

Joel Lesson 25

We are still on our first pass through verses 28–32 of Joel 2, and in this first pass we are viewing these verses from the perspective of Joel’s listeners. Later, we will take a second pass through these verses, looking at them from the perspective of Peter’s listeners in Acts 2.

Joel 2:28-29, Continued

Joel 2:28–29 – “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

We have three more topics to consider in our first pass of these two verses: (1) a difficulty between these two verses and **Zechariah**; (2) a link between these two verses and **Moses**; and, (3) a link between these two verses and **locusts**.

A Difficulty with Zechariah

There is a big difficulty with these verses involving the book of Zechariah.

As we saw on the Handout for Lesson 24, there is a passage in Zechariah that I believe is parallel to the passage that we are studying here in Joel 2.

Zechariah 12:10 – And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Not only is the language very similar, but the timing is also very similar. Peter tells us in Acts 2:16 that Joel 2:28–29 is describing a first century event, and John 19:37 likewise tells us that Zechariah 12:10 is describing a first century event.

So what is the big difficulty? It is this – while Joel tells us that a period of prophecy will **occur** at this time, Zechariah tells us that prophecy will be **removed** at this time.

Zechariah 13:2–5 – And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off

the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. **And also I will remove from the land the prophets** and the spirit of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, but he will say, 'I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.'

How can we explain that? How can it be that prophecy both occurs and does not occur at the same time?

I think the answer is simple, and it is an answer that agrees both with what we find elsewhere in the Bible and with what find from our own experience today.

God does not speak to us today with prophecies, dreams, and visions. Instead, God speaks to us today through the written word that he has given us.

But when did that change occur? When did God quit speaking to Christians with prophecies, dreams,

and visions, and instead begin speaking to us only through his written word?

Doesn't that question answer itself? Wouldn't we expect God to make that change once we had the written word? And didn't we have the written word after the last book of the Bible was penned – most likely by the Apostle John around AD 80 or 90?

I think that Joel and Zechariah, taken together, are showing us a window of time during which God spoke to the church as he promises to do in Joel 2. And the Bible tells us that that window of time both opened and closed in the first century.

Joel shows the window opening, and Zechariah shows the window closing, and Peter and John told us that both of those prophecies were fulfilled in the first century.

And the Apostle Paul also tells us that.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 – Love never ends. **As for prophecies, they will pass away;** as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For **we know in part** and **we prophesy in part**, but **when the perfect comes**, the partial will pass away.

We prophecy in part? Prophecies will pass away? Isn't that just what we see in Joel (**we prophecy**

in part) and in Zechariah (**prophecies will pass away**)?

“When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.”

The Greek word translated “perfect” in that verse means “complete.” A literal translation of the Greek is that “when the **complete thing** comes, the **in-part thing** shall be done away.”

What is that “in-part thing”? Verse 9 tells us: “For we **know** in part and we **prophecy** in part.”

And so what then is the “complete thing”? It must be the completion of the in-part thing – that is, it must be the complete knowledge that comes from the complete revelation of God that we find in his Word.

And how do we know that the word of God is complete? Because it makes us complete. When we have the Bible, we don’t need another word from God to be complete and equipped for everything that we must do.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 – All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

When we look at all the Bible teaches on the subject, what we find is that there was a window of time during which God spoke to the church through prophecies, dreams, and visions. But that window closed when the last word of the Bible was penned near the end of the first century.

I'm not sure how we could explain the interaction of Joel and Zechariah in any other way. We know with certainty that both prophecies are focused on the first century, and we know with certainty that Joel promises a period of prophecy while Zechariah promises an end of prophecy.

Pentecostals, charismatics, and many others today tell us that this window has never closed – but is that what the Bible is telling us?

No, it is not. Zechariah tells us that this window closed in the first century. And Paul told us that as well.

A Link with Moses

There are two themes that we have been seeing as undercurrents in the book of Joel. One of those themes is Moses, and the other theme is locusts. Let's look first at how Moses is used as a theme in Joel.

First, we have the obvious connection of Moses with locusts.

Exodus 10:12-14 – Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. **The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again.**

No Jew could ever think about locusts without also thinking about Moses and the plagues against Egypt.

Second, we have also seen frequent allusions in Joel to the book of Deuteronomy, one of the books of Moses.

