**Disciples Who Passed the Sobriety Test**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One night a drunk walked up to a woman in a bar and gave her a big ol’ kiss right on the lips. She responded by slapping him so hard that he fell to the floor. After he got up, he looked at her closely and exclaimed, “Oh, I’m sorry, I thought you were my wife. You’re a dead ringer for her!” She answered, “Get away from me, you worthless drunk.” He replied, “Wow, you even *sound* like my wife!”

Well, as we return to our study of Acts 2, you’ll recall that the Lord’s disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost and given the ability to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4). As we resume our study we see that when that happened, some of the people who *heard* them speak in tongues thought *the disciples* were drunk! They dismissed what was going on by saying, “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13).

Now while the apostles were speaking in known, identifiable languages (Acts 2:9-11), if you came upon a bunch of men speaking different languages all at the same time, sounding like the aftermath of the Tower of Babel, you might attribute their behavior to drunkenness as well. But Peter wasted no time in responding to their faulty assessment of what was going on:

“**But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words” (Acts 2:14).**

Now the first thing we notice about what Peter says here is that he made sure everyone knew he was talking to Jews and *not* to Gentiles. If there were any Gentiles standing around, Peter wanted them to know that he wasn’t talking to them. That’s important to know because many Christians believe that the church which is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23) *began* here in Acts 2 at Pentecost.

And that just makes a *mess* out of Christianity. For if they spoke in tongues on the birthday of the church, that means *we too* should be able to speak in tongues. And that only leaves us with two options. Either we have no answer for our Pentecostal friends who say that we should speak in tongues, or we have to join them in *pretending* to be able to speak in tongues.

But as grace believers we know that the Body of Christ *couldn’t* have begun at Pentecost, for a number of different reasons. First, the Body is made up of Jews *and* Gentiles, as Paul made clear when he wrote,

**“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, *whether we be Jews or Gentiles…”* (I Corinthians 12:13).**

So if Peter was trying to get the Body of Christ started, there’s simply no way he would have excluded the Gentiles in his opening remarks. And that’s just one of many proofs that we’ll see in Acts 2 that the church of this dispensation didn’t start at Pentecost. But first let’s see how Peter responded to the charge of being drunk and disorderly:

**“For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15).**

Now people who know such things tell me that the people of Israel started their day at 6 am. That means the third hour of the day would have been 9 o’clock in the morning. And I don’t know anything about how long it takes to get drunk on new wine—or any other kind of wine for that matter—so I’m just going to take Peter’s word for it that it was too early to be inebriated.

But I find it interesting that he didn’t just say, “We’re not the kind of men who get drunk.” He didn’t expect them to take his word for it. Instead, he argued that it was too early in the day for *any* kind of men to be drunk. Most men take a little longer to get so hammered that they start speaking in words that no one can understand!

After denying that the disciples were drunk, Peter went on to explain the *real* reason they were speaking in tongues:

“**But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).**

In explaining what was happening, Peter is about to quote Joel 2:28-32. But before we let Peter tell us what Joel said, I have to point out that this supplies us with another reason why the Body of Christ could not have started at Pentecost. Paul said that the church of this dispensation was a “mystery” (Eph. 5:32), and a mystery is something that was “hid” from the prophets (Col. 1:26). So when Peter said that what was happening at Pentecost was something that was spoken by the prophet Joel, then what was happening could not have been the beginning of the Body of Christ.

And as Peter went on to tell us what Joel said, we’ll see yet *another* reason why the church couldn’t have begun at Pentecost:

**“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).**

When Peter identified what was happening as something Joel predicted would happen “in the last days,” that means Pentecost could not have been *the first days* of the Body of Christ. They had to have been *the last days* of Israel’s program.

And that was good news for the people of Israel! Speaking of the last days, Isaiah wrote:

**“And it shall come to pass *in the last days,* that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, *Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob;* and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*…And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isaiah 2:2-4).**

As you may know, that’s a description of the kingdom of heaven on earth, a kingdom that Isaiah said God would establish in the earth “in the last days.” So in saying that the last days had arrived, Peter was declaring that it was time for the kingdom! The kingdom in which the Jews would lead the world in worship of God, and teach the Gentile nations the Word of God. The kingdom in which Israel would finally know peace in their land, and the kingdom in which there’d be no more war *anywhere* on the planet. And according to Peter, the last days that would bring that kingdom into fruition had finally arrived.

They began with the coming of Christ, as we see in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

**“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath *in these last days* spoken unto us by his Son…” (Hebrews 1:1,2).**

When the Lord was here on earth ministering to the Hebrews (Rom. 15:8), the last days of Israel’s program had begun. I mean, it just makes sense that the last days before the kingdom would begin with the coming of the King. You can’t have a kingdom without a king!

And you can’t have *the kingdom of heaven* without the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Remember, as we’ve seen, the Spirit rendered the disciples at Pentecost *incapable of sinning.* Writing to them, John wrote:

**“Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin…he cannot sin,* because he is born of God...whosoever is born of God *sinneth not”* (I John 3:9; 5:18).**

If you think it through, it couldn’t be otherwise. If you could still sin, and you entered the kingdom of heaven on earth, you’d spoil it just as quickly as Adam spoiled the Garden of Eden. There’s an old joke that preachers tell about people who are looking for a perfect church. It says, “If you ever find a perfect church, don’t join it, because you’ll be the one to ruin it, since you’re not perfect yourself!”

Taking away their ability to sin was actually the only way that the fulness of Isaiah’s prophecy could come true. How do you think God is going to make a kingdom in which there’s no more wars? Man is warful by nature, as James expressed so clearly when he wrote,

**“From whence come wars and fightings among you? *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Ye lust, and have not: *ye kill, and desire to have*, and cannot obtain: *ye fight and war…”* (James 4:1,2).**

As long as men are able to lust for things that they can’t have, there’s going to be wars on this planet when they go to war to obtain the things they can’t have. The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was the beginning of the end of all of that, for as we’ve seen, Pentecost was a taste of the kingdom.

And there’s another way that the pouring out of the Spirit was a taste of the kingdom. Look what Solomon said about the pouring out of the spirit:

**“…I will pour out my spirit unto you, *I will make known my words unto you”* (Proverbs 1:23).**

Now here I need to make clear that this is not God talking to the people of Israel. That’s Solomon talking to *his* son. The Book of Proverbs is all about a father who was passing his wisdom on to his son. When a father does that, he pours his spirit into his son. That’s what happens when you fill your son with your words.

So when *God* poured *His* Spirit into *His* sons at Pentecost, it means He made known His words to them. The Lord had promised them that the Spirit would guide them into “all truth” (John 16:13). That means with the coming of the Spirit they had “an unction from the Holy One” that enabled them to “know all things” (I John 2:20). In other words, they had a supernatural understanding of the Word of God. And I don’t know about you, but that sounds like heaven on earth to me!

Next the pouring out of the Spirit was also supposed to change *the very earth.*

**“…they shall lament…Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, *and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest”* (Isaiah 32:12,15).**

In the kingdom, God plans to make the earth like it was before Adam fell, like it was in the Garden of Eden. And God said that He would do that when He poured out His Spirit.

Now the reason that didn’t happen at Pentecost, of course, is that God *interrupted* His prophetic program with the dispensation of the mystery (Eph. 3:1-3) after the Jews rejected the offer of their kingdom by stoning Stephen. But when the kingdom does finally come, “the desert shall rejoice, *and blossom as the rose.* It shall blossom abundantly…” (Isa. 35:1,2). And God’s people will blossom as well, for God will gather them back into their land and fill them with His Spirit again:

**“Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel…*and I will put a new spirit within you;* and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, *and will give them an heart of flesh”* (Ezekiel 11:19).**

That’s yet another description of the kingdom. And you’ll notice that when the kingdom comes, and the Spirit is poured out again, God says He will gather the people of Israel back into their land. What’s that tell you about the Jews who gathered back in their land in 1948 *without* the Spirit? It tells you that God had nothing to do with that. The unbelieving Jews who returned to Israel in 1948 didn’t fulfill Ezekiel’s prophecy, or any other Bible prophecy. A careful study of all of the predictions that say that Israel will return to her land will show that this monumental event will not take place until the King returns to establish His kingdom.

That’s also when God will keep this promise that He made to the people of Israel:

**“A new heart also will I give you*, and a new spirit will I put within you:* and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes,* and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).**

With the Spirit within them, *causing* them to walk in God’s ways, they will be literally incapable of sinning once again.

But perhaps the best thing about that future pouring out of the Spirit is the promise we read in Ezekiel 39:29:

**“*Neither will I hide My face any more from them:* for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God”**

God has been hiding His face from the people of Israel for nearly 2,000 years now! But when He sends His Spirit upon them again, it will have a profound effect on His people:

**“*And I will pour upon the house of David,* and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,**

***the spirit of grace and of supplications:* and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).**

That’s what’s going to happen someday after the Rapture, when the dispensation of the mystery is over, and God’s prophetic clock again begins to tick.

