

Joel

1. The Day of the Lord in Judah

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Each prophet had his own unique approach to his own special message. Hosea's message was an application of his sad domestic trials with his adulterous wife Homer that emphasizes God's jealous love for His people, but Joel's message was an interpretation of a national calamity – a plague of locusts and a drought – and emphasized God's glorious kingdom.

The Book of Joel is a short little book that packs a powerful message.

A. AUTHOR

Joel 1:1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.

We know almost nothing about Joel the prophet. The name Joel is a combination of two divine names in the Hebrew language: 'Yahweh' and 'Elohim', meaning "The LORD is God," and actually it was a very common name in Israel. This is the prophet who bears this name believed that definition, without reservation! We know he was the son of Pethuel, but we don't even know who Pethuel was.

However, he was called by God to interpret the contemporary events of the nation of Judah as well as to predict some of the catastrophic events of the future.

B. TIMELINE

Many students of the Bible believe his ministry took place around 835 B.C. during the early days of King Joash in 2 Kings 11. The people of that day were apathetic and sluggish. The people of Judah and Israel worshiped false gods. They were nonchalant toward the Lord God, and Joel was commissioned to tell them repentance was essential before there could be revival. And there must be revival if they hoped to avoid God's judgment. That truth is at the heart of Joel's message. Repentance must precede revival. If we do not repent, God will not hold back His judgement. God used Joel, His man, to bring His message to His people.

By the way, I want to suggest an interesting sidelight to think about. There is something, unique about calamities, such as the wars against Iraq, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, when they strike our nation. So often it has a way of softening people and making them more teachable. It can bring about a time of intense soul-searching of perhaps asking "Could God be in this?" When the citizens of a nation undergo a calamity of catastrophic proportion, often that nation is then humbled and turns to God in repentance and revival.

Scholars generally agree that Joel was prophesying in Judah, because of his many references to Jerusalem and his familiarity with the temple. Joel probably was written sometime in the early ninth century B.C., which would make him a contemporary to Elisha and perhaps Elijah. This would mean that Joel was one of the oldest prophetic books written.

C. THEME

Joel's main theme is the "Day of the Lord" and the need for God's people to be prepared. "Day of the Lord" is used in Scripture to refer to different periods when God

sent judgment to His people, but the main emphasis is on the future "day of the Lord" when the nations will be judged during the Great Tribulation period and Christ shall return to set up His glorious kingdom.

D. STRUCTURE

The Book of Joes is divided in three sections:

- 1) The plague of locusts as an immediate day of the Lord in Joel 1:1-20 which mentions the locusts as a metaphorical army.
- 2) The invasion of Judah by Assyria as an imminent day of the Lord in 2:1-27 talks about the locusts symbolize a real army this time.
- 3) The final judgment of the world as the ultimate day of the Lord in 2:27-3:21 prophecies the gentile armies are very real and very dangerous against the Israel people.

E. LOCUST EVERYWHERE

Joel 1:2-4 Hear this, you elders, And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, Or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell your children about it, Let your children tell their children, And their children another generation. 4 What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

A wise preacher or teacher will get the people's attention by referring to something they all can connect with. In this case, the people of Judah were talking about the economic crisis due to the locusts, so the Lord led Joel to use that event as the background for his messages. The people didn't realize it, but they were watching the Day of the Lord unfold before their very eyes, and the Prophet Joel explained it to them.

We Americans don't have any idea what these swarming locusts can do. Here is the most recent massive damage done by these insects:

The increase in desert locust breeding activity was noted in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) desert locust informational newsletters in late 2003, and by early 2004 the threat materialized as swarms of locusts started to inflict damages on crops in West Africa.

In 2004, the threat of a locust plague emerged, creating one of the largest locust swarms since 1989. The costs of fighting this outbreak have been estimated by the FAO to have exceeded US \$60 million and harvest losses were valued at up to US \$2.5 billion which had disastrous effects on the food security situation in West Africa.

When we're in a crisis, we'll hear all kinds of voices interpreting what's going on and telling us what to do. The optimists will say, "This crisis isn't going to last. Be brave!" The pessimists will sob, "It's going to get worse and there's no escape! We're finished!" The alarmists will see the enemy behind every tree, and the scoffers will question the news reports and shrug their shoulders saying, "How do we know that is real?" But Joel was a realist who looked at life from the standpoint of the Word of God.

F. AWAKE, YOU DRUNKARDS

Joel 1:5-7 Awake, you drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you drinkers of wine, Because of the new wine, For it has been cut off from your mouth. 6 For

a nation has come up against My land, Strong, and without number; His teeth are the teeth of a lion, And he has the fangs of a fierce lion. 7 He has laid waste My vine, And ruined My fig tree; He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; Its branches are made white.

