

# Signs and Wonders:

Joel, Acts, and Hebrews

by

Kristofer Carlson

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[This was written in answer to an issue involving the Latter Rain error among certain Charismatics within the AALC.]

Joel prophesied during the reign of Joash, the boy king. He looks at the current conditions in the land of Judah as the warning signs described in the Deuteronomic Covenant. He warns of the coming Babylonian captivity, then talks of the restoration of the people to the land. Only after that, and within that context, does Joel begin to describe what may be termed “signs and wonders.”

## **Joel 2:28-32**

28 ¶ And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

32 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

The Apostle Peter himself declares that this vision has been fulfilled. In Acts chapter 2 we see the disciples gathered in the upper room, the Holy Spirit descending upon them, and the disciples speaking in tongues. At Pentecost, these tongues were actual human languages, for these uneducated backwoods bumpkins spoke in the various languages of the empire (Acts 2:5-12). Then Peter declares unto them that this, what they were hearing and seeing in their midst, was the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken of by the prophet Joel.

## **Acts 2:14-21**

14 ¶ 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:

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 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:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And because we don't want to derive our doctrine from a single passage of scripture, we need only look at the opening verses of Hebrews for confirmation. God, who in the past spoke to us through the prophets, has now spoken to us through His Son. We need no further prophetic revelations, no signs and wonders.

### **Heb 1:1-3**

1 ¶ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

One potential argument against this is the so-called "latter rain" phenomenon. In this concept, there is an early rain and a latter rain; there is an early fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, and there is a latter fulfillment. This heresy is easily dispelled in the book of Joel. Remember the situation. God was fulfilling his Deuteronomic Covenant through signs in the heavens and signs in the earth. The rains were not coming like they used to; the crops were being eaten up by insect infestations, or burned up by the drought. This is a sign that the Day of the Lord is at hand, which is the overwhelming portrait painted in the first chapter of Joel.

### **Joel 1:4-5, 7, 10-12, 15, 17-20**

4 That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.

5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast *it* away; the branches thereof are made white.

10 The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.

11 Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.

12 The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, *even* all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.

20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Within the context of Joel chapter 1, we see the further development of this theme in chapter 2. Judgment is come upon them. The day of the Lord is at hand. But God is not finished with them. Beginning in Joel chapter 2, we see the coming Babylonian invasion portrayed. But just as we think it cannot get any worse, we see that all is not lost. If and when his people turn to him, God promises to turn their captivity, to remove the northern army, and to restore all things as they were---including the former and latter rains.

### **Joel 2:20-26**

20 But I will remove far off from you the northern *army*, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things.

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first *month*.

24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

Please note that the former and latter rains were actual weather events, actual rain, actual water falling from the sky that filled the rivers and made crops grow. This was the literal fulfillment of the Deuteronomic Covenant.

The clear, literal sequence of events in Joel is this:

1. A falling away of Judah from the true worship of God

2. Drought and insect infestations as a sign of divine displeasure
3. Invasion and the Babylonian captivity
4. Return to God while in captivity
5. Divine punishment upon the northern invader
6. Renewal of the divine order, including the former and latter rains
7. Promise of signs and wonders, dreams and visions at some future date
8. Promise fulfilled at Pentecost, as proclaimed by Peter, and confirmed by the writer of Hebrews

We dare not give this some fanciful and speculative interpretation, especially as this is unsupported by the text. We dare not go beyond the actual Words of God. As the apostle wrote, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4).