

# “All the Prophets Testify”: Joel 2:18-27

Midweek Bible Study – 2025 October 01

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions

Outline (TLSB p.1448):

- I. Catastrophes Current and Coming (1:2-2:17)
  - A. The Current Catastrophe: The Locust Plague (1:2-20)
  - B. The Coming Catastrophe: The Day of the Lord (2:1-17)
- II. The Lord’s Response (2:18-3:21)
  - A. To the Locust Plague: Healing and Restoration (2:18-27)**
  - B. To the Coming Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21)

The Lord’s Response to the Locust Plague: Healing and Restoration (2:18-27 [note still that 2:12-19 is appointed as the Old Testament Reading for Ash Wednesday in the A, B, and C years of *Lutheran Service Book’s* Three-Year Lectionary Series and for a Day of Supplication and Prayer]):

2:18 *Then*: the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and”, but there does seem to be at least a temporal change. Presumably after the call to repent of 2:12-17 was successful (confer 2:19’s “answered and said”), the Lord speaks about His healing and restoring the people by way of blessing His land entrusted to them. With reference to 2:18-20, Roehrs-Franzmann notes that the reversal is the Lord’s doing and his alone. The Good News is certain and leaves no room for even rhetorical doubts (confer/compare 2:14’s “who knows”).

*became jealous ... had pity*: we usually think of being “jealous” as bad, but we should be somewhat used to the Lord’s “jealousy” from what we learn as the Close of the Commandments (Exodus 20:5-6), and we might think of Jesus’s being “zealous” for the Lord’s House (Psalm 69:9; John 2:17). There may be a little “redness”, and the eagerness can include protecting His own rights and extend to consuming fire destroying enemies. The “pity” can be to spare or have compassion but is a different Hebrew word from that translated “spare” in 2:17.

*land ... people*: the Lord’s land is entrusted to the people’s use but ultimately remains His, and the Lord’s blessings on His land are blessings on His people, the people of Israel/Jacob/Judah then (not to be confused with the people of Israel now, distinguishing descent or religion from politics or geographic residence). Allen points to the land as the Lord’s in 1:6 and refers to the locusts’ damaging the land as damaging the Lord’s property.

2:19 *I am sending to you ... you will be satisfied*: the Lord blesses the Land so that it produces grain, wine, and oil, and the people receive the land's fruit and are satisfied (confer 2:26). Keil-Delitzsch explain "sending" the products by way of "sending" rain that causes growth. The idea behind "satisfied" is that the need is met, not that the people can be gluttonous. Allen points to Deuteronomy 11:13-15, where the people's faithfulness is linked to the three essential crops.

*I will no more make you a reproach among the nations*: this seems to be a direct answer to the petition of 2:17, with the "heritage" as a name for God's people, contrasted with the "nations" of Gentiles, non-Jews ethnically and usually also religiously. All people deserve punishment for their sin, but God's repentant people are forgiven and in some sense spared ridicule from the unbelievers, as is God's Name (confer 2:26, 27).

2:20 *remove the northerner ... drive him*: the locust swarms, which may have come with an exceptional wind from the north, will be relocated to desert areas where they will have less impact on the people of Judah (*TLSB* later refers to a powerful wind's relocating the locusts, and Allen points to the wind that ended the plague of locusts in Exodus 10:19). Later literal enemy armies also came from the north (*CSSB* mentions also the south, ruling out invasions from the desert to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west). *vanguard ... eastern sea ... rear guard ... western sea*: front ranks to the Dead Sea ("vanguard" apparently short for Old French "avant-garde") and rear ranks to the Mediterranean Sea. Keil-Delitzsch comments, "a rhetorical picture of rapid and total destruction".

*stench and foul smell*: drowned locusts washed up on the seas' shores, where, Keil-Delitzsch describes, "their putrefaction fills the air with stench". Laetsch remarks, "Stench is all that is left of the enemy once so powerful and so dreaded." Allen points out that the other mentions of stench in the Old Testament are in the context of battlefield corpses and thinks the association is intended, with the locusts still viewed in military guise.

*great things*: perhaps ironic characterization of the swarms that only destroy, in contrast to the Lord (2:21), Whose great things include saving and preserving (as described earlier in this verse, and confer 2:22-23, 24-25). As Roehrs-Franzmann note, the northener's great things were serving under God's control. Luther is among those who see an element of pride in the locusts' destruction, and Allen seems to suggest their going beyond what the Lord intended.

2:21 *Fear not ... be glad and rejoice*: terror-fear would seem to be in view primarily, though the gladness and rejoicing of true worship of God includes reverence-fear along side or as part of faith (confer 2:22, though the animals do not have rational souls or "believe", and 2:23). *CSSB* correlates the threefold call to grief (1:5, 8, 13) with the threefold call to joy (2:21, 22, 23). And, Keil-Delitzsch discusses the rhetorical individualizing and the distribution of the Divine blessings among the different parts of creation mentioned.

*land*: most likely personification/anthropomorphizing, ascribing human actions to, in this case, the inanimate land (confer and compare its mourning in 1:10). Animals are mentioned in 2:22, and the people in 2:23, otherwise we might think that the land is standing in for the people, or that the people are simply unexpressed in the second half of the second line.

2:22 *beasts of the field*: the beasts groaned in 1:18 and panted for the Lord in 1:20 but now no longer need to be afraid (confer 2:21), because the pastures are green and the tree and vine bear the full yield of their fruit (*TLSB*'s comment seems to run the animals and plants together, while this verse anyway refers to the reaction of the animals because of the plants' restoration.

*pastures ... tree ... vine*: affected by the locusts (for example, 1:7, 10, 12, 18-20).

2:23 *O children of Zion*: now the people of Jerusalem and Judah are commanded to join the land and beasts in being glad and rejoicing in the Lord their God, Who has with rain vindicated them and their faith (the "for you" can hardly be over appreciated). Keil-Delitzsch says the "sons of Zion" are mentioned as the representatives of the kingdom of Judah, all of which was afflicted by the locusts and all of which can now be glad and rejoice. (The Hebrew is masculine plural, and without a reason Luther says, "We must read 'sons,' not 'daughters'"; the ESV surprisingly does not give a text note.) Note the "object" of their worship and His action, and think of the "object" of our worship and what He has done. The NIV in the text has "autumn rains in righteousness" and in the margin has "the teacher for righteousness", and *CSSB* refers to the people at Qumran's calling their most-revered teacher "Teacher of Righteousness" as they saw prophesied here. Luther for one rejects that reading. (Keil-Delitzsch sees parallel threefold gifts for present and future: teacher for righteousness, destruction of the locusts, and return of the fruitful season; and outpouring of the Spirit, judgment upon heathen, and glorification of the people of God.)

*early ... latter rain*: the seasonal precipitation would be abundant as before (prior to the drought that may be described in preceding verses), reminding the people of God's graciousness and trustworthiness. Kretzmann explains the early rain's being right after seeding-time in the fall and the latter rain's being right before harvest in the spring, while Allen mentions the fall rain's soaking the ground before plowing and sowing and the spring's rain's bringing the crops to maturity. Allen also quotes Smith, "Rain and harvest are not merely physical benefits but religious sacraments: signs that God has returned to his people and that his zeal is again stirred on their behalf." (The term "latter rain" may be behind the name of, but should give no credence to, the "Latter Rain" movement within Pentecostalism after WW II, which expected an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the end times, presumably different from that outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Joel prophesies of in 2:28-32, which is seen as fulfilled on Pentecost. Confer the group 4Him's song "Great Awakening" [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Jxp\\_Tu88fc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Jxp_Tu88fc)].)

2:24 *threshing floors ... grain ... vats ... wine and oil*: perhaps moving past the green pastures and fruitful trees and vines to the harvesting and storing of their produce, if not to the impossibility of their storing (grain would not normally remain on the threshing floors, and vats, whether attached to the press or for storage, should not "overflow"). We might recall the demolished granaries of 1:17. Overflowing grace leads to overflowing vats, *TLSB* seems to suggest.

2:25 *years ... eaten*: “harvests lost to the locusts”, *TLSB* comments, and Keil-Delitzsch seems to find the restoration of what was lost over several in the abundance of what is provided in one year (confer Allen). Of course, each year’s harvest provided seed for the next year, so, even one year of locusts would have an impact of multiple years. Perhaps more than the harvests themselves are in view, however, as the people’s whole livelihoods would be affected by the loss of food and drink and such things as fuel for lamps (for example, sacrifices mentioned in 1:9 and 13). Roehrs-Franzmann calls the years “blank periods of ruin”.

*Swarming locust ... hopper ... destroyer ... cutter*: as in 1:4, where we noted possibilities of four kinds of locusts, four stages of locust development, or a poetic device’s emphasizing the destruction of successive swarms.

2:26 *eat in plenty and be satisfied*: confer 2:19 on their being sent grain, wine, and oil and being satisfied (also confer the Small Catechism’s table prayer’s use of Psalm 145:15-16, “You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (*Lutheran Service Book* 327)).

*praise the Name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you*: we know the Hebrew verb *halal* from “Hallelujah”, or “Alleluia”, for “praise the Lord”. Laetsch contrasts the preceding laments with these songs of praise. We should perhaps think of the restoration of thank and other offerings that had been cut off by the plague of locusts. The Name is not only “reputation”, “fame”, and “memory” but also “bears His being and power to save”. Note that He is praised not simply for Who He is but specifically for what He has done, as a result of Who He is. Again the “for you” can hardly be overappreciated. *CSSB* refers back to the wonders worked for the people in Egypt. In the case of Joel’s original hearers, the abundance of food and such after the locusts might have been primarily in view, but, in our case, primarily in view should be the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected.

*never again be put to shame*: Luther says “forever” or “to eternity” can simply be an “indefinite” time. The phrase here and again in 2:27 certainly could be mistaken for an absolute guarantee that we know did not hold true. *TLSB* says the phrase “assured God’s people that their enemies would never get the final word”, but that seems to misread what it says, though *TLSB* does see the promise ultimately fulfilled in the Messianic Age, such as on the Last Day when hunger and death no longer exist under the new sky on the new earth. Still, Joel’s hearers, including us today, should understand that God’s promises are always true in and of themselves but that our benefitting from those promises depends on our repentance (not that our repentance causes us to be rewarded, but it is an essential condition).

2:27 *You shall know that*: God’s prophecy and its fulfilment reveal to the people the following three things that they arguably otherwise would not and could not perceive on their own. Similarly, we believe that we cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him by our own reason or strength, but the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts. The knowledge may be that of experience, which can be consistent with God’s revelation of His Word especially in its sacramental forms.

*I am in the midst of Israel:* in this case at least Judah as Israel, or, *CSSB* suggests, “Israel” as all God’s people irrespective of the northern or southern kingdoms. *TLSB* notes that “God’s dwelling in the midst of His people is both the cause and a result of their salvation”, presumably meaning both that His presence causes their salvation, and that their ongoing repentance and so salvation results in His continued presence. We might think of “Immanu-El”, our “with-us God” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; 28:20), especially through His Word and Sacraments. The dwelling together, Allen suggests, is fellowship.

*I am the Lord your God and there is none else:* *CSSB* refers to the covenant at Sinai, as in Exodus 20:2. Passages such as John 14:4 and Acts 4:12 come to my mind. *TLSB* comments, “The Lord is the only God and Savior of Israel”, and He is also our only God and Savior. We who readily accept that there are no other living “gods” may underappreciate how quickly we can fear, love, and trust in other things, looking to them for all good and finding in them refuge in every time of need.

*My people shall never again be put to shame:* repeated for emphasis from 2:26. Allen comments, For an obedient people there is only the prospect of well-being, as long as they abide near the Fount of every blessing.” Roehrs-Franzmann concludes, “Life will be one harmonious whole, where man’s economy, his liturgy, and his theology will make one music to the glory of God.”

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

*TLSB*’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 2:18-27 says, “To be sure, the Lord will not tolerate rebellion, and He fully expects us to sincerely repent of our sins. Nevertheless, when we return to the Lord, He is faithful and just and forgives us all our unrighteousness” (confer Divine Service, Settings Two and Three’s use of 1 John 1:8-9).

Next time, October 08, Joel 2:28-32.

Closing Prayer & Benediction