

The Gift and Promise of Acts 2:38-39

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Please notice the similarities between the promise of Joel 2 and the promise of Acts 2:38-39:

<i>“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...”</i>	
GOD’S PROMISE THROUGH JOEL	THE PROMISE OF ACTS 2:38-39
“I will pour out of my Spirit ”	“Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ”
“upon all flesh”	“For the promise is...to all... ” (cf. Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; 2:33)
“ Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy”	“For the promise is unto you and to your children ”
“Whosoever”	“ every one ”
“shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved ”	“Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ”
“in the remnant whom the LORD shall call”	“as many as the Lord our God shall call”

The table above shows that Peter’s Pentecost sermon was based squarely upon the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, which was to begin in Jerusalem (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:5, 14). Comparing Joel 2 with Acts 2 helps one understand what Peter meant when he referred to the “*gift*” and the “*promise*” of Acts 2:38-39. The gift and promise are directly related to things mentioned in Joel’s prophecy, and the two main things Joel promised were salvation and miraculous power.

After the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, the people were all “*in doubt*,” asking, “*What meaneth this?*” (2:12). Peter had their full attention, and his explanation was “*this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...*” (2:16). Peter then made it clear that the promise God made through Joel was not just for the apostles, but for “*all flesh*” (2:17ff). The promise included miraculous power and the forgiveness of sins for “*whosoever*” would call on the name of the Lord. Both types of blessings were apparently received on the Day of Pentecost by those who would obey the Gospel (cf. Acts 5:31-32; Jn. 15:26-27; Mk. 16:16-18). If not, then Joel’s prophecy did not directly apply to them; however, Peter clearly applied it to them! (2:16ff). Their sins were remitted, and they could “*receive the Holy Ghost*” by the laying on of the apostles’

hands (cf. Acts 8:14-19; 10:45-47; 19:1-6). Since at that time they did not have a New Testament Bible, the miraculous power of the Spirit would temporarily help to “perfect” them, “establish” them, and guide them through the miraculous revelation of God’s will (Acts 2:17-18; Rom. 1:11; Eph. 4:8-16; 1 Cor. 12-14; 2 Cor. 1:21-22).

When asking what the promise of Acts 2:39 is, one should also ask, “What is the promise mentioned in verse 33?” Acts 2:33 mentions that Jesus had “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.” To the apostles Jesus had mentioned the promise of the Father, which was the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4-5, 8). Jesus had also promised miraculous power to people who would believe and obey (Mark 16:15-18). As already stated, the power of the Holy Spirit was not just intended for the apostles, but for “...all flesh...sons...daughters...young men...old men...” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17ff; 11:15-17; 21:9). Some would receive the power of the Holy Spirit by Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:44-47; 11:15-17), and others would receive it by the laying on of apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14-19; 19:1-6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6).

Please notice how Acts 2:33 is rendered in the New King James Version: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33 NKJV; see also ASV 1901; Acts 10:45-46). The promise was related to something that had been poured out—something the people at Pentecost could see and hear. What were they seeing and hearing? They **saw** “cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (2:3). They **heard** the apostles speaking in their own tongues, wherein they were born, by the power of the Holy Spirit (2:4-12). They were seeing and hearing the promised miraculous power of the Holy Ghost which had been “poured out” (2:33; cf. 2:17-18; 10:45-46; Rom. 5:5 NKJV).

Why would the promise of Acts 2:38-39 be totally unrelated to the promise of miraculous power that had just been mentioned? (2:16-18, 33). Surely those Jews listening to Peter would have understood the promise of Acts 2:39 to be the same promise he had just mentioned. Surely they would have understood the gift of the Spirit to be associated with the miraculous power of the Spirit which Peter said was for all flesh—the power which they were presently seeing and hearing! (2:1-12, 33). Such an interpretation fits perfectly within the immediate context and the rest of the New Testament (cf. Mk. 16:16-18; Jn. 7:38-39; Acts 4:31; 5:31-32; 8:12-18; 19:1-6). Although there are some parts of Peter’s sermon that are not recorded (Acts 2:40), it is clear that the basis of Peter’s sermon was to make a direct application of Joel’s prophecy to those present on the day of Pentecost. The words of his sermon that are recorded begin and end with unmistakable references to Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:16, 39; see table above).

The promise of Acts 2:33 had been “poured out,” and according to Acts 10:45-46, the gift of the Holy Ghost was miraculous power that was “poured out” (cf. 2:17-18, 38-39). In Acts 10 Peter also described it as “receiving the Holy Ghost”: “...on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts 10:45-47). Therefore, according to Acts 10,

“receiving the Holy Ghost” (miraculous power of the Holy Spirit) is the same as receiving “the gift of the Holy Ghost” (cf. 2:38), which was separate and distinct from salvation (cf. 8:12-20). If all early Christians “received the Holy Ghost” in this sense immediately at water baptism, how does one explain Acts 8:12-20 or 19:5-6?

Compare key words and phrases in Acts 10:45-47 with the same words in Acts 2, such as “poured out” (10:45; cf. 2:17-18, 33), “received,” (10:47; cf. 2:38), and “gift of the Holy Ghost” (10:45; cf. 2:38). Luke repeatedly used this kind of terminology throughout Acts to mean miraculous power (Acts 2:17-18, 33; 8:15-20; 10:45-47; 19:1-6, etc.), and there is no reason to doubt that miraculous power was included in Acts 2:38-39.

Some may claim that “all that are afar off” means all future generations, but this type of language is used to describe Gentiles (Eph. 2:13,17; cf. “all flesh,” Acts 2:17). The Jews were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and the Gentiles were far off, but eventually “...on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45).

Some may object, stating that Acts 2:43 only mentions the apostles doing miracles. They may use this to argue that the apostles were the only ones who could do miracles until later on in the history of the church. However, Acts 5:12 also only mentions the apostles, even though the rest of the church had already been speaking miraculously (4:31), so that argument is inconclusive (cf. 19:11). Although the KJV states, “...signs were done by the apostles...” (Acts 2:43), the ASV and NKJV render that phrase as “...signs were done through the apostles...” Compare that word “through” in Acts 2:43 with the same word in 8:18: “...through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given...” The idea is that through the apostles miracles were done—whether by the apostles themselves, or by those on whom the apostles had laid hands (cf. Jn. 4:1-2; Acts 5:12). It was obviously God’s will for the early church as a whole to have ready access to miraculous power (compare Mark 16:16-18 with Acts 2:38-39; cf. Jn. 7:38-39; Acts 4:31; 8:14-18; 19:1-6; Rom. 1:11; 1 Cor. 12:7; 14:1, 5, 31; Eph. 4:7ff), so there is no compelling reason to argue against Christians on Pentecost receiving such power—especially when the context bears it out.

Note: Although people do not receive miraculous power today (Zech. 13:1ff; 1 Cor. 13:8ff; Eph. 4:5, 8ff), a close look at Joel 2, Acts 2, and the rest of the New Testament indicates that the gift of the Holy Ghost mentioned in Acts 2:38 was miraculous power (cf. Acts 10:45-46). For further study, see “gift,” “gifts,” or “given” in the following miraculous contexts: John 3:34, 39; Acts 2:38; 5:31-32; 8:18, 20; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8; Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30-31; Ephesians 3:7; 4:7-8; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 2:4; and 6:4-5. Regarding “receiving” the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38), see forms of the word “receive” in these miraculous contexts: John 7:38-39; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:38; 8:15, 17, 19; 10:47; 19:2; Galatians 3:2-5; and 1 John 2:27.

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