Deuteronomy 28 listed the punishments that would come if the people were disobedient and rebellious – and those punishments included locusts and a foreign invasion, both of which we have seen in Joel.

Third, I believe that we earlier saw a reference in Joel 2:23 to the great promise of Deuteronomy 18.

Deuteronomy 18:18 – I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Recall that the Hebrew word translated “early rain” in verse 23 can also mean “teacher. And we know that this coming prophet was Christ because that is what Peter tells us in Acts 3.

But what about verses 28–29 of Joel 2? Is there a link to Moses somewhere in these two verses?

Yes, I think there is. And if someone asked me to explain that link, I would answer with two words: Eldad and Medad!

There is an event from the life of Moses recorded for us in Numbers 11 that I think is directly relevant to the great promise that we are studying here in Joel 2:28–29. Let’s read it:

Numbers 11:23–30 – And the LORD said to Moses, “Is the LORD’s hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.” So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the

tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. Now two men remained in the camp, one named **Eldad**, and the other named **Medad**, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? **Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!**" And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

"Would that **all** the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit **on them!**" Doesn't that sound familiar?

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on **all flesh**; your sons and your daughters shall **prophesy**, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions."

We know that Moses was a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:18 just told us that. And I think we are seeing a prophecy from the prophet Moses in Numbers 11:

“Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

And I think we are seeing that same prophecy again here in Joel 2 as well as in the parallel passages that were shown on the Handout for Lesson 24.

And when would that happen? When would Moses’ prophecy be fulfilled? When could it be said that all the Lord’s people are prophets and that the Lord had put his Spirit on them? Didn’t Peter answer that question for us in Acts 2? That great prophecy of Moses was fulfilled in the church.

Moses is a theme in the book of Joel, and I don’t think we can properly understand Joel without recognizing those links to Moses. And I think our Old Testament scholar reading Joel 2 would have thought about Eldad and Medad, and so I think we should as well. This prophecy in Joel 2 had been part of God’s plan from long before the days of Joel!

A Link with Locusts

The second theme that we have seen in Joel is hardly a surprising one – locusts. In fact, some commentaries say that Joel is about nothing more than locusts. That view is wrong, of course, but

it does show that no one should be shocked to hear that locusts are a theme in the book of Joel.

In fact, we just mentioned locusts twice as we looked at the links between Joel and Moses. We were reminded of the plague of locusts in Exodus 10, and we were reminded of the punishment of locusts in Deuteronomy 28.

And so no one should be surprised to hear that locusts are a theme in the book of Joel. But what might be surprising is that I think locusts are **still** a theme in the book of Joel.

After all, we looked at some very strong evidence that the problem of locusts was just a Chapter 1 problem. Here in Joel 2, the problem was invading **people** rather than invading **locusts**.

But even then, we did not leave those locusts entirely behind. Instead, they continued lurking in the background as the text described the coming human army in ways that reminded the people of the terrible locust invasion that had just happened.

But what about now in these closing verses of Joel 2? What about these verses quoted by Peter in Acts 2? Are there still some locusts lurking in the background? Yes, I think there are.

At its root, the locust disaster in Joel 1 was an agricultural disaster.

Joel 1:10 – The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.

And, in an agricultural society, an agricultural disaster was a life and death matter. Locusts did not just bring a food shortage; they brought famine and death. And that was especially true in Joel where the locusts were followed by a terrible drought (Joel 1:20).

But then we got to Joel 2. And in that chapter, God commanded the people to repent, and he told them what would happen if they did repent.

Joel 2:23–26 – Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

In short, God would send them rain, and God would send them food. God would restore the years that the swarming locust had eaten.

But where is there such a link to locusts in verses 28–29?

The answer comes when we recognize that verses 28–29 were not written in a vacuum. These two verses are related to and come from the verses that precede them. God is not changing the subject here, but rather God is enlarging the subject.

And, as we have already seen, God is asking the people to look up from their physical perspective to instead see things from a spiritual perspective.

And what happens when we do that with a physical famine caused by locusts and drought? What spiritual insights do we see? I think there is another prophet who directly answers that question – Amos.

Amos 8:9–11 – “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land – **not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.**”

Yes, a lack of physical food and physical water is very bad – but it is nothing compared to a lack of spiritual food and spiritual water.

And, yes, the people should have been praying that God would pour down rain upon them, but more than anything they should have been praying that God would pour down spiritual blessings upon them.

And what do we even today experience when the rains come after a terrible drought? In a word, we experience refreshment.

And what word could we use to describe what we see in verses 28–29? Couldn't we use the same word – refreshment? And isn't that, in fact, the same word we see used in Acts 3 to describe the time when verses 28–29 were fulfilled?

Acts 3:19–21 – Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Times of **refreshing**! The drought is over! The rain has come! The storehouses are full! We can all eat and be satisfied! Yes, it is wonderful when we can say that after a physical drought –

but how much more wonderful when we can say that after a spiritual drought!

Yes, locusts are still a theme in Joel! Yes, agriculture is still a theme in Joel! But God has moved the discussion to the spiritual realm. And instead of rain pouring down from heaven, we find the Spirit of God pouring down from heaven!

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord!”

That statement by Peter in Acts 3:19–20 is a pretty good summary of the entire book of Joel!

We will come back to verses 28–29 when we look at Acts 2, but for now let’s move on to the next two verses, again looking at them first from the perspective of our Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments.

Joel 2:30-31

Joel 2:30–31 – “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”

Many commentators today tell us that verses 30–31 are all about the end of the world, and, in particular, about the great battle that, they tell us, will occur during the second coming of Christ. I think that view is completely wrong.

Why? **Because there will be no great battle at the end of the world.** We are **not** heading toward some cataclysmic battle between good and evil as so many false prophets proclaim today. There is nothing in the Bible to support that notion.

What the Bible teaches is that those opposed to Christ on the last great day will not be waging war but instead will be bending their knees. That last day will be a day of judgment, not a day of warfare. Jesus has already fought and won the war. There will not be another one.

And, after studying this far in the book of Joel, are we really expecting to see the end of the world here in verse 30? Is that what the context is telling us? Is that what the time frame is telling us?

Oh, but we must take everything literally, right? We hear that a lot, but does anyone do that with verse 30? **“The moon turned to blood?”**

Is that the *literal* moon and *literal* blood? If the answer is no, as I think it must be, then the

question is no longer whether we should take verse 30 literally. Instead, the question is what the figures of speech in verse 30 mean.

And let's save that question for later when we get to Acts 2. But, for now, let's just notice that there are two events in verse 30 – and it is not immediately clear whether or how those two events relate to the pouring out in verses 28–29. Here is what we have:

- In verses 28–29, God promises to pour his Spirit out on all flesh. That is our first event.
- In verse 30, God promises to show various wonders in the heavens and on the earth. That is our second event.
- And, finally, in verse 30, God promises to show those various wonders in the heavens and on the earth **before** the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. That great and awesome day is our third event.

As for the order of those events, the only thing we are explicitly told is that the second event would occur “before” the third event.

As for the timing of the events, Peter will say that “this is what was uttered through the prophet

Joel” and then proceed to read these verses from Joel. But what is “this” in Acts 2:16? Which event or events was Peter linking with Joel 2?

Those will be some of our questions when we take our second pass through these verses from the perspective of Acts 2 – but for now, let’s just do what we did with verses 28–29. Let’s ask the question of how our Old Testament scholar would have viewed these promises in verses 30–31.

For starters, I do not think our Old Testament scholar would have immediately thought about the end of the world. Why not? Because, being an Old Testament scholar, he would have known two very important facts about the language that is used here.

First, he would have known that such language is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe events that we know are not the end of the world.

For example, listen to Isaiah’s description of the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Medes.

Isaiah 13:10 – For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

That may sound like the end of the world, but it was not. Isaiah was telling us about the end of Babylon.

And second, our Old Testament scholar would have known that such language is used elsewhere (as it is here) to describe a day of the Lord, which he would have known does not automatically mean the end of the world.

For example, earlier in Joel we saw a day of the Lord that was not the end of the world.

Joel 1:15 – Alas for the day! For **the day of the LORD** is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

That day of the Lord was coming and was near, and that coming and near day of the Lord is the day described in the first part of Joel 2.

Joel 2:11 – The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For **the day of the LORD** is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

But then, later in Joel 2, God tells us what he would do “afterward.”

Joel 2:31 – The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome **day of the LORD** comes.

What does that mean? What it means is that we have at least two different days of the Lord in the book of Joel – one day of the Lord that was coming and that was near in Joel 1–2, and another day of the Lord that would come after the first day of the Lord and after the wonders described in verse 30.

So there can be more than one day of the Lord? Is that what we are saying? Yes, we are saying that, but more importantly the text of Joel itself just told us that!

And there is another thing that our Old Testament scholar would have understood about verse 31. He would have known that a very similar prophecy is found near the end of the Old Testament.

Malachi 4:5 – Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

I suspect that verse would have caused our Old Testament scholar living between the Testaments to believe that the great promise of Joel 2:30–31 had not yet come to pass but was yet future in his day.

Today, we can read Malachi 4:5 and then turn the page to read Matthew 1, but our Old Testament scholar was not able to do that. All he could do was what he did – remain faithful to God while awaiting the promised Messiah and his eternal kingdom.

We will return to these verses when we get to Acts 2.

Joel 2:32

Joel 2:32 – And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

We saw three events in verses 28–31, some of which may be the same event. Here we see a fourth event that would come to pass – “that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

And we are given a further description of that event: “For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”

And we have many questions, some of which will hold until we get to Acts 2. But we should note that the entirety of verse 32 is not quoted by Peter in Acts 2. Instead, Peter ends his quotation of Joel with the first sentence in verse 31: “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Let's look at verse 31 from an Old Testament perspective.

First, we have the timing: "And it shall come to pass."

Verse 28 described something that "shall come to pass afterward," and verse 32 describes something that "shall come to pass."

Is the event in verse 32 included with the event in verse 28, or does this event in verse 32 occur after the event in verse 28?

We aren't told, but perhaps we can say that the failure of the text to again say "afterward" suggests that this event in verse 32 is a part of rather than after the event in verse 28, but we can't say that for sure at this point.

In fact, the timing of these events remains difficult. There are two words in these verses related to the timing and the order of these events: "afterward" in verse 28 and "before" in verse 31. But we still have questions despite the appearance of those two words. We saw that with verse 31, and we are still seeing it here in verse 32.

Let's wait until we get to Acts 2 – maybe we will find some answers there.

Next, we have the promise: “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

As we said, Peter’s quotation of Joel 2 in Acts 2 ends with this phrase.

What would our Old Testament scholar have thought about that promise? How would he have viewed “calling on the name of the Lord”? And how would he have viewed being “saved”?

When we read that sentence, we are immediately thinking about many New Testament verses, but what about someone who did not yet have the New Testament? What would he have thought?

He might have viewed this salvation as a physical salvation from an earthly enemy. If he had, I suspect he would have had a lot of company. I think many Jews expected the Messiah to appear as a warrior king to physically save them from the earthly kingdoms of this world.

Is that what this Old Testament scholar would have expected, or would he instead have expected the Messiah’s entrance into this world as a baby who would grow up to face a death by crucifixion at the hands of one of those earthly kingdoms?

And, yes, we know that those aspects of Christ’s life had been prophesied, but can we assume that

our Old Testament scholar would have understood those prophecies?

We understand them, but that's because they have been explained to us and because we can read the evidence of their fulfillment. But what about our hypothetical scholar who lived and died before there was a New Testament?

Later, when we get to Acts 2, we will see that this salvation was the reason why Jesus came and the reason why his kingdom was established as it was and when it was. But I suspect that wonderful truth would likely have been just a mystery to many who lived prior to the time of Christ.

Let's be thankful that's not us! We have the truth, and we can know the truth. The mystery of redemption is no longer a mystery for us.

Ephesians 1:7-10 – In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight **making known to us the mystery of his will**, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Let's come back to the topic of that mystery when we get to Acts 2. Perhaps when we get there it won't be a mystery at all!

Next, we have a further description of that promise: "For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls."

Two words immediately stand out in that verse: "escape" and "survivors." We have seen only one of those words so far in this book, and then only once.

Joel 2:3 – Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing **escapes** them.

That verse told us that nothing would escape this terrible army that was coming and that was near, but here in verse 32 we are told that some will escape whatever is happening here.

Who are these escaping people in verse 32? And from what are they escaping?

Let's start by looking at the Hebrew words used here.

The Hebrew word translated "escape" in verse 32 (Strong's #6413) is used earlier in verse 3 (as

we said) and is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament:

Ezra 9:8 – But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a **remnant** (#6413) and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery.