

-19-

Comparison with Peter's Pentecost Sermon

It has been noted by some commentators that the “application” sections of Peter’s Pentecost sermon and the present sermon here in Acts Ch. 3 have a number of features in common. The table below lists some of these connections (taken from www.jasonsibleblog.com), and I have added one additional item at the bottom of the list.

Acts 2	Acts 3
Delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...ye have crucified	killed the Prince of life...God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses
This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses	whereof we are witnesses
Repent	Repent
and be baptized	and be converted
every one of you	Turning every one of you away from his iniquities
in the name of Jesus Christ	through faith in his name
for the remission of sins	that your sins may be blotted out
and ye shall receive the gift	so that times of refreshing may come
of the Holy Ghost (sent by God, Jn. 14:26; 15:26)	from the presence of the Lord (God)
for the promise is unto you... and to all that are afar off	all kindreds of the earth [shall] be blessed
be saved from this perverse generation	every soul that will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly cut off from the people

e note that the “times of refreshing” in Acts 3 correspond to the gift of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2 (rather than referring exclusively to some event in the distant future) and also that there is a warning in both sermons. The warning in Acts 2 relates to the present generation of Peter’s hearers, which perhaps suggests that the warning of being “cut off from the people” in Acts 3 has a similar “this generation” focus—rather than referring exclusively, or even at all, to the final judgement. Repentance and belief in Jesus are now, according to Peter, the condition for being part of “the people” - as was made manifestly evident in the judgement of AD 70.

The “warning” and judgement aspects of Peter’s Pentecost sermon are more extensive than in Acts Ch. 3 since Peter quotes extensively from Joel and, in a little chiastic structure in Acts 2:19-20, in particular refers to “apocalyptic” signs and wonders in heaven (references to sun and moon) and on earth (blood, fire and vapour of smoke) before the Day of the Lord. Most commentators see this as a reference to the end of the world (e.g. I. H. Marshall, 1980) even though Jesus speaks (Luke 21:25-28) in very similar apocalyptic, heaven and earth, terms in His prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70):

v. 25: And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,

v.26: people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world [Gk. “oikoumene”]. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

v.27: And then they will see the Son of Man coming with power and great glory.

v. 28: Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The heavenly signs in Peter’s Pentecost sermon and in the Joel prophecy are similar to those given by Jesus in Luke in that both involve the sun and the moon, whereas in the former, the signs on the earth/the land involve blood, fire and vapour of smoke, but in the latter, these portents are presented in much more specific and concrete terms—armies surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20), days of vengeance (v. 22), the sword (v. 22) etc.

Thus, it seems to me that the Day of the Lord in Joel and in Peter’s sermon must, at the very least include the AD 70 judgement on Jerusalem, even if it also looks forward to the more distant “time horizon” of the (?analogous) final judgement. Peter also quotes Joel 3:32 in his Pentecost sermon, “*And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Acts 2:21).

Now, in the original context, the “saving” in Joel was, at least partly, a saving from the judgement on Jerusalem. Indeed, if we continue on in Joel 3:32, we read,

“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”.

Now, if we accept that Peter's Pentecost sermon has a definite "this generation" time-frame (not withstanding the possibility of a more distant time horizon), then, even though this important reality is ignored by the commentators, we can with some justification infer that the sermon in Acts Ch. 3, which also speaks of a division amongst the people ("*every soul that will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly cut off from the people*") may also likewise refer, *inter alia*, to that imminent judgement.

Now, I realise that many Christians may feel uncomfortable with associating the use of such cosmic language with important events here on earth such as the fall of cities and of kingdoms—especially as for example, the moon has not been literally turned to blood, and the sun continues to shine etc. However, the cosmic imagery tells us that things that happen on earth are not "just events on earth" but are fore-ordained by, and under the control of, heavenly forces, and indeed one could say, that the reality of God's control of human history and human destinies is what is pointed to by the prophets in their use of this cosmic "apocalyptic language".

Thus, in Isaiah Ch. 13, regarding the fall of Babylon, we read,

v. 9: "Behold the Day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

v. 10: For the stars of the heavens will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

v. 11: I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity . . .

.....

v. 13: Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger."

Now if that consummate prophetic literary artist Isaiah can use this sort of language for the fall of Babylon, who are we to deny that it can refer to the (even more cosmically significant!) fall of Jerusalem (of which the fall of Babylon is a "type")? Indeed, the New Covenant is a new creation ("If anyone is in Christ, a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17 TR) As Jesus said, Matt. 5:17: "*For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished*". Well, Christians in the

New Covenant are not under the Law of Moses (Rom. 6:14) rather we are “in the law [Gk; *ennomos*] of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21), so by this reasoning, the “Heaven and Earth” of the Old Covenant have indeed passed away, and the cosmic language of OT prophecy reflects this, and we are now part of a new creation in Christ, (a new creation of which the old creation is a “type”).

So, under the Old Covenant, the earthly sun shone on the earthly people of Israel, but now, the Sun of Righteousness shines upon the Church. This is the True Light—as Christ Himself said. There is much, much more to be said about this “spiritual” interpretation of Scripture, but I hope this has at least pointed to the way the New Testament writers spiritually interpret the OT prophecies as fulfilled in Christ and the Church. For further reading on this I highly recommend both Charles Alexander's writings (www.allbygrace.com) and James Jordan's excellent book “Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World”.

Finally, in this chapter would like at this point to suggest a difference between Peter's Pentecost sermon and his sermon in Acts Ch. 3. Both sermons arose from dramatic events, and the contents of the sermons clearly relate very directly to those events. However, in the Pentecost sermon, the falling of the Holy Spirit and the gift of languages points to something new in the history of redemption (but which was nevertheless prophesied (i.e. “All flesh . . .” and the future inclusion of the Gentiles) in the Old Testament.) By contrast, in the Acts Ch. 3 sermon, the healing is used by Peter to point to a restoration (of spiritual health) for Israel. In particular Peter uses the word *apokatastasis* (restoration) to speak of the blessings of an earlier time which are now, as prophesied once again being restored—the restoration occurring through moral and spiritual regeneration in Christ.

Old Testament prophecy thus points both to the restoration of old things and the in-breaking of new things through Christ. Indeed, much of the language of Old Testament prophecy expresses New Covenant spiritual truths in terms of Old Covenant, earthly, “word pictures” or types, (so “old” and “new” can sometimes be hard to distinguish). A famous example of “something new expressed in terms of something old” is where Zechariah speaks of a time when “Holiness to the Lord” will be written on the bells of the horses (which are unclean animals in the Law). Thus, in the New Covenant the very same Holiness written on the High Priest's headband is now extended to even formerly unclean animals! What a wonderful *picture* of the complete holiness wrought by Christ!



