

CWR_m

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“Did ‘all people’ receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost?”

Q Does Acts 2:17 mean that “all people” from the Day of Pentecost forward have received God’s Holy Spirit, whether or not they have repented, believed and accepted God?

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).

A The meaning and implications of Acts 2:17 are fascinating. Peter was citing what the Old Testament author Joel had written hundreds of years prior—giving it context and contemporary relevance and application. God was pouring out his Spirit on “all people”—what does that mean specifically?

Briefly, we should remember the verse begins with the statement that this event, this pouring out of the Holy Spirit, would happen “in the last days.”

Some allow that phrase to sidetrack them, and given their general predisposition toward thinking “the last days” are the months or perhaps a year or two immediately before the Second Coming of Jesus, they just decide that whatever this means it will happen then.

This is a great example of a doctrinally ingrained belief being read into a passage, then allowing one’s theological predisposition or indoctrination

to dictate and derail what Scripture is teaching.

There is no question that Peter is claiming that the listener in his immediate audience were living “in the last days.” Beyond that, the New Testament generally treats the phrase “last days” as referring to the times just following the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Back to the your question about this passage: was the Spirit poured out “on all people” some 1980 years ago? What about the record of history over the last 1980 years or so? Millions and millions of people have lived and died since then, and there seems to be little or no evidence that the Holy Spirit was poured out on all of them.

I believe the best, but certainly not only, explanation for what Peter meant by “on all people” is reached by the following two basic rules of hermeneutics (the way we interpret Scripture):

1) We should do our best to determine the context of the original audience, its culture and its setting—the ideas that permeated their thinking.

2) We should realize that whatever meaning we reach now is valid only if it builds in some way on the meaning the original audience would have understood when they first heard the message or read the passage in question.

Given the first principle, who

was it that constituted Peter’s first audience in Acts chapter 2?

They were all Jews. They understood the world and God in terms of the old covenant. Peter was giving them a new revelation, and this passage is part of the “new wine” of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, Peter may have been saying “all people” to emphasize the equality of all the new covenant people of God.

As Paul explains later, we are *all*—Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female—one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Jesus has broken down the walls of religious exclusivity so that now “all people” have equal access to God (Ephesians 2:11-20).

Those passages, among many others, may be the intent of the phrase “all people” used in Acts 2:17. Up until that point, Peter’s audience on Pentecost consisted of Jews who may have only thought prophets, priests and kings could experience a direct one-on-one relationship with God. But those days, Peter seems to be saying, are over.

Given the second principle, we ask, **what does this passage mean for us today?** It means virtually the same now as it did then. The 21st century is still the “last days” and, by God’s grace, in and through the work of the Holy Spirit, “all people” may have such a direct relationship with God now. □