

## **“Fulfillment” - Part 1 (Introduction)**

A very frustrating situation for a Christian is to read two passages in the Bible which seem to clash in meaning. This is most pronounced for passages in which there is a “fulfillment” or an implied “fulfillment.” Take for instance Acts chapter 2 when Peter is explaining what is happening with the tongues of fire and speaking in tongues. Originally, I was only going to include the quote from Acts 2 starting from verse 14. But by doing that I would rob you of the context. You need the context of what is happening leading up to Peter’s quote of Joel chapter.

**Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.**

**Acts 2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.**

**Acts 2:3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.**

**Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.**

**Acts 2:5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.**

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**Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.**

**Acts 2:7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?**

**Acts 2:8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?**

**Acts 2:9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,**

**Acts 2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,**

**Acts 2:11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”**

**Acts 2:12 And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”**

**Acts 2:13 But others were mocking and saying, “They are full of sweet wine.”**

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**Acts 2:14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.**

**Acts 2:15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;**

**Acts 2:16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:**

**Acts 2:17 ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams;**

**Acts 2:18 Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.**

**Acts 2:19 ‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.**

**Acts 2:20 ‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.**

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**Acts 2:21 ‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’**

My first response when reading this is that what was foretold in Joel is not happening in Acts chapter 2. But this is the word of God and I assume that Peter has been empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the beginning of the Church Age.

There are some basic assumptions that cause me to wonder what I am missing.

1. Assumption: Inerrancy. The Word of God is inerrant.
2. Assumption: Inspiration. Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit. He correctly observed and commented on what he observed. He was not confused but accurately compared something from the book of Joel to what was happening in Acts chapter 2.
3. Assumption/Observation: “This is that” in verse 16. When Peter says in the Greek, “This is that,” I expect something to be exactly the same, not like something.
4. Observation: Mystery. The Church Age was a mystery, that is, not revealed in the Old Testament. Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 3:11. That means there is no prophecy in the Old Testament that is fulfilled in the Church Age. None.
5. Observation: Church. The Church dispensation started in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost.
6. Observation: Style. The Hebrews of the Old Testament wrote differently than modern western writers. In the New Testament, Paul writes analytically with a vocabulary he developed.

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7. Observation: Joel is describing the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. That would be a change in dispensations: from the Jewish dispensation to the Millennial dispensation. He does not identify this shift in dispensations with specific vocabulary. He does what the Hebrews do well. He describes it. When the laws (or rules) of nature change and when God deals differently with people, those who are observant will know that there is a change in history. We call this a change in dispensations.
8. I agree with some, that this is used to invoke the concept of a universal giving of the Holy Spirit. But the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not to all flesh in the Church Age, just to believers. As Robby Dean says so clearly, there are no events in Joel chapter 2 that are duplicated in Acts 2. But I disagree with him and other conservative Bible scholars that suggest Peter is saying “this is like that/what happened in Joel chapter 2.”
9. So, in my soul, I am left with a disconnect between Joel chapter 2 and Acts chapter 2.
10. It is like going into college finals, knowing what will be asked on the test (Biblical inerrancy) but realizing you do not know the answer (no understanding of a particular Bible passage). I witnessed this in a basic physics 101 course. The final was tough. For one guy in particular, he browsed through the questions, laughed, got up, turned in a blank test with his name on it and left.
11. But we have the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. With empowerment from Him, prayer asking for wisdom in this matter and following the logic of the passage, there is a solution.

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There are essentially two questions I want answered:

- a) What is it that Peter is describing? He didn't need to quote about all the earthly events described by Joel because they didn't happen in Acts chapter 2. So why did he include them?
- b) What principle of hermeneutics is Peter using to allow him to connect these two events? Obviously this is not a direct prophetic fulfillment. And please don't tell me that the Holy Spirit has a secret hermeneutic that we are not privy to.

It is one of those passages I dread to try to explain to a believer or even an unbeliever because I don't fully understand it myself.

Until now.

Let me start with an extended quote from Robby Dean on one of his lessons on dispensations. He is talking about this passage. I am doing this because I really want you to understand the problem.

“The Church Age begins in Acts 2; and in Acts 2 the phenomena of God the Holy Spirit descending upon the church takes place; and the disciples begin to speak in languages that they never learned. Their physical manifestation of what appears to be flames of fire over each of their heads; and they begin to speak to each of those who are in the temple about the mighty works of God. Because they are Galileans they are assumed to be ignorant, from the back woods, something like we might ascribe to someone from Pasadena or East Texas or Arkansas, every place has some place like that, West Virginia. When I was in Connecticut I heard somebody say that when you cross the border into Maine your IQ dropped 50 points. Now these things are not true, but they are just these kinds of regional myths that people believe and they had them in NT times as well. They just figured that if you were from Galilee, because you had sort of a backwoods accent apparently, or whatever it was, you

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weren't very bright. So how could these unlearned Galileans, these fishermen speak so well, so accurately in languages that they had never heard?”

