

The promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2

A reply

Don Harrison

I WOULD LIKE to offer the following comments in defence of my letter published under the heading, "[Opposing erroneous teaching about the work of the Spirit today](#)" (Aug. 2006, p. 291), and in reply to Brother Aleck Crawford's article of the above title ([Nov. 2006, p. 412](#)).

A new outpouring of the Spirit

The Old Testament Scriptures were written when "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (2 Pet. 1:21), but for nearly 400 years there was silence: "the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them" (Mic. 3:6). Then we turn to Luke 1:13-17 and read of John the Baptist, who was to be "filled with the Holy [Spirit]" from birth, and who was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". He was to be a prophet. Next we read of Mary, and of how the Holy Spirit was to come upon her, "the handmaid of the Lord" (vv. 35,38). Mary then visited her cousin Elisabeth, who became filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (vv. 41-45). It was obviously by the Holy Spirit that came upon her that Mary broke forth into those wonderful words known as 'the Magnificat' (vv. 46-55).

Then, in verse 67, we are told that John's father Zacharias also became filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath *visited* and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an *horn of salvation* for us in the house of His servant David" (vv. 68,69). Zacharias says of his son John: "thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest . . . to *give knowledge of salvation* unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the *tender mercy* of our God; whereby the dayspring [sunrising] from on high hath *visited* us" (vv. 76-79).

Thus we are certainly presented with an outpouring of the Spirit in Luke 1. The visitation spoken of by Zacharias came about "through the tender mercy of . . . God", and its keynote is "salvation". The message was to be, "God so *loved* the world" (Jno. 3:16), a theme not prominent in the Pharisaic administration of the law of works. A new prophetic day had begun with this visitation of the Holy Spirit. Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to mention this visitation, and

he mentions it again in reporting some words of Jesus spoken right at the end of his ministry when he wept over Jerusalem and foretold its desolation: "because thou knewest not the time of thy *visitation*" (19:44).

All flesh

According to Joel the Holy Spirit was to be poured out "upon all flesh" (2:28). The term "all flesh", or similar terms, usually means 'everybody' (Gen. 6:12; Lev. 17:14; Jer. 45:5, etc.). God says in Proverbs 1:23, "I will pour out My spirit unto you", by which He means, "I will make known My words unto you". But the people did not listen. Elsewhere, as in Ezekiel 7:8 and 20:8,13, the Almighty speaks of pouring out His fury and His anger. These references may help us to get the sense of Joel 2.

The birth of John Baptist relates to Isaiah 40, where he is "The voice . . . that crieth in the wilderness" (v. 3). In verse 5 we read: "and the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and *all flesh* shall see it together". Exodus 33:18,19 and 34:5-7 clearly inform us that the glory of the Lord is to be found in the meaning of His Name; He is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin". His glory spells *salvation*, and when Isaiah 40:5 is quoted in Luke 3:6 it reads, "all flesh shall see the *salvation* of God".

This reminds us of the elderly Simeon, upon whom was the Holy Spirit, which revealed unto him that he should not die until he had "seen the Lord's Christ" (2:26). Simeon saw him in that baby Jesus, and said, "mine eyes have seen Thy *salvation*, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people" (vv. 30,31). The whole nation was to see God's salvation in the person of Jesus Christ.

The various classes mentioned in Joel 2:28,29, "sons . . . daughters . . . old men . . . young men . . . servants . . . handmaids", would seem to be well represented in the individuals named in those early chapters of Luke, and we must not forget Joseph, who dreamed a dream that the child who was to be born to his wife Mary "shall *save* his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). Again *salvation* is the theme. I feel there is every reason

to see in those several references to the Holy Spirit in Luke's record a decided fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, which could quite correctly be described as an outpouring of the Spirit, and was clearly the foundation of the work of salvation to be wrought in Christ.

Upon Jesus

A further outpouring of the Spirit is to be seen in God's bestowal of the Spirit without measure on His Son (Jno. 3:34). We cannot exclude Jesus from the prophecy of Joel. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, a symbol of peace (Lk. 3:22). He was anointed to preach the gospel of peace. Soon afterwards he was in the synagogue at Nazareth, where he read from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord". He broke off at this point and said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:18-21).

He later completed that quotation from Isaiah when he said, "these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (21:22). He was referring to the coming of A.D. 70. So, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles, it came as "cloven tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3), and their message was to be, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (v. 40). That is what John Baptist prophesied about, as recorded in Luke 3:16,17. Nobody has suggested that he poured out any Spirit.

It is true that on the Day of Pentecost Peter said that the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles was a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, but remember that it had been previously prepared by the Lord Jesus Christ, he who had himself been invested with the Spirit without measure. It was all part of that visitation spoken of by Zacharias, it was all part of the work of salvation in Christ, it was a necessary outpouring to accommodate the later New Testament stages of that work.

May I suggest that Joel 2:28-32 is a compressed history of the visitation, which ended in the blood and fire, vapour and smoke of A.D. 70, and that it includes the ministry of Jesus? It makes reference to "wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath" (Acts 2:19), and Peter goes on to say, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know . . ." (v. 22). How did God do these things by Jesus? He did them by the Holy Spirit invested in His Son.

