

## Joel

Major events tend to get our attention

- Wars
- Outbreak of disease
- Earthquakes, hurricanes, or tornadoes
- Bad health reports from friends or family

For the prophet Joel, a major event took place in the land of Judah nearly 800 years before the birth of Christ

- We will look at this major event, Joel and his prophecy

We don't know much about the man Joel

- There are several men who are given the name "Joel" throughout the Bible

The first verse tells us that he is "the son of Pethuel"

- Beside this, there is not much biographical information that we know about him or his family

We do know that Joel means "Yahweh is God"<sup>17</sup>

- The book does have a strong emphasis on God and His character
- This book will highlight the sovereign work of God throughout history

Joel also doesn't give a lot of hints about the time period in which he ministered

- He doesn't mention the northern kingdom
- He refers to priests, but not kings
- He doesn't refer to Babylon or Assyria

But there are explanations for these absences<sup>18</sup>

- Joel doesn't have to mention the northern kingdom. This man was a prophet to the southern kingdom – he didn't have to know what was going on up north; that wasn't his audience!
- Other earlier prophets (Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, and Habakkuk) omit references to kings
- Assyria and Babylon had not yet come into their positions of power; therefore, there was no need to deal with them at the current time

It seems that from these hints that a date somewhere in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. would be appropriate for Joel's ministry

---

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Alan B. Stringfellow, *Through the Bible In One Year*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 240-41.

The book of Joel also does not mention the sin of idolatry

- This would fit in nicely with the early reign of Joash when he purged the nation of Baal worship

From these facts, we come to realize that Joel ministered around the same time as Elisha!<sup>19</sup>

I will outline the book of Joel as follows

- Historical judgment (1:1-20)
- Transition (2:1-17)
- Future judgment (2:18-3:21)

### **I. Historical judgment (1:1-20)**

During the life and ministry of Joel, disaster strikes

- A sudden and swift attack hits the southern kingdom of Judah

This attack was not a major political power like Babylon or Assyria

- Rather, this attack was from locusts

These locusts devour every living thing in their path

- They are so plenteous in number that their presence appears as a black cloud that blocks the sun<sup>20</sup>

Locusts are quite destructive little creatures

- They can devour a 90 mile area in one day<sup>21</sup>

Let's put that in perspective

- From Huntsville to Nashville
- Or Huntsville to Birmingham

God sometimes uses real, literal events in the life of a prophet to point toward other realities

- Hosea was a great example of this

Hosea's marriage to unfaithful Gomer was a great example of the nation of Israel

- Like Gomer, Israel was unfaithful in her intimate relationships

Joel doesn't deal with the marriage relationship

- But the real event of the locust attack was used of God to point to a future time of distress and devastation

---

<sup>19</sup> Gerard Chrispin, *The Bible Panorama*, 366.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkinson & Boa, 240.

<sup>21</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 72.

Joel takes this current event and uses it to point to a greater, future event of God's vengeance

- The attacks of the locusts would serve to highlight the awful time when God Himself would vindicate His righteousness over sin

Let's look at chapter 1 to see this description of the locusts

- 1:4 mentions the "gnawing locust", "swarming locust", "creeping locust", and "stripping locust"
- These could be either different species of locusts or different stages of locust development

We can see the devastation of these locusts

- 1:5, 7 – the vine was destroyed, so there was a shortage of wine
- 1:6 – these locusts are compared to a lion's teeth
- 1:8 – the various offerings could not be presented to the Lord due to a shortage
- 1:11 – farmers suffered a lack of crops

God commands the priests to call for a fast (1:14)

- They were to lead the people in calling out to the Lord
- Only He could help to remedy the situation

Verse 15 is the first mention of the term "the day of the Lord"

- This phrase is mentioned several times in this book (1:15; 2:1, 2, 10, 11, 30, 31; 3:14-16)
- This phrase is the main theme of the book of Joel

This phrase "the day of the LORD" is used 19 times by 8 different Biblical writers<sup>22</sup>

- So it isn't unique to the book of Joel

We must understand that "the day of the LORD" does not imply a 24 hour period of time

- Rather, when Joel speaks of this "day," he is referring to an unspecified period of time

It is my understanding that "the day of the LORD" begins with the Great Tribulation and extends through the Millennial Kingdom<sup>23</sup>

- It would be a time of unparalleled judgment upon the people and the Earth itself
- This judgment would come because of the rebellion and sinfulness of mankind against the holy God

This "day" includes elements of both destruction and deliverance

- It is destruction for those who reject the Lord
- It is deliverance for those who receive the Lord

---

<sup>22</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 228.

<sup>23</sup> Stringfellow, 92.

“the day of the LORD” is frequently associated with earthly disturbances<sup>24</sup>

- Violent weather
- Clouds with thick darkness
- Upheaval of the cosmos

## II. Transition (2:1-17)

Chapter 1 details the physical destruction of the locusts

- Chapter 2 begins to discuss the spiritual destruction

God uses the analogy of the locusts to foreshadow the destruction that He would bring in the future

- The damage of the locusts was great
- However, the damage of the LORD would be even greater

Let’s look at Joel 2:2, “A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been *anything* like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations”

- Certainly this day of which Joel prophesies is not a pleasant one

Joel himself writes of this day in 2:11, “The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”

- It will make the locust plague pale in comparison

Other Scripture references speak of the Great Tribulation that is coming on the Earth (Mt 24:21; Dan 12:1)

- Both these verses mention the fact that no other judgment has ever occurred like this
- It is unprecedented, even compared to the locusts

This terrible locust plague that occurred in Judah was used to point to a future time when God would execute His own vengeance on the unbelieving world

- There would be great tribulation poured out on the Earth
- But there would also be great restoration and salvation

In the midst of discussion this future destruction, notice verse 12

- “‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; 13 and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil. 14 Who knows whether He will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?”

