

Joel Lesson 22

Joel 2:22

Joel 2:22 – Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

As we saw earlier, restoration is a key theme in the second half of Joel, and we see that theme again here in verse 22.

Let's think back about what we saw earlier. Back in Joel 1:18, animals were crying out in agony, and, in Joel 1:7, the trees had been stripped bare.

But what do we see happening now? We see a complete reversal. We see a restoration. Those suffering beasts now receive a promise of relief, and those bare trees are promised fruitfulness. And, once again, we see the command to fear not, which we also saw in verse 21.

And why is the text here so concerned about animals and trees?

I think one reason is the same reason we discussed earlier – that at the end of Joel 1 God was showing us a breakdown of the created order: the animals were dying, the plants were dying, and the good

order of seed time and harvest had been disrupted. It was as if creation itself was being reversed as chaos was making a come-back.

And, as we also said earlier, that theme of reversing creation often accompanies descriptions of the day of the Lord. In fact, we saw it earlier in this second chapter of Joel.

Joel 2:10 – The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

But now, in verse 22, we are seeing what would happen if the people repented. And one thing that would happen is that God would restore the proper created order. Things would once again be the way God wanted them to be – with well-fed beasts and people enjoying the abundance of the land.

That is God's will for his creation, but Satan has other ideas. Our sin and rebellion cause not only us to suffer, but all creation to suffer as well. That *may be* Paul's point in Romans 8.

Romans 8:19 – For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain

the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

I say that it “may be” Paul’s point because it is possible that the “creation” in Romans 8 is the “new creation” of the church (2 Corinthians 5:17) – but, either way, I think the main point remains the same: Sin and rebellion leads to the suffering of all creation.

We certainly see that suffering of all creation with the entry of sin into the world.

Genesis 3:17-18 – And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ **cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.**

And I think we see that same suffering in Joel was well – but here the promise is that *all creation* would be blessed and restored if the people repented.

And, of course, we know that those blessings are enjoyed today in the church. It is in the church that we can once again enjoy the perfect peace with God and with each other that was enjoyed in the Garden.

Isaiah 65:24-25 – “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Joel 2:23-24

Joel 2:23-24 – “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. 24 “The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

Verse 23 is one of the most important verses in Joel 2 – and I realize that is saying a lot given the importance of the verses that we will see at the end of Joel 2!

And, again, what do I mean by “important”? What I mean is that verse 23 has a strong link to what we see in the New Testament – verse 23 is important to our understanding of the New Testament.

But, on the surface, verse 23 may not look all that important. And we could certainly interpret verse 23 in a way that is entirely local in time

and place – in a way that is unrelated to what was coming. Be glad and rejoice! Why? Because you have been in a drought, but I am about to make it rain.

But is that all that is going on here? Is verse 23 just a weather report? I don't think so. I think there is much, much more going on here in verse 23.

And I think we can see that in two different ways – one of which is *obscured* by our English translation, but the other of which is *highlighted* by our English translation. Let's start with the latter of those two points.

I think that our English translations of verse 23 highlight a connection for us that might have been harder to spot in the original Hebrew. How? By the use of the word "poured" – "he has **poured** down for you abundant rain."

While we do not see the same *Hebrew* word later in Joel 2, we do the same *English* word later in our translations of Joel 2 – "I will **pour** out my Spirit" in verse 28 and in verse 29.

And, based on the lexicons, I think it is correct that the two Hebrew words both mean "pour."

- The Hebrew word “yarad” (Strong’s #3381) in verse 23 means to go downward or to descend, and so when paired with “abundant rain” it refers to rain pouring down.
- The Hebrew word “sapak” (Strong’s #8210) that we will see later in verses 28 and 29 means to spill forth or to gush out as with water (Exodus 4:9) or with blood (Genesis 9:6).

Here, in Joel 2, God is the source of both – God pours down the rain in verse 23, and God pours out his Spirit in verses 28–29.

So why the two different Hebrew words? I think both words are pointing to God in different ways – one by pointing to the *direction* of the pouring, which gives us the source *indirectly* (down from God or down from heaven in verse 23), and the other by pointing *directly* to the *source* of what is poured (out of God or out of heaven).

And I am saying that this pouring down of rain in verse 23 is the same as the pouring out of the Spirit in verses 28–29? No, I am not saying that.

All I am saying is that this pouring down of rain in verse 23 should make us start thinking about the pouring out of the Spirit that we will see twice later in this same chapter.