The gift of the Holy Spirit

I still hold to what I wrote in my letter about Peter's words in Acts 2:38, "ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]". I had Simon the sorcerer in mind when I visualised the number of fake repentants there would have been if the Spirit gifts had been bestowed as a result of baptism. His kind would have multiplied considerably in those circumstances. There is no evidence that the 3,000 who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost did in fact receive Spirit gifts of any kind. The last few verses of Acts 2 seem to cover a period of time, but there is no evidence whatever of Spirit gifts in the hands of those new converts; we read only that "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (v. 43).

I feel quite strongly that when Peter said, "ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]", he had in mind the words of Zacharias, by which we understand that the Holy Spirit through John Baptist would give knowledge of salvation in Christ. The baptism of those converts on the day of Pentecost was the very first occasion for anyone to be baptized into Christ. They had previously known only the Law, which could not take away sin; but now, through the love and mercy of God, they could rest assured in the knowledge of the grace of God and the gift by grace. The word *dōrea*, translated "gift" in Acts 2:38, is said by *Young's Concordance* to mean 'a free gift' or 'present', and it is used in Romans 5:15,17, where it has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.

The repentance of those 3,000 at Pentecost was indeed a day to be remembered, and we can see in it the bearing of fruit from the visitation of the Spirit in the time of Zacharias. They had crucified and slain the Son of God, and yet in their repentance they had been invited to "call on the name of the Lord [and] be saved" (Acts 2:21). How fitting that Peter should tell those first converts that they were to receive, not 'a gift of the Spirit' but "*the gift of the Holy [Spirit]*", which was the knowledge of the salvation possible through Christ! And that is surely the knowledge that we should all treasure. It is "the gift by grace" (Rom. 5:15) for which we can all be thankful.

It is perhaps possible to read Acts 10:45 in a similar way. It is true that the Gentiles who had become believers had been given the gift of tongues—an indication that they were now to be accepted in Christ—but they received the knowledge of salvation in the process.

Another outpouring of the Spirit is recorded in Acts 4:31-33 when a company of believers prayed

that they might engage in the work which Jesus had commanded his apostles to do. The apostles had been told to preach and baptize with the authority of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19), the part of the Holy Spirit being to "[confirm] the word with signs following" (Mk. 16:20). This is what those believers in Acts 4 sought to do, and their prayer was answered.

The Spirit gifts

The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gifts, such as we read of in 1 Corinthians 12, was a later development, the Holy Spirit being imparted by the laying on of the hands of the apostles. The object to be served was the bringing together of the various parts of the body of Christ. By this means, together with the writing of the books of the New Testament, the body of Christ was brought to maturity, and with the falling asleep of the apostles the Holy Spirit was no longer available or necessary (1 Cor. 13:8).

The prophetic day which began with the visitation of the Spirit as noted by Zacharias eventually came to an end. If that day began with the birth of John Baptist and ended about A.D. 70, Jesus, at thirty years of age, would have been the bright midday sun. He said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jno. 9:5), and, "I must work the works of Him That sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (v. 4).

Jesus knew that day would come to an end, and the Apostle Peter wrote in about A.D. 63: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19).

These are my views and the scriptures on which they are based. I must leave it to readers to decide if they are reasonable.

New series

The Lord's Prayer: an introduction

Greg Palmer

This article provides an introduction to the prayer given by Jesus to his disciples and consequently known as the Lord's Prayer. God willing, it will be followed by a series of one-page articles on the individual parts of the prayer, to be published in the ten standard issues of the Testimony during 2007.

THE LORD'S PRAYER is arguably the most well-known passage of Scripture, but sadly it is often the least understood and the most liable to be spoken without reverence or any godly thought. Parliament in Australia commences with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer, followed hotly by lies, deceit, graft and corruption. For many the Lord's Prayer has been reduced to an incantation, perhaps as part of a rosary prayer.

It is tragic that the model prayer of the best pray-er has been misused in a way that the one who gave us it would never have intended. In Matthew's record Jesus warns, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do:

for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (6:7), yet we see the prayer that follows this warning used as a vain repetition. Surely, as Jesus warned, the prayer of such is not heard. Jesus rather instructs us, "Be not ye therefore like unto them" (v. 8).

Why the prayer was given

Why did Jesus give the prayer? The record in Matthew gives the prayer as part of the Sermon on the Mount. The record in Luke 11:1-4 (which is a somewhat abbreviated version) has Jesus responding to a question of the disciples, and is given some time after the Sermon on the Mount. Which is correct? They both are. It was evidently given twice, once to the multitude, and again later to the small group of disciples.

There were two sorts of prayer common in Jewish times: 'free prayer', in which the words were selected by the person praying; and 'prescribed' or 'liturgical prayer', in which the words were already selected by a teacher and repeated. Summaries were made of liturgical prayers, and on occasion these were said to be sufficient. Rabbis