But when Peter said that God had poured His Spirit out on “all flesh” (Acts 2:17), that phrase *all flesh* sometimes means *everyone in the world,* as it did when we read about the days before Noah’s flood:

**“And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for *all flesh* had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Genesis 6:12).**

Everyone in the world is made of flesh, so “all flesh” sometimes refers to everyone in the world, as it does in this instance, with the exception of Noah and his family. But remember, Peter was speaking *exclusively* to the people of Israel. So when he went on to say that the Spirit would be poured out on “your sons and your daughters,” and “your young men” and “your old men” (Acts 2:17), he was saying that the Spirit had been poured out on all *Jewish* flesh. God had poured out His Spirit upon all the Jews who had believed on Christ.

Now when Peter quoted God as saying, “your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,” (v.17), visions and dreams are just two ways of saying the same thing. In the Old Testament, God spoke to men through the prophets, to whom He gave dreams and visions, as we read in Numbers 12:6:

**“If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him *in a vision,* and will speak unto him *in a dream”***

That’s how God communicated His Word to the prophets, in dreams and visions. The prophet Balaam called himself, “he…which *heard the words of God*, which *saw the vision of the Almighty…”* (Num. 24:4). And that’s what was happening to *all* the Lord’s disciples at Pentecost, all 120 Jews who had believed on Him (cf. Acts 1:15).

Next, Peter continues to quote what God said through his prophet, saying,

**“And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:18).**

Now here you might be thinking, “what’s a handmaiden?” Well, a handmaiden was a servant girl who was *at hand.* You’ll remember that when the Lord began His public ministry, He announced,

**“The kingdom of heaven is *at hand”* (Matthew 4:17).**

That meant that the kingdom was right there, ready to be established on the earth if the people of Israel would only receive their King. And that’s the definition of a handmaiden. Handmaidens were young girls who hung around their master or mistress, just *waiting* for a sign that they were needed. And I mean watching *very carefully,* as we see when we read the psalmist say,

**“Behold, *as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters*, and as *the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress;* so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us” (Psalm 123:2).**

In that day, the people of Israel were obviously being oppressed, and *needed* the mercy of their God. And as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, when you’re oppressed and in need of mercy, you look for it *very carefully.* That’s why the psalmist compared their eyes to the eyes of a handmaiden.

By the way, is that how you serve the Lord? We can’t watch for the Lord’s hand to move, of course, to beckon us to serve Him. But the Lord’s hand *wrote a Book* that we can look to as carefully as the handmaidens in ancient Israel. Is that how you serve the Lord? If not, don’t tell me about it, talk to the Lord.

Okay, now we know that God was pouring out His Spirit on all flesh in Israel, and that when Peter said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” we know that that part of Joel’s prophecy had been fulfilled. But if you know your Bible, you know that that’s not all that Joel predicted would happen in the last days, as we see when Peter continued:

“**And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke” (Acts 2:19).**

That’s a description of the Tribulation! Those words “wonder” and “blood” and “fire” and “smoke” appear a combined 58 times in the Book of Revelation, the book that *describes* the Tribulation! And that means the Jews at Pentecost who prophesied and spoke in tongues would have lived to see the Tribulation, if God hadn’t interrupted His prophetic program. As you can see, if you don’t recognize the mystery, you have to conclude that Peter was *mistaken* when he pointed to Joel’s prophecy of the Tribulation and said, “this is that.”

Next, Peter describes some of the “wonders” that he said would appear “in heaven above,” saying,

**“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come” (Acts 2:20).**

Now when it says that the sun would be darkened, that was to mark the beginning of a very special day. Look what Isaiah said about the darkening of the sun:

**“Behold, *the day of the Lord cometh,* cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: *the sun shall be darkened in his going forth…”* (Isaiah 13:9,10).**

Isaiah says that when the sun is darkened, that’s the beginning of the day of the Lord. If you’re thinking, “What’s the day of the Lord?”, have you ever heard the old saying, “Every dog has it’s day?” Well, man has been having *his* day for nearly 6,000 years now, and he’s been having a field day, so to speak. But if you think God is going to let this sorry world continue forever in sin and degradation, you’ve got another thing comin’. God’s going to have *His* day someday, and it will start with the day of His wrath, as we read in Revelation 6:12:

**“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; *and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.”***

But when Peter says that the sun would be darkened “before that great and notable day of the Lord come,” that doesn’t seem to agree with what the Lord said in Mark 13:24, where He predicted that

**“*after that tribulation,* the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.”**

If the day of the Lord is the Tribulation, how come the Lord said the sun would be darkened *after* the Tribulation, and Joel said it would be darkened *before* it? Well, the whole seventieth week of Daniel will constitute the day of the Lord, but the last three and a half years will be “the great and notable” day of the Lord. That word “notable” means *something worth noticing.* Joel used a different word when he wrote,

**“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before the great and terrible day of the Lord come”* (Joel 2:31).**

Is a terrible day worth noticing? Of course! That’s why God plans to *make it* a terrible day, so that people will notice, and realize they are in the midst of the day of the Lord.

But that means the sun will be darkened after the first half of the day of the Lord, but *before* the last half. That’s when all hell will literally break loose here on earth. The first three and a half years of Daniel’s 70th week will be years of “peace and safety,” as Antichrist rebuilds Israel’s temple and promises to protect her people from her enemies. But after that, “sudden destruction” will come on them during the great and terrible day of the Lord.

But we know that it won’t be so terrible that people won’t be able to be saved from their sins, for Peter went on to quote Joel as saying,

**“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).**

No matter how bad things get on this planet, God has always made it so that men can be saved from their sins by calling on the name of the Lord. That’s a figure of speech that means to believe on the Lord. If you’ve never called upon the name of the Lord, I would encourage you to trust the Savior who paid for all your sins on Calvary’s cross, and be saved from your sins. Don’t put it off. A thousand years from this moment, you will remember this moment. And whether you remember it with joy or eternal regret depends on the decision you make to trust the Lord *right now.*

Now if you know this passage of Scripture, I’m sure you know that only half of Joel’s prophecy came to pass that day. There were “signs in the earth” when the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in tongues, but no “wonders in heaven above.” The sun wasn’t darkened, and the moon was not turned to blood at Pentecost. So what’s up with that? If Peter was so sure that “this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” how come only half of what Joel predicted came to pass?

The plot thickens when we consider something that happened to the Lord when He returned to His hometown and attended the synagogue service on the sabbath. In describing that day, Luke wrote,

**“He came to Nazareth…and…went into the synagogue…and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord…anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives …to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. *And He closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down”***

**(Luke 4:16-20).**

If you are familiar with the passage the Lord was quoting, you know He didn’t finish quoting all that Isaiah had to say in that passage, as we see when we consider the prophet’s remarks in Isaiah 61:1,2:

**“The Spirit of the Lord…anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, *and the day of vengeance of our God.”***

Did you notice the Lord didn’t quote that last part about “the day of vengeance of our God”? Do you know *why* He didn’t quote it? It was because He went on to say,

**“…*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”* (Luke 4:21).**

That’s not something the Lord could have said had He read the whole passage! He stopped in the middle of a sentence because He knew that *it wasn’t yet time* for the day of God’s vengeance. That’s why He didn’t read the entire prophecy.

But why then did Peter read all of Joel’s prophecy? How come *he* read the part about God’s vengeance? The answer is that Peter didn’t know that it wasn’t yet time for the Tribulation. He thought that it *was* time for the day of God’s vengeance! For you see, he didn’t know the mystery that was later revealed to Paul, the dispensation of the mystery that would interrupt Isaiah’s prophecy in mid-sentence.

We know that Peter learned about the mystery eventually, for later he wrote,

**“…*there shall come* in the last days scoffers…saying, Where is the promise of His coming?...the Lord is not slack concerning His promise…even as our brother Paul…hath written” (II Peter 3:3-15).**

Now here, notice carefully that something has changed in Peter’s understanding since Pentecost. There he announced that the last days had come. Here he predicted that in the last days “there shall come” scoffers. In other words, he knew that he was no longer in the last days! He has obviously learned from Paul that God hit the “pause” button on the prophetic program, and was doing something different with Paul. And he says, as it were, “If you want to know more about *why* God hit the pause button, *go ask Paul.* He’ll tell you all about what God is doing in the dispensation of grace.”

If you don’t understand that the mystery interrupted Israel’s last days, you’re going to think Peter was mistaken when he said that the last days had come. And since Peter was “filled with the Holy Ghost” when he said that (Acts 2:4), that means *God* was mistaken when Peter said that. This is why atheists and others who challenge that the Bible is the Word of God point to prophecies like this to maintain that the Book you hold in your hand is not infallible, and could not have been written by a God who knows all things. And that means that “rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15) is once again the only way to maintain the integrity of God and the veracity of His word. Aren’t you glad you know the mystery?