

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Promises

January 2023

Winter Quarter

January 28, 2023

Lesson #4 – God Promises His Presence

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Joel 2:21-27

ICE BREAKERS-

1. Why is it important to rejoice in the Lord?
2. How can focusing on Jesus' promises (2 Corinthians 12:9-10), provision (Phillipians 4:19), forgiveness (1 John 1:9), and humility (Hebrews 9:26) serve to break the power of shame?

Key Verse: “Ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”— Joel 2:27

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Several uncertainties surround the composition of the book of Joel. The book opens by stating that what follows is “the word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel” (Joel 1:1). The name Joel was common in the Old Testament era (examples: 1 Chronicles 4:35; 5:4, 12; 6:33, 36; 7:3; 11:38; 15:7; 27:20; 2 Chronicles 29:12; Ezra 10:43; Nehemiah 11:9). Beyond the prophet's name and the name of his father, other personal details regarding this specific Joel are unavailable to us.

Several possibilities exist regarding the composition date of the book of Joel. Traditional interpretations date it to the ninth century BC. The era of King Joash (ruled 835–795 BC) is frequently listed as a possible backdrop for Joel's prophecy (see 2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24).

However, other theories place the book in a postexilic context, after 538 BC. If Joel wrote in this context, then he was lamenting what had happened to Jerusalem (Joel 3:17) and held hope for God's vengeance against foreign aggressors (3:1–16). Some details behind the composition of the book of Joel may never be discovered. That fact should not dissuade modern readers from taking seriously the prophet's warnings and promises.

Joel directed his prophetic message to the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem (Joel 2:21). The book opens by describing a plague of insects that destroyed the crops of Judah (1:2–12, 17–20; 2:1–11). The once fruitful land of Judah became barren by the destructive insects. Because of the land's desolation, the people of Judah lived in famine and in want. Joel interpreted the destruction

as the consequences of Judah's sin, and he called his audience to return to the Lord and repent (2:12–14; compare 2 Chronicles 6:28–31; Amos 4:6–11).

The Lord saw the turmoil in the land and the suffering of His people. Though the people had sinned, He had compassion for them (compare Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17). The Lord was “jealous for his land” and showed “pity” for His people (Joel 2:18). He demonstrated His care by promising His people renewed sustenance (2:19) and protection from foreign enemies (2:20). His renewal would cause His people and their land to prosper. Because of His compassion, His greatness would be on display for His people and the whole world.

LESSON COMMENTARY

2:21–22. The **land** and the **beasts** are told, **do not fear** but **rejoice and be glad**. Here Joel describes the blessing associated with the Jewish people's eschatological return to their land. As elsewhere in the prophets, the blessing on the land is synonymous with the **great things** the Lord has done for His people, indicating that more than agricultural blessing is in view (cf. Is 54:4; Jr 30:10; Zph 3:16, 17).

2:23. A clue to this greater blessing described here is in the phrase **the early rain for your vindication**. At issue is whether the Hebrew phrase *hamoreh litsdaqah*, should be translated as “early rain for your vindication” (as in the NASB and various other English translations) or as “the teacher of/for righteousness.” The basis for translating this as **early rain for your vindication** is that the word *moreh* is found in the second half of the verse where it does indeed mean **the early rain**. But, for several reasons, the use of the word “rain” (*moreh*) in the second half of the verse does not compel translating it that way in the first part. (1) Even though *moreh* is indeed used in the second half of the verse to mean rain, it is an extremely unusual form—the normal form would be *yoreh*. (2) It seems that the author is using a deliberate play on words, indicating that when the teacher (*hamoreh*) came, so would the early rain (*moreh*). (3) Translating the word *litsdaqah* as “vindication” is virtually impossible. It is a moral/ethical term meaning “righteousness” and cannot describe rain.

The more likely translation should be “the teacher of/for righteousness,” for several reasons. First, the word *moreh* in the singular form is used eight times in the OT and is translated “teacher” in all cases (cf. 2:23; 2Kg 17:28; 2Ch 15:3; Jb 36:22; Is 30:20 [2 times]; Hab 2:18, 2:19). Further, it is translated as “teacher” in several ancient texts (the Vulgate, the Targum, the Greek Symmachus and the DSS). Second, Joel's use of the definite article with “the teacher” (*hamoreh*) indicates that it is speaking of a particular person. Third, the pairing of “the teacher” with the word “righteousness” and with the preposition “to” or “for” indicates that this teacher personifies righteousness.

Hence, Jl 2:23 indicates that the blessings described here will occur when God the Father will send the Messiah, “the Teacher of Righteousness” to the people of **Zion**, who should **rejoice ... and be glad**. At the same time, God will send blessing to Israel in the form of the early (fall) and latter (spring) rains. Isaiah provides a parallel idea, predicting an eschatological Teacher who will guide Israel (cf. Is

30:20), and when He comes, God will send rain (Is 30:23). For a complete discussion, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 139–42, 172–73.

Jesus called Himself Teacher (Mt 10:25; 26:18; Jn 13:13), as did His followers (Mk 4:38; 9:38; 10:35) and opponents (Mt 9:11; 12:38; 22:16). Of the 90 times Jesus was addressed directly in the gospels, 60 times He was called “Teacher.”

2:24–25. The blessings will include **threshing floors ... full of grain** and **vats overflowing with the new wine and (olive) oil**. The future blessing of the Lord will **make up to you for the years** destroyed by the **great army** that the Lord sent in judgment.

2:26–27. The result will be **plenty to eat**, and they will **praise the name of the LORD [their] God Who has dealt wondrously** with His people as He did at the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Ex 7:3). The assurance that they **will never be put to shame** (twice for emphasis) awaits fulfillment in the millennial kingdom (cf. Is 45:17; 49:23). The purpose of the restoration is that they **will know that [God is] in the midst of Israel** (cf. Ex 6:7; Dt 5:6; Is 43:3; Ezk 20:5), that He is their **God**, and that **there is no other**.

LESSON NUGGET – God offers people hope. He remains opposed to the proud and will destroy the wicked, but He preserves the humble and shows grace to those who repent (Proverbs 3:34). As you consider the state of the world today and its prospects for the future, lay hold of God’s promise of hope. Always remember: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32)

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, The Word In Life Study Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*