All I am saying is that these verses have a related theme. Just as earlier verses caused us to start thinking about the church, I think this verse should cause us to start thinking about the Spirit.

And I think that view is confirmed by Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:3 – For I will **pour water** on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will **pour my Spirit** upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

And, by the way, Isaiah uses yet a third Hebrew word meaning “pour” – the word “yasaq” (Strong’s #3332).

So that is one reason why verse 23 is so important – because verse 23, like Isaiah 44:3, compares the pouring out of rain with the pouring out of the Spirit.

And there is also a second reason why I think verse 23 is so important. But while that first reason was *highlighted* by our English translations, this second reason is *obscured* by those same translations.

Here, again, is the ESV translation of verse 23.

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.

Let's focus on that phrase in the middle: "he has given the early rain for your vindication." Here are some other translations of that phrase:

- (KJV) "for he hath given you the former rain moderately"
- (LSB) "for He has given you the early rain in **righteousness**"
- (YLT) "for He hath given to you **the Teacher** for righteousness"

Now, that's interesting. The Young's Literal Translation of verse 23 has the word "teacher" in place of the phrase "early rain." Where did that come from?

The answer is that it came straight from the Hebrew. The Hebrew word "moreh" (Strong's #4175) in verse 23 can mean either "teacher" or "early rain." You can see the definition on the Handout for Lesson 22.

How is that Hebrew word used elsewhere in the Bible? Well, it is found in two other places – and one of those places uses it to mean **rain**, while the other uses it to mean **teacher**.

Psalm 84:6 – As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the **early rain** also covers it with pools.

Proverbs 5:13 – I did not listen to the voice of my **teachers** or incline my ear to my instructors.

Those two verses confirm that the same Hebrew word can mean either “early rain” or “teacher.” But what is the meaning of the word here in verse 23?

On one hand, we might very easily conclude that it means “early rain” given the context of verse 23. That verse is all about rain, and there is nothing in the immediate context about teachers. Most English translations see the situation that way, and so they translate the word as “early rain.”

But, on the other hand, perhaps we should look at another Hebrew word in verse 23 – the word translated “vindication” in the ESV. Let’s take a closer look at that word.

The Hebrew word is “daqa” (Strong’s #6666), and I think it is better translated as “righteousness” than as “vindication.” In fact, that word is found 157 times in the Bible, and the KJV translates it as “righteousness” in 128 of those instances. The basic meaning of the word is “rightness.”

And so here is our question: what is the relationship between “early rain” and “righteousness”?

The ESV apparently had some trouble with that same question, which I suspect is why they chose the word “vindication” in place of the word “righteousness.”

But, rather than doing that, let’s consider another possibility – maybe the text is, in fact, talking about a **teacher of righteousness**.

Does that mean we have to reject the “early rain” translation? Not at all – it just means that we may be looking at an intended double meaning here.

The Hebrew word is ambiguous absent context – it can mean either rain or teacher. But maybe that ambiguity was intentional here – maybe we are supposed to see rain on the surface, but we are also supposed to see a teacher when we look below the surface.

And don’t we see examples of that elsewhere in the Bible? Statements that have both an immediate physical meaning as well as a deeper spiritual meaning?

- “Give us this day our daily bread.”
- “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”
- “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.”

And we could find many more examples. In fact, we may even find an example in the immediate context of verse 23 as we continue studying Joel 2. (Hint: Look at verse 26 below!)

Here is how one commentary describes the possible situation here in verse 23:

The surface or immediate meaning is that God will vindicate the Jews in the presence of the nations by sending rains to heal their land. At the same time, it seems, Joel used a wordplay to hint that the salvation of the nation would come from a teacher of righteousness.

I think that view is the correct view. I think we are intended to see, not just early rain, but also a teacher of righteousness here in verse 23.

Why is that my view? I can answer question with a single word: **Deuteronomy**.

All throughout Hosea and now all throughout Joel, both prophets have been using Deuteronomy as a framework for what they are proclaiming. The people were living through the promised curses in Deuteronomy and were failing to enjoy the promised blessings in Deuteronomy because they were engaging in the sin and rebellion condemned in Deuteronomy.

But what else does Deuteronomy tell us?

Deuteronomy 18:15 – The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – **it is to him you shall listen.**

And, of course, we know the identity of that promised prophet.

Matthew 17:2-5 – And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him.**”

It is to him you shall listen! Listen to him!

The promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18 was Christ, the Messiah. And if Joel 2:23 is telling the people about a promised teacher of righteousness, then that teacher is also Christ, the Messiah. And, again, that would mean that we are seeing yet another link between Joel and Deuteronomy, which should not surprise anybody.

But is there any more evidence that verse 23 is intended to make us think both about rain and about

a teacher? Yes, there is – and that additional evidence comes from Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple.

1 Kings 8:35–36 – When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, **when you teach them the good way in which they should walk, and grant rain upon your land**, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

The Hebrew word “yara” (Strong’s #3384) translated “teach” in 1 Kings 8:36 means “to flow like water.” Solomon linked rain with teaching when the temple was dedicated – and I think we are seeing that same linkage here in verse 23.

But Solomon is not alone. The prophets also link rain with right teaching.

Isaiah 30:20–23 – And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your **Teacher** will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your **Teacher**. ... And he will give **rain** for the seed with which you sow the ground, and bread, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous.

Amos 8:11 – “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.”

Hosea 10:12 – Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and **rain righteousness** upon you.

Should we be surprised to find Joel telling us about the Messiah in verse 23? Of course not. Why? Because we know with certainty that Joel will soon be telling us about the establishment of the Messiah’s eternal kingdom just a few verses later!

So, with all of that background, what are verses 23–24 saying?

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.

God is telling the people to rejoice and be glad because of what is coming – and I think also because of **who** is coming. “He has given the early rain for your vindication.” “For He hath given to you the Teacher for righteousness.”

And, yes, that rain in verse 23 was a gift from God, and that grain, wine, and oil in verse 24 were gifts from God, but God's greatest gifts were yet to come – and I think these verses are also looking forward to those greatest gifts.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Acts 2:38 – And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the **gift** of the Holy Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 9:15 – Thanks be to God for his inexpressible **gift**!

When we read verse 23, what do we see? We see God **giving**, and we see God **pouring**.

And what do we see when we open the pages of the New Testament? We see the same thing – we see God **giving**, and we see God **pouring**.

As I said, verse 23 is one of the most important verses in Joel! The great blessings that we see in verses 23–24 are pointing us to the great spiritual blessings that we enjoy today in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ **with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.

Joel 2:25

Joel 2:25 – 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.

Back in Lesson 3, we looked at some important lessons that we could learn from the book of Joel, and one of those lessons was the importance and the possibility of restoration.

And the verse we looked at for that important lesson was verse 25, which we just read. This verse contains one of the most beautiful promises found anywhere in the Bible.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...

Yes, God can restore time! We can't restore time, but God can! Yes, the troubles will come, but we can be made new! God can restore what we have lost – even if what we have lost is time! “I will restore to you the **years** that the swarming locust has eaten.”

But **how** does God restore time? How can God restore the wasted years?

I don't think we need to look to physics or to time travel to answer that question. And, likewise, I

don't think we need to look to the 15 years that God miraculously added to the life of King Hezekiah.

Instead, I think God can restore our lost time by restoring us! Like Shakespeare, we may be saying, "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me!" But God can change all of that.

God can restore me so that I will have a different relationship with time. God can make time my friend rather than my enemy!

God can give me eternal life so that hand of the clock is no longer the hand of a cruel taskmaster. God can lift up my eyes so that I can see the big picture – a picture that stands apart from time and that includes me living eternally with God!

God can remove the tyranny of time. When I am in Christ, the clock is no longer counting the days until my death – but rather that clock is counting the days until my life! That clock is ticking down the time until the hour and the minute and finally the second when I close my eyes in this world and open them in the next to live eternally with God.

And if that isn't a restoration of the wasted years, then I don't know how else to describe it!

When it comes to time, our prayer should be the same as that of the Psalmist.

Psalm 90:12 – So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

I think that great lesson of restoration is an important spiritual lesson that we can learn from verse 25. But let's also look at the more immediate and more localized meaning of verse 25.

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.

And the first thing we notice is that the text is most definitely talking about locusts here in verse 25.

Does that mean Joel 2 has been talking about locusts all along? No. It does not.

First, perhaps we should note that in a book that is sometimes said to be about nothing but locusts, the word "locust" occurs in only two verses – here in Joel 2:25 and in Joel 1:4.

And second, we should note again what we just observed – that there is no mistaking the fact that locusts are being discussed here in verse 25. Joel uses the word "locust."

Was that also the case earlier in Joel 2? No, it was not. This is the first time we have seen the word "locust" in Joel 2.

Perhaps that fact should tell us what we likely already know – when God is talking about locusts, God can do that very plainly – as he does here in Joel 2:25 and as he did back in Joel 1:4.

But God does not do that earlier in Joel 2. God never says, as he did in Joel 1, that this coming invasion would be a locust invasion. Instead, if we are looking for the plain description of what was coming, what we find is “a great and powerful **people**” in Joel 2:2.

And, again, I think we are intended to read Joel 2 and to think about the locusts that we just saw in Joel 1. I think the error comes when we read Joel 2 and think **only** about locusts. If we do that, then I think we have missed the boat about Joel 2, and we have also left ourselves without any explanation for the judgment that we will see in Joel 3. Why would the nations be judged for a *locust* invasion?

But, some might say, verse 25 refers to those locusts as “my great army!” Doesn’t that prove that the army in Joel 2 is an army of locusts? No, it does not.

Yes, the locusts were an army sent by God, but nowhere does God say that these locusts were his **only** army. I think we have already seen another army in this chapter – the “great and powerful

people” in Joel 2:2 that are called God’s army in Joel 2:11.

And remember what we saw in verse 20 – we saw the villain of Joel 2 described as a “northener” who was acting like he was God – he was arrogant. Could that be true of a locust? Have you ever met an arrogant locust?

God can have two armies, and I think he does here in Joel. We have the army of locusts in Joel 1:6, and we have the army of people in Joel 2:2 (that in some ways should remind us of the army of locusts from Joel 1).

And if we had any doubt at all about whether God was behind that locust invasion in Joel 1 – we no longer have that doubt. Verse 25 is very clear on that point: God calls those locusts “**my great army, which I sent among you.**”

As we said earlier, God sent those locusts to teach the people a lesson and to warn them about something else that was coming.

But why does God tell them that he would restore what the **locusts** did but not tell them that he would restore what the **invading human army** did?

Simple – **the invading human army hadn’t done anything yet!** In fact, what God is telling the people here is what he would do if they repented – and

one thing he would do if they repented was that he would remove the northerner far from them.

That is, if they repented then there would be nothing to restore after the northern invasion because that northern invasion would never have occurred.

But the locust invasion had already occurred. God could not prevent the locusts from coming because the locusts had already come. But God could restore what the people had lost because of those locusts.

One last point about verse 25 – the word order for the four locust types is different here in verse 25 from what we saw in Joel 1:4.

- **Joel 1:4** – cutting locust, swarming locust, hopping locust, and destroying locust.
- **Joel 2:25** – swarming locust, hopping locust, destroying locust, and cutting locust.

Can we conclude anything from that difference? Likely not, although it may be noteworthy that the lists are arranged so that the **cutting** locust is both the first and the last locust that we meet in Joel.

That Hebrew word “gazam” (Strong’s #1501) translated “cutter” in Joel 2:25 and translated “cutting locust” in Joel 1:4 is found in only one other verse in the Bible.

Amos 4:9 – “I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees **the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me,**” declares the LORD.

And likewise here, I think the question is the same: the locust devoured – but would the people return to God? In Amos, they did not. Would they in Joel? That may be why God closes verse 25 with that particular locust.

But, with that said, I think the **number** is likely more important here than the **order**. We see **four** words for locust here, and, as we have said, the number four is often used in the Bible as a symbol for the earth. These locusts are an **earthly** army sent by God, just as surely as the Babylonians and the Assyrians were **earthly** armies sent by God.

Joel 2:26

Joel 2:26 – “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.

Verse 26 describes the great blessings that would follow the restoration in verse 25.

“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”

As we said when we looked at verse 23, verse 26 is an example of a statement in the Bible that has a surface physical meaning along with a deeper spiritual meaning. And perhaps this statement in verse 26 is additional evidence that we were intended to see both the rain (the physical blessing) and the Messiah (the spiritual blessing) in verse 23.

Here the people are promised all they can eat after the restoration from God occurs. And, as we said, that statement is true on two different levels.

On one level, they will have all the *physical* food that they can eat. God will restore their crops and restore their rainfall, and so they will have physical food in abundance.

But, on another level, and especially if they were just told about the Messiah in verse 23, the people would have all the *spiritual* food that they can eat.

Ephesians 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.

Romans 8:32 – He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

But some commentaries disagree. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about locusts. They

tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about lost crops and a terrible drought. And so they tell us that Joel here is just promising physical rain and physical crops to satisfy a physical hunger.

And what do I say in response to those commentators? I say that they are dead wrong!

God is always asking us to lift up our eyes from this physical world to see the unseen spiritual world – and this book of Joel is no different.