

“All the Prophets Testify”: Joel 2:28-32

Midweek Bible Study – 2025 October 08

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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)
 1. **Salvation for the survivors who escape (2:28-32 [heading?])**
 2. Judgment of the Nations (3:1-21 [break between vv.8-9 and vv.16-17?])

The Lord’s Response to the Coming Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21 [note the use of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:1-16 {*CSSB* says “with a few variations from both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint”} and the use of Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13]):

2:28-29 *And it shall come to pass*: typical Old-Testament passive-voice speak for God’s actively bringing something about. Confer the use of the phrase at 2:30.

afterward ... those days: the phrasing would seem to suggest passage of time between the Lord’s response to the locust plague and His response to the Day of the Lord, but *TLSB* suggests the earthly abundance “will be accompanied by” a spiritual outpouring. The Day of the Lord can be understood more broadly as the Messianic Age leading up to the Last Day, but even that breadth of understanding can still be somewhat problematic given the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity prior to the Messianic Age, which to some extent touches on what follows. Regarding “afterward”, *CSSB* comments, “In the Messianic period, beyond the restoration just spoken of.” Luther discusses the inspired prophets’ skipping the intervening destruction of Israel. Roehrs-Franzmann notes that the Divinely-inspired Peter substitutes “in the last days” for Joel’s “afterward” (Acts 2:17), and Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “he is being true to the intention of the text”. (We might talk about fulfillment of prophecy, including “direct” or “single” fulfillment, sometimes called a “rectilinear” view, and the debate about “progressive” or “double” fulfillment.)

pour out ... pour out: *TLSB* notes that immersion is not specified and refers to its note at Matthew 28:19. Keil-Delitzsch refer to “communication in rich abundance, like a rain-fall or water-fall” (think of that which ended the drought after the locusts [confer Allen]), and Keil-Delitzsch seem to favorably quote Calvin’s statement that what was promised was greater than what was experienced before. Keil-Delitzsch refers to John 7:37-39, where the “giving” of the Spirit is said to not have occurred because Jesus was not yet glorified, and Keil-Delitzsch also refers to Acts 2:38-39, where Peter seems to describe repeated “givings” of the Spirit. Laetsch refers to “special gifts of the Spirit of God” and people’s refusal to drink.

my Spirit ... my Spirit: the Holy Spirit, Third Blessed Person of the Holy Trinity, equal everything as confessed in the Athanasian Creed, for example. Allen notes rabbinic teaching regarding the activity of the Holy Spirit. Joel’s prophecy is seen as fulfilled on the New Testament Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41), which may or may not rule out any other fulfillment (more on the fulfillment in the next bullet).

on all flesh: the Hebrew preposition translated “on” can be “for the sake of”, a meaning *TLSB* seems to allude to when it notes, “God’s judgment affected the entire nation of Judah (v 16). His promised future blessings will extend to all nations.” As Keil-Delitzsch note, “all flesh” does not include irrational animals. Our understanding of Pentecost, not to mention the work of the Spirit in general and the gifts of the Spirit for the Office of the Holy Ministry in particular, can relate to how we understand the prophecy Pentecost fulfills. (For example, were only the apostles present, and did only the apostles receive the Spirit, or were other men, women, and children present, and did they also receive the Spirit?) Luther in 1524 refers to all faithful people as “priests”, but, as controversy warranted, Luther later distinguished more carefully between the so-called “priesthood of the baptized”, or of “believers”, and the Office of the Holy Ministry. The next two groupings of lines seem to be essential at least to understanding Joel.

your sons ... daughters ... old men ... young men ... the male and female servants: *TLSB* comments, “No one is excluded on the basis of age, gender, or any other factor.” *CSSB* comments, “All will participate without regard to sex, age or rank; and then Moses’ wish (Nu 11:29) will be realized (cf. Gal 3:28).” *CSSB* further comments that Peter extends the “all” of this verse and the “everyone” of v.32 to the Gentiles, but seeing them ruled out in Joel is difficult (for example, note the initial “your” but then its absence). Different communication of the Spirit may be rhetorically distributed to each, but, as Keil-Delitzsch says, they are not limited to each.

prophecy ... dream dreams ... see visions: *TLSB* seems to see the prophecy, dreams, and visions all as related to God's will. *CSSB* refers back to Numbers 12:6, where prophecy, dreams, and visions are mentioned in distinction from Moses, to whom the Lord spoke face to face, and, we would add, Jesus, Who is God in human flesh (confer Hebrews 1:1-2, used in the liturgy of Evening Prayer, *LSB* 247). Rohers-Franzmann comments, "The people of God as a whole will become for mankind what the Spirit-empowered prophet has hitherto been for Israel: the declarer and the interpreter of the will and work of God. Thus Israel prepares the way for the judgment on the Day of the Lord; for prophets force a decision and create a division, as the example of Elijah on Mount Carmel shows (1 Kings 18:21). The Spirit exposes human sins and is the potent Convicter (Micah 3:89; confer John 17:7-11). Under the afflatus ["inspiration"] of the Spirit the prophets call humanity to repentance, as Peter did when Joel's prophecy found its last-days fulfillment. (Acts 2:14-40)" Kretzmann refers to people's "openly proclaiming the great deeds of God". Such prophetic a role for all the people of God towards the world does not exclude the prophetic role of the male-only Office of the Holy Ministry, either toward God on behalf of His people or towards His people on behalf of God. Presumably believers are meant as the recipients of these gifts, and unbelievers are the object of their work, though perhaps compare Luther, who brings in Jeremiah 31:33-34's mention of "all" knowing the Lord (confer Allen), and Luther also discusses what might be called a cessation of some spiritual gifts with the establishment of Holy Scripture.

2:30-31 *And I will show*: connected to the preceding but by the content clearly distinct as we understand the fulfillment, despite its quotation in Acts. (The shift from verse to prose may also be significant.) The Hebrew verb may emphasize "show" less than "give" or "bestow" or "grant". Luther talks about prophets' signs' confirming the presence of the Spirit, but on the Last Day such signs would seem to be too late, and Luther does go on to say, "Whoever wants to relate these signs to the final Day of Judgment will do this without any resistance from me." Allen notes that God's demonstration of power is on His people's behalf and is no threat to them at all.

wonders in the heavens and on the earth: what we usually call "signs" of the end, specifically the Last Day. We should think "sky" and "ground", and it seems that the first three that follow relate to the ground, while the next pair relates to the sky (confer Keil-Delitzsch and Laetsch).

blood and fire and columns of smoke: *CSSB* suggests the blood is from war and associates the fire and smoke with signs of God's presence, though we may not completely agree with the latter association, and to the former association we might add the water that is described as becoming blood in Revelation 16:4, for example. Keil-Delitzsch note that blood and fire recall the plagues upon Egypt, changing the water of the Nile into blood and, with the hail, falling balls of fire, so blood and fire are taken with bloodshed and war, as are pillars of smoke rising from burning towns in times of war.

The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood: *CSSB* says the moon will become “blood-red”. We might confer Revelation 6:12’s “like blood” (confer Luther). Jesus teaches similarly in the so-called “little” apocalypses (Laetsch lists Matthew 24:6-8, 29 ff. and Luke 21:9, 25-27; Allen points out how Jesus gave signs related to Jerusalem’s destruction and to His own return in glory). Keil-Delitzsch comments, “The darkening and extinction of the lights of heaven are frequently mentioned, either as harbingers of approaching judgment, or as signs of the breaking of the day of judgment”, and Keil-Delitzsch rules out “periodically returning phenomena of nature” and instead points more to “extraordinary (not ecliptic) obscurations of the sun and moon, such as frequently occur in accompaniments to great catastrophes in human history” (examples given include those caused by sunspots, trade-wind dust, and the like), which we would say ultimately point to the darkening/extinction of the Last Day. Allen refers to “a reddish obscuring of the moon through sandstorms and the like, whose color ominously suggested bloodshed.”

before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes: *TLSB* refers to cosmic disturbances that unmistakably signify the Last Day, though *TLSB* also notes signs given during the Lord’s ministry that revealed His judgment on His enemies and His salvation of His people, such as the earthquakes at His crucifixion and resurrection (Matthew 27:51; 28:2), which, it says, foreshadowed the Last Day (Allen connects the events related to darkness at the crucifixion and earthquakes with Peter’s use of the Joel text on Pentecost, noting that some people there may have witnessed those signs). As we have noted before the Last Day will be “awful” for unrepentant unbelievers but “awesome” for repentant believers (inspiring reverence or godly fear or awe).

2:32 *And it shall come to pass:* confer the use of the phrase in 2:28. We might ask to what extent, if at all, what follows was or was not the case already at the time of God’s prophecy through Joel and how however many different periods there are all fit together. For example, *TLSB* comments, “Though this promise was originally directed to the Judean people of Joel’s generation, Jesus extended it to all, including Gentiles, through His apostles”.

everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved: *TLSB* suggests “calls on” means speaking God’s name in prayer or repentance and that “saved” means victory over wickedness, and surely repentance leads to ultimate salvation. Laetsch connects back to the repentance after the locust plague. Luther comments, “Christ has always been the same; the faith of the devout has always been the same.” Allen connects the Old Testament Name of the Lord with the Name of Jesus, and, we might add, the Trinitarian Name. The sequence of people’s “calling” on the name of the Lord and of the Lord’s calling people to believe might in some sense be out of order. As *TLSB* notes, “all of those called by the Lord are given the gift of faith” (confer passages such as Romans 8:30, with the progression of predestined, called, justified, glorified; Luther points to Romans 10:13 ff. and to Paul’s exposition of Joel 2:32 there, which includes the need for sent preachers). Inner and outer worship should be understood. And, there seems to be no limit to ethnic Jews but also an inclusion of the ethnic Gentiles.

in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem ... among the survivors: God's chosen locations are mentioned in connection with those who truly are His people by repentance and faith, though there may also be unrepentant unbelievers in those places who also "survive" until the end. Apparently on "survivors", *TLSB* comments, "The saved are those who have been called by God's grace and delivered by Him", though notably the text seems to say the saved are "among" the survivors, suggesting that there are also others "among" the survivors who are not saved (confer the discussion of the following descriptions, if they are truly parallel). *CSSB* refers to Zechariah 13:8-9, where those left alive arguably all are those who call on the Lord. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, "The survivors will be those who have heeded His call and, in obedience to it, call upon the name of the Lord." (I suppose the Hebrew preposition translated "among" need not *necessarily* suggest there are any others "among" the survivors; though the construction differs, confer the idea of Exodus 14:28, not one among them.)

those who escape ... those whom the Lord calls: the elect the Lord calls will "escape" the judgment of the Last Day for eternal life. Laetsch comments, "the Church is the whole number of escaped ones". As the ESV text headings say, Joel 3:1-16 describes the Lord's judgment on the nations (though Roehrs-Franzmann separate out Joel 3:1-8 as the place of the people of God in the Judgment), and Joel 3:17-21 describes the glorious future of Judah, both arguably still part of the Lord's response to the Day of the Lord (there clearly is overlap even in the subsections as broken out [confer Keil-Delitzsch on the blending of the distinct features of Joel 2:28-3:21]).

As the Lord has said: *CSSB* suggests Joel is recalling the Lord's covenant with David and refers to 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 132:13-18.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB's Law and Gospel Application Note for 2:28-32 says, "Knowing that the Lord's judgment may come anytime, we should remain ever watchful and strive to be ready for that day. By His grace, the Lord enables us to do this very thing, as we call on Jesus' name and trust that He shall save us."

Next time, October 15, at least Joel 3:1-8.

Closing Prayer & Benediction