“So they asked the question and Peter answers; and his answer really opens up this whole issue. Because when Peter answers in Acts 2:16 he says, "But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." So at a surface reading of the Text, it seems as if what Peter is saying is that this is the fulfillment of what Joel says, and He quotes from Joel 2:28-32, which is a prophecy related to "the great and awesome Day of the Lord," which comes at the end of the Tribulation. And he talks about these things that will come about as a result of God pouring forth His Spirit upon Israel. And we understand from what we studied in the New Covenant that that is part of the fulfillment and the true inauguration of the New Covenant.”

“What Peter describes in Acts 2, it is not mentioned; I mean what actually happens in Acts 2 is not mentioned at all in Joel 2. What does happen in Acts 2 is the speaking in tongues. This is nowhere mentioned in Joel 2. What happens, what is predicted actually literally in Joel 2 doesn't take place at all in Acts 2. So in what sense is this a fulfillment? Now the reason this is important is because within evangelicalism there are these different views on how you understand this fulfillment type of terminology when the NT quotes from the OT. And if you treat them all the same then you end up with some pretty squirrely ideas and theology. And there are those who will take this as a partial fulfillment. So this is one issue that comes up in hermeneutics: is there such a thing as partial fulfillment? Or is a partial fulfillment actually no fulfillment because fulfillment means "fulfilled" completely. And that is where I would end up. This isn't a partial fulfillment; there are no partial fulfillments because it is not a fulfillment at all. Nothing that happens in Joel 2 happens in Acts 2. So how could it be partial fulfillment?”

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Graphic from Robby Dean's Acts 2 lesson.  
<https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2010-Acts-021b.pdf>

Comparison of Joel 2 and Acts 2	
Joel 2	Acts 2
Your sons and daughters will prophesy	No prophesy, no daughters speaking
Young men shall see visions	No visions
Old men dream dreams	No dreams
Only slaves, men and women	Only the 12 speak
Wonders in the sky and on earth (blood, fire, vapor of smoke)	No wonders in sky or earth
Sun turned to darkness	No sun turning to darkness
Moon into blood	No moon turning to blood
<b>NO MENTION OF TONGUES</b>	<b>ONLY MENTIONS TONGUES</b>

“There is only one thing that the two events have in common and that is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But I would argue that it is a different kind of outpouring on the Day of Pentecost than what will come with the New Covenant, which we studied to a small degree when I studied that.”

“This is why this is important. It also will help lay the foundation for something we will study a little later on when we talk about this recent development within dispensational thought that has been called "progressive dispensationalism." And in progressive dispensationalism they've adopted a new system of interpretation, a new hermeneutic, which they call a complementary hermeneutic. Now we believe that the way to understand the Bible is on the basis of a literal-historical-grammatical interpretation of the Scripture. Literal, we take the word used in the normal everyday sense. It does not mean that we deny figures of speech or idioms, but in terms of the every day meaning and use of language we take it at face value.”



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Here is another quote, this time from Arnold Fruchtenbaum:

“This author views that it is best to take the passage as fitting into the category of drash or Cooper's literal plus application where an Old Testament passage is quoted based on one point of similarity. As already noted, nothing that happened in Acts two was predicted by Joel two. What actually did happen in Acts two (the speaking in tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts two. Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole nation of Israel in the last days while Acts two speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles, or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. Either way, this is a far cry from Joel's all flesh. Furthermore, according to verse 18, the servants of the Jewish people were to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but there were no servants in the Upper Room to experience these things.”

“However, there was one point of similarity: an outpouring of the Holy Spirit resulting in an unusual manifestation. Acts two neither changes or reinterprets Joel two nor does it deny that Joel two will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity. In Joel the Spirit is poured out resulting in the unusual manifestation of prophetic dreams and visions; in Acts the Spirit is poured out resulting in the unusual manifestation of speaking in tongues.”

I couldn't bear to leave you hanging concerning what method Peter uses to explain what is happening at Pentecost. So I am perhaps jumping ahead of myself. I will explain it now, to a point. Then when I have explained the four methods of interpretation of these kinds of passages, you will have a framework into which to place what Peter did here.

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Simply, points for now, starting with the points already given:

1. The Bible is inerrant.
2. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is not mistaken about the parallel with Joel chapter 2.
3. Nothing in the Joel chapter 2 quotation happens in Acts chapter 2.
4. The Joel chapter 2 quote describes the transition from the Tribulation, the end of the Jewish dispensation to a new dispensation, the Millennium.
5. A dispensation (oikonomos – literally, “house rules”) is more about the set of rules under which believers operate than about time. That is critical to understand these two passages.
6. The Joel chapter 2 quote is describing changes in rules between the Jewish dispensation and the Millennium. There are environment and people changes. The “house rules” are changing. The Hebrew mind understands the concept even if there is no specific vocabulary word to identify it.
7. The Church Age dispensation starts in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. The “house rules” are changing. There will be a universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit for all believers. There were physical manifestations including a noise like a violent rushing wind (auditory) and tongues as of fire (visual) and speaking in foreign languages (individual gifts). There are other changes that take place as well. Peter has not encountered those, such as being able to have bacon at breakfast. At this point, the dispensation is changing from Jewish dispensation to a non-Jewish dispensation. This is a transition from the Jewish Age, not the end of the Jewish Age, but a pause if you will, and transition into the Church Age. Peter needs

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some biblical passage to describe that. Joel chapter 2 describes that concept. The concept of the end of one dispensation and the beginning of a new one.

8. The Church Age is not revealed at all in the entire Old Testament. Not a word. So there can be no fulfilled prophecy. But there are principles of doctrine described in the Old Testament that do apply to the New Testament. One of those is the concept of dispensations. I have previously explained that each dispensation has its own rules. I quoted from the Old Testament to show that. There is no word given in the Old Testament that gathers together the concept of “house” rules. They are just explained, sometimes in the form of a covenant. So Peter does not have a vocabulary word to give his audience that would explain, this is a new dispensation. We have to wait for Paul to use this word for dispensation.
9. So Peter, in order to explain that a new dispensation had started must find a passage in the Old Testament that describes the transition from the Jewish dispensation into another. He does not say anything in Joel chapter 2 was “fulfilled” in Acts chapter 2. Peter is pointing to that and applying that principle to what is happening in Acts chapter 2. A new dispensation is starting and the only place the Jews will understand this is from the Old Testament in a passage like Joel chapter 2. This is an application of that principle from Joel 2. One of the principles we will encounter in this study of “It is fulfilled,” is that the New Testament will quote an Old Testament passage and say “this is (like) that.” Application. Peter in Acts 2 literally says, “this is that.”
10. One more observation. Peter gives all the future astronomic events because the Jews are a “show me” people. So what happens in Joel appears to be a change in the rules that govern the astronomic bodies. Rule Change. Where do we find rule changes? At the

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boundaries between dispensations. Remember our discussion on dispensations? Each dispensation has its own unique rules. So when Peter is talking about astronomic rule changes, he is talking about a new dispensation. But even Peter does not at this point understand the full significance of this rule change. He has not been given those rules yet. One of those rules, that all food is good to eat now, he will encounter in Acts chapter 10. But, again, I want to emphasize that this is not a “fulfillment” as we understand that English word. This is an application of Joel 2, the change in dispensations, to the situation in Acts 2. That will be item 3 in what we are about to study.

It is in this very lesson of Robby Dean’s (God’s Plan for the Ages lessons 15 & 16) in which he explains that there are four ways the New Testament uses “it is fulfilled” or similar phrases. This information did not start with Robby Dean. It started with the Rabbis 100’s of years ago. More recently, that methodology was picked up and updated for Christian interpretation by David L. Cooper. Arnold Fruchtenbaum and then Michael Rydelnik pick it up from David Cooper and each wrote on this.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum’s essay on this can be found at: <https://www.pretrib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Fruchtenbaum-RabbinicQuotationsoftheOl.pdf> My plan when I wrote this was to have copies of this printed out and available to hand out.

I have Michael Rydelnik’s book, “The Messianic Hope.” His book along with Robby Dean’s explanation and expansions in various places was a great help to me for understanding these kinds of passages. One place that Robby Dean explains this is in lectures 15 & 16 of his God’s Plan of the Ages, a series of lessons on dispensations. Previously, when I mentioned this topic, I included a slide from my notes on this topic.

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**From Rabbi to Bible Teacher**

**Rabinnical  
Interpretation**

**D.L. Cooper**  
Messiah: His  
Historical Appearance

**A.G. Fruchtenbaum**  
Rabbinic Quotations of the  
Old Testament and How  
It Relates to Joel 2 and Acts 2

**M. Rydelnik**  
The Messianic Hope

**R. Dean**  
God's Plan for the Ages

D. L. Cooper's book and Michael Rydelnik's book are available from Amazon. Cooper's book is no longer in print, so you will have to find it second hand, if you so desire.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum's essay can be found at: [Fruchtenbaum-RabbinicQuotationsoftheOl.pdf \(pre-trib.org\)](http://pre-trib.org/Fruchtenbaum-RabbinicQuotationsoftheOl.pdf)

Robby Dean's explanations can be found on one of his websites, for instance at: [God's Plan for the Ages - Dispensations \(2014\) - Dean Bible Ministries](http://DeanBibleMinistries.com) (lessons 15 & 16)

So, let's delve into this. It started with the Rabbi's and what is called the PaRDes method. Here are notes I took and arranged from Wikipedia. I first put them into a PowerPoint slide presentation.



# Rabbinic Hermeneutics

"**Pardes**" refers to (types of) **approaches** to biblical **exegesis** in rabbinic **Judaism** or to **interpretation** of text in **Torah study**. The term, sometimes also spelled **PaRDeS**, is an **acronym** formed from the same initials of the following four approaches:

- **Peshat** (פֶּשֶׁט) — "surface" ("straight") or the literal (direct) meaning.<sup>[1]</sup>
- **Remez** (רֵמֶז) — "hints" or the deep (allegoric: hidden or symbolic) meaning beyond just the literal sense.
- **Derash** (דִּרָשׁ) — from Hebrew *darash*: "inquire" ("seek") — the comparative (**midrashic**) meaning, as given through similar occurrences.
- **Sod** (סוּד) (pronounced with a long O as in 'soda') — "secret" ("mystery") or the esoteric/mystical meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation.

From Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes\\_\(Jewish\\_exegesis\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes_(Jewish_exegesis))

The point of this is to provide a starting point. It is not necessary to remember this chart. It is here for a reference. It is this rabbinic hermeneutics that D. L. Cooper started with when he updated the language for Christians.

He came up with the following terminology:

<u>Hebrew</u>	→ <u>English</u>
Peshat	→ <u>Literal</u> Prophecy
Remez	→ Literal Prophecy plus a <u>Typical</u> Import
Derash	→ Literal Prophecy plus an <u>Application</u>
Sod	→ Literal Prophecy plus a <u>Summation</u>

Here is the slide I presented at the last lesson on this topic:

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Direct Fulfillment: Literal prediction and literal direct fulfillment.

Typical Fulfillment: A literal, historical event applied typologically.

Applicational Fulfillment: An historical event is used to draw out an application with reference to a future event.

Summary Fulfillment: No actual event is prophesied, but the fulfillment represents a summation of Old Testament prophecies.

Quoted from Dean's Lessons 15 & 16 of God's Plan for the Ages - Dispensations (2014)

So far, I have only given you reference material. I will refer back to these as necessary.

I am following Michael Rydelnik and Robby Dean in the flow and interpretation. Where appropriate I will quote. Otherwise I will just paraphrase or summarize.

The first category is the easiest to understand because it is what we normally think of when we hear the word “it is fulfilled.”

**I. Direct Fulfillment (Matthew 2:5-6/Micah 5:2)**

**Matthew 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,**



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**Matthew 2:2 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”**

**Matthew 2:3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**

**Matthew 2:4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.**

**Matthew 2:5 They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:**

**Matthew 2:6 ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”**

It is not my desire here to fully exegete the passages involved. But I must comment, based upon information from Robby Dean and Michael Rydelnik.

1. Background: The Magi from the east came to worship the Messiah. They call Him king.
2. King Herod heard about the Magi and that they had information that Israel’s king (Messiah) had been born. Herod understood that the Scriptures prophesied where He would be born. So he gathered the Bible scholars of his day, “the chief priests and scribes” and asked them what their Scriptures said about the Messiah’s birth. Note that



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the Magi asked about the king of Israel. Herod immediately understood that this was a reference to the Messiah.

3. Then the chief priests and scribes quote from Micah chapter 5. Commentators argue that Matthew manipulated the text to some extent. But what Matthew says is that the quote is what the chief priests and scribes said.
4. They use Micah as a direct prophecy with only a direct fulfillment. They understand this as true prophecy. Commentators that read this text faithfully, agree. This is true prophecy. The rabbi's from 2,000 years ago tell us this, as reported in the New Testament.