Except for pointing out the insincerity of some of the worshipers, drunkenness is the only sin that Joel actually names in this Book. However, these drunkards represented all the careless people in the land whose only interest was sinful pleasure.

The people who pursue their carnal pleasure could care less about what is going around. When was the last time you saw gay and lesbian organizations help natural disaster victims or stepping out of their ways to assist others? Of course, they are all over for AIDS drives. Because their lives are depend on them, so that they can continuously go after their carnal desires.

During this time in the Middle East, bread and wine were staples in the Jewish diet. The locusts attacked the vines and the fig trees, two things essential to Jewish life. Having one's own vineyard and fig trees was a symbol of success and contentment in their regions. Note how Joel uses the personal pronoun 'My' as he speaks of the land and its vegetation, because all of it belonged to the Lord, and He had a right to do with it whatever He pleased.

G. LAMENT YOU FARMERS

Joel 1:8-12 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the husband of her youth. 9 The grain offering and the drink offering Have been cut off from the house of the Lord; The priests mourn, who minister to the Lord. 10 The field is wasted, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine is dried up, The oil fails. 11 Be ashamed, you farmers, Wail, you vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field has perished. 12 The vine has dried up, And the fig tree has withered; The pomegranate tree, The palm tree also, And the apple tree-- All the trees of the field are withered; Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.

From season to season, the locusts ate whatever was produced, and the drought kept the soil from producing anything more.

835 B.C. was a time of turmoil and transition in Judah, at the end of the reign of the Queen Mother Athaliah and the beginning of the reign of King Joash. Athaliah seized power at the sudden death in battle of her son Ahaziah, who only reigned one year. Athaliah killed all Ahaziah's heirs, except for one who was hidden in the temple and escaped – one year old Joash in 2 Kings 11. Her six-year reign of terror ended in 835 B.C. when the High Priest Jehoiada overthrew Athaliah and set the seven year old Joash on the throne.

It's remarkable to see that these sacrifices to the Lord at the temple only stopped when there was no more grain or wine to give to God. Queen Athaliah's reign was wicked, but she allowed the temple ceremonies to continue. This shows us that the devil doesn't mind ceremonies in themselves, and that the devil is more interested in corrupting true faith than eliminating it.

H. GIRD YOURSELVES, PRIESTS

Joel 1:13-20 Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth, You who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of

your God. 14 Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord. 15 Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; It shall come as destruction from the Almighty. 16 Is not the food cut off before our eyes, Joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed shrivels under the clods, Storehouses are in shambles; Barns are broken down, For the grain has withered. 18 How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless, Because they have no pasture; Even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. 19 O Lord, to You I cry out; For fire has devoured the open pastures, And a flame has burned all the trees of the field. 20 The beasts of the field also cry out to You, For the water brooks are dried up, And fire has devoured the open pastures.

Not only were the people in need, but so was the temple. Nobody could bring the proper sacrifices because no meal, wine, or animals were available.

The Jews were required to observe only one fast, and that was on the annual Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur. But the religious leaders could call a fast whenever the people faced an emergency and needed to humble themselves and seek God's face. This was such an emergency. "Gird yourself" means "Put on your sackcloth!" It was time for the people to humble themselves and pray to the Lord.

In v18 it says, "*How the animals groan,*" this reminds us that all creation groans and labors because of the bondage of sin in the world that came from the fall of the mankind. Creation longs for that day when the Creator will return to earth and set it free from sin's shackles.

Isaiah 35:1 The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;

In v19-20, we find this prophet interceded for the nation in his prayer. God is the Lord of creation, and without His blessing, nature cannot produce what we need for sustaining life. We should never pray lightly, "Give us this day our daily bread," because only God can sustain life.

It wasn't enough for the people to humble themselves and lament. They also had to pray. This is what God required in His covenant with His people. Joel didn't ask God for anything. He simply told the Lord about the suffering of the land, the beasts and the people, knowing that God would do what was right.

Too often we drift along from day to day, taking our blessings for granted, until God permits a natural calamity to occur to remind us of our total dependence on Him. When water is rationed and food is scarce, and when prices for necessities escalate, then we discover the poverty of our artificial civilization and our throwaway society. Suddenly, necessities become luxuries, and luxuries become burdens.

I. APPLICATIONS

1) Revival will not come unless we repent from our wickedness.

2) The devil is more interested in corrupting true faith in God than eliminating it.

3) We need to remember that God doesn't have to send a great army to destroy us or get our attention, small insects or a tiny virus can do the job. After all, He is the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth.