain that this person, Jesus, who lived over 2,000 years ago is God, the Son and has been appointed by God, the Father as Lord over all the universe. It is through Him alone that God will save people from His sure and certain wrath over their sins. There is no other way to be saved from God's condemnation and eternal punishment,

Since this is so, then God calls you to believe these facts known as the gospel and to bow to Jesus as your Lord. If, in believing and bowing, you call on God to save you through Christ alone, then He will.

The gospel's comforts...

What does God promise to those who believe in Him?

- Deliverance from guilt over sin and His wrath due to you
- Union with His people both spiritually and corporately
- Struggle, trial, hardships as He transforms you from the old person you were to the new person you are becoming
- Persecution from friends, family and maybe even society as you live under the rule of God in this world
- Joy and gladness as Christ increasingly becomes your main desire and greatest delight
- Eternal joy and bliss in living with Him in a glorified sinless body in the new heavens and new earth.

So, repent and believe. Escape from this sinful generation and the coming wrath of God. Believe in Christ. Bow to Him. Do so today for today is the day of salvation.