---

<sup>24</sup> MacArthur, 228.

These are words of hope, mercy, invitation, and patience!

- God isn't quick to destruction
- He holds out grace and forgiveness to those who turn to Him!

This repentance was not merely an external façade, however

- Rather, it was to be an internal reality
- It was to be genuine and heartfelt

Notice God told the nation to “**rend your heart and not your garments**” (2:13a)

- It would be very easy for individuals to go through the motions of remorse and sorrow for sin
- But all of this could be done apart from true change in the heart

True, Biblical repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of action

- Repentance is a turning from sin to God

Repentance is a renewal of the fellowship with the Lord that sin had broken

- It is a revival of the joy in the Lord that sin had disrupted

2:15-17 are similar to what we read earlier at the end of chapter 1

- There was to be a widespread repentance of the people
- Young and old alike were to seek the LORD
- The priests were to lead the charge in this effort

### **III. Future judgment (2:18-3:21)**

Starting in 2:18, there is a shift toward discussing the future judgment of the LORD

- This would be much more far reaching than the destruction of the locusts

The assumption is that between verses 17 and 18, Israel repented<sup>25</sup>

- Because what follows is restoration, not judgment, for God's people
- Physical, spiritual, and national restoration

The situation in Joel 2:21-24 is a reversal of what we read in chapter 1

- Animals would have plenty to eat because the pastures were lush and green with vegetation
- Trees were bearing fruit
- Rains were early and often, providing needed nourishment

---

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, 989.

Joel 2:27 says this, “Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame”

- God’s very presence would be experienced
- He alone would bring about this restoration and blessing for His people

Joel 2:28-29 are quoted in Acts 2:16-18

- Acts 2 is the account of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit was poured out
- This was the birth of the Church

The reference in the book of Acts extends from Joel 2:28-32

- However, the information in Joel 2:30-31 and Acts 2:19-20 has not been fulfilled yet

In Acts 2, we don’t read about any of the cosmic signs being fulfilled then

- Sun being darkened
- Moon turning into blood

So what we have is an example of a prophecy where it has been partially fulfilled

- Pentecost fulfilled the statements related to prophecy
- But a later time will show the final fulfillment of these verses
- That time will be “the day of the LORD”

Part of the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy pertains to the Holy Spirit

- Not only would He empower people for service
- But He would indwell believers permanently!

This indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit was part of the prophecy related to the New Covenant

- “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (Jer 31:33)
- “And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezek 36:27)

One of the major aspects of the New Covenant would be the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit

- No longer would a believer need to be concerned with the Holy Spirit somehow leaving him (cf. Ps 51:11)

But even the partial fulfillment of Joel, as we see in the book of Acts, helps us to see the veracity of God’s Word

- What God promises will come true in His timing!

Seeing that God’s Word comes true, even partially, gives us hope and a guarantee that the rest of prophecy will come true as well

This partial fulfillment is a preview of what would take place in the future

- The attack of the locusts was severe
- But the attack from the LORD would be exponentially more severe

How would the nation of Judah avoid this future “day of the LORD”?

- By repenting of their sins
- By believing in the LORD

We read in Joel 2:32, “**whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered**”

- This is quoted in Romans 10:13 as a promise of salvation for those who believe

As we think about the nation of Judah, what did they need to be saved from?

- No specific sins are mentioned in this prophecy (unlike the sin of idolatry in Hosea)

Judah needed to be saved/delivered from God Himself!

- He is the holy, perfect, and righteous Creator of the universe
- All sin is rebellion and disobedience against Him

Chapter 3 details the national restoration of the people of God

- They would be gathered together back in their land

Joel 3:2 references the battle of Armageddon

- You can read more about this in Revelation 16 and 19

Look at 3:13, “**Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great**”

- Judah’s sins were “ripe”
- Their wickedness was “great”

“**Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.**

**<sup>14</sup> Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision” (3:13-14)**

- This is a battle scene where men are brought to hear the decision of the Lord!
- God’s verdict would be passed down

“**And the LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel” (3:16)**

On one hand, the LORD roars like a lion

- A fierce competitor
- A fearful battle adversary

On the other hand, the LORD is a refuge for His people

- He protects and shields His people from danger

Which part of this verse describes you?

- Are you terrified of the LORD's roar?
- Or, are you are assured of the LORD's protection?

God must punish sin since He is holy and righteous

- For Him not to punish sin is to go against His holy character

The reality is that as sinners, we need to be delivered from God Himself

- Our sins cause us to be God's enemies
- Our sins cause us to be in opposition to God's holiness

We can't earn forgiveness on our own

- We can't make ourselves right with God in our own power

The only way for us to be delivered from God and His righteous wrath is by God Himself

- That's right, God must deliver us from Himself

Thankfully, God has done just that

- He has punished His Son, Jesus Christ, with the wrath that we deserved
- He has treated Christ as we should have been treated

The result is that there is an offer of salvation and deliverance from future wrath

- If we believe in Jesus Christ and repent of our sins

**"And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered"** (Joel 2:32a; Rom 10:13)

So we need to call on the name of the Lord

- That is, to confess and express our inadequacies, our sins, our shortcomings
- That is, to confess personal belief in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins

When we embrace Christ, the Holy Spirit will come into our minds and indwell us permanently

- He will help us to live the Christian life
- He will empower us to live the Christian life

This was the offer and invitation extended to Judah

- They rejected it and went away into exile

This same offer is extended to each one of us today

- How will you respond?

After the break, we will discuss the book of Amos