

JOEL (complete exposition)

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Of Joel we know nothing and there is no real indication of his dates.

The book begins with a devastating plague of locusts accompanied by a severe drought which speaks of an oncoming judgment. This plague will destroy all plant life. There will consequently be no harvest and the cattle and sheep will suffer as there will be no food for them (1.16) and the prophet takes this coming plague as a warning from God (1.15). Even the wine will fail (1.7) and the drunkards will complain (1.5). There will also be a strong nation, very large in numbers, who will invade the land just as the locusts, caterpillars and cankerworm had. But this time it will not be plant life that will suffer but human life. It is interesting to note that at the time of these two invasions that worship was not considered important by the Jews (1.13) and the elders are told that they must come before the Lord in a solemn assembly and cry to the Lord (1.14).

Sanctification and holiness was the order of that day, as it is today. and it is also true that when worship is not real and in accordance with God's will, the church and its witness is seriously damaged.

We read that judgment begins at the house of God. As Christians, we must ensure that we hold fast to the truth and maintain worthy fellowship with all our members without jealousy, gossip and back biting. We must elevate the Lord Jesus and not preach or talk about ourselves (2 Corinthians 4. 5). The prevalent emphasis in many churches today is on self promotion and personal testimonies and this is not helpful since when we are saved the past is to be remembered no more.

The situation in Joel's time is that there would be great lamentation likened to a widow mourning the husband of her youth (1.8). We are dealing with overwhelming grief here. The priests mourn because they cannot perform the various offerings since animals and plant life is destroyed. Farmers are in a similar situation because the grain and the wine are destroyed (1.11) as have the fruit trees including the fig, pomegranate, palm and apple trees.

It is time to dress in sackcloth and fast and to respond to the call for repentance (1.14-15) although God does not want garments rent but hearts.

A comment on verses 2 and 3 is apt. Elders were to pass on knowledge to succeeding generations (Exodus 10.2, Deuteronomy 4.9 etc.) and the calamity of the plague was so severe that it has been recounted for future generations. Swarms of locusts can extend to 500 miles and some have covered 2,000 square miles.

The situation is so utterly serious (1.16-18). The animals are crying and groaning as they starved and slowly died. Famine was rife as crops died before the people's eyes. The water streams had dried up and a forest fire swept through the land (1.19-20). Calamity follows after calamity. We cannot be sure that these disasters were God's punishments or His method of driving His people back to Himself, although He sometimes does this by using trials and difficulties to reach us so that we come back to Him and, when we do, there is always blessing.

Chapter 2 begins with identifying that the message of coming doom is addressed to Judah and, as you know, Zion is another name for Jerusalem. There is to be a general alarm and the sounding of a trumpet for the day of the Lord is coming. We must understand that the day of the Lord is an expression often used for a day of judgment. When we come to the end times and that great day of the Lord which is after the church has been raptured (1 Thessalonians 4. 13ff) and the following great tribulation ends with Lord coming to the earth in power and great glory and, after defeating His enemies, He will set up His millennial reign.

But although this is referred to later in this chapter, the day of the Lord that was imminent for Joel's time was to be a day of darkness and unmitigating gloom. The invaders are a great and powerful nation and their like has not been seen before nor will they be seen in succeeding generations.

The people had seen the plague of locusts and the devastation it brought. The swarm of locusts had the sunshine of the dawn shining on their wings but now the dawn will break on a rapacious army to kill and destroy. The locusts had ravaged the land as a forest fire would and did. Before the locusts and the army attacks, the land would have been as the Garden of Eden but afterwards it would be a wilderness. This may be an exaggerated comparison but the point is made. There is the thunderous clatter of horses and chariots and the battle is about to take place. Just the sight of the warriors advancing with warlike faces made the Jews tremble and their own faces were pale with shock. They were not afraid; they were terrified. (2.3-6).

The next three verses have Jerusalem invaded and we read of the discipline of the army since they do not break ranks. Jewish weapons were no match for the conquerors. There was death on both sides and bodies were cremated straightaway as the historians point out was the custom.

The locust invasion was accompanied by an earthquake and a great storm and it would appear that both the earth and the heavens trembled and now, in verse 12, we read of both the earth and the heavens trembling again.

It will be said again and again that God is righteous. He cannot look at sin. He has always shown grace, mercy and longsuffering but when there is no response and the people abandon both Him and His goodness and choose to sin and rebel against Him then He must act. Judgment is His strange work and He takes no delight in the death of the wicked or even the punishment of the wicked.

He now calls upon His people to repent (2. 12-14). Repentance is not saying sorry but reviewing the situation thoroughly and being genuinely contrite realising your offences and how they have caused God to be angry at our sin. We must remember that the Lord Jesus went to the Cross because of our sin and died that we might live. In view of this and what He has done, we should love and honour Him and avoid sin.

The prophet says that the people must return to the Lord with their whole heart with clear and willing display of true repentance. The practise of tearing your clothes to show repentance was no longer valid since the heart had to be rent.

Repentance was not to be an outward show but an internal life-changing matter.

The Lord is gracious, slow to anger and full of kindness. He may change His plans and repent Himself. It is not that God has any sin of which to repent but repent here means a change of plan. Because of Judah's sin they were estranged from the Lord. He wants them back, such is His love for them. He had been deprived of the offerings and the worship due to Him as well as enduring the continual sin of the people. The people's severance from the Lord weighed heavily on the Lord's heart and, in our day, we should realise that the Lord Himself wants fellowship with us. Because of many changes in society there is, in some churches and assemblies, small congregations and often they may feel dejected but where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord He is there and that to bless (Matthew 18.20). We may not always appreciate this.

A solemn assembly is called for (2. 15-17) and the shophar which had been blown to warn of the approaching enemy now this cow's horn is to be blown by the priests for the people to attend this solemn assembly. All were to attend including children and babies. The meeting was more important than a planned wedding.

Jealousy is given a bad name but when you someone you want to protect them because of your love for them and true love will not accept any rival. The prophet asks the question as to what other nations will say about the Jews and taunt them saying, Where is your God?

While we do not want to use the term property to describe God's property, the Jews were His people and the Temple was His as well. It was God's house.

Are there churches today, which are houses of and for God, which are being used for secular things from jumble sales to political meetings?

It is a common taunt today about the character of God and His people. If God is a god of love why does He allow this? Why does he not do something about this? Why is He allowing so much suffering?

All these comments make God out to be responsible for all such matters.

And when people say, Why doesn't God do something about it? We look at the Cross and say, He has!

The thrust of these verses is that God wants to care for His people but, as any father would, He sometimes has to correct and discipline them. He could not allow His people to continue in sin or that any heathen nation could gain the upper hand.

Divine jealousy is shown in 2.18-19. He had compassion for His land and would send grain, wine and oil which would satisfy them and His people would no longer be a reproach to the nations. Whatever people may say about God and also criticise Him, He constantly shows His care. And any change of heart towards His people is in response to their change of heart towards Him.

The northerners will be driven into desolation and because of the great evil they have done they will become as a stench (v 20) and the next two verses speaks of Jewish fear turning into joy and restoration not only of the people but the ground which shall again bear fruit.

This reminds us of the glorious verses in Psalm 103 about the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. verses such as He will not always chide neither will He keep His anger for ever. His desire is for the welfare and lasting happiness of His people and, in our day, we recall that the Lord's will is that all should come to a knowledge of all the truth and that we might have abundant and meaningful lives (John 10.10).

This abundance is also in verses 23 and 24. After the drought, the rains have come and food and drink supplies will now be plentiful and the following two verses talk about a complete restoration and that the people will realise that He God is the only God and they will praise Him for all His wonderful acts and will know and acknowledge the goodness of God. He does not want His people ever to be put to shame again but it is human sin that causes the shame. The years that the locusts have eaten and the other tribulations that have come will all change into joy and prosperity.

And it is true for us. The closer we are to the Lord the more satisfied we shall be. Many of us can testify to this and compare the times when we were not close. If we honour God more, He will respond accordingly.

We now come to the most familiar passage of this prophecy which so many misinterpret.

Joel 2 28-29 reads

It shall be that afterwards I will pour out on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Also upon your manservants and maidservants in those days will I pour out my Spirit.

Elim and other Pentecostal and charismatic meetings believe and assert that this prophecy refers to them and justifies their doctrines including their speaking in tongues, prophesying and women taking audible part in meetings and worship.

What they fail to realise is that this prophecy was initially addressed exclusively to Jews and that the outpouring of blessing was to be on ALL flesh not just Pentecostals and charismatics some of whom claim that only they have the full gospel and therefore are superior. However, there are some who believe that all flesh refers to more than just the Jews.

The prophet is solely concerned with the southern kingdom of Judah. Nowhere is this more clear than in chapter two of Joel's prophecy

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion that is to say Jerusalem (verse 1).

The Lord is with the army (verse 11). Chapter 1 verse 6 talks of a nation that is to invade the land of His people

The Lord will have pity on His people, the Jews (verse 18) and calls them to repentance (verse 13).

The Lord will restore His people to prosperity (2. 23ff) and after this God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh and that means all Jews (verse 28). The great outpouring of the Spirit, to which Joel refers, is upon the nation of Israel (Ezekiel 39.29). God's people remain the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2. 8).

Wonders will be shown in the heavens (verse 30) including the moon being turned to blood. Verse 10 talks of the earth shaking and even the heavens trembling and the sun and stars becoming dark. Surely this refers to the last days, often called the day of the Lord, as indicated in Revelation in 6.12. Revelation 19 tells us of the Lord going forth to war with His army and Revelation chapter 20 verse 2 talks of Satan being bound for a millennium and speaks of the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth in Jerusalem among His people. All this ties up with Joel chapter 2. Consider also Jude 14 and 15.

As Satan will be bound for a thousand years, there will be a millennium of peace. Isaiah 11.6ff also refers to peace in the animal kingdom.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatlings together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed together; their young ones shall lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

There has never been a time like this but there will be in the millennium.

It is frequently claimed that the apostle Peter said that the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2.16 ff.) but the accompanying details which Peter quoted were not, of course, fulfilled at Pentecost. The last days were not at Pentecost. The sun and moon were not darkened nor the moon turned to blood or the wonders appeared in the heavens of blood, fire and vapours of smoke. The things would happen before the great and terrible day of the Lord. (verses 30 and 31)

Christendom is full of people who wrongly interpret parts of the Bible. They may be sincere but are sometimes sincerely wrong. It may not be our place to correct them but simply to explain what is evidenced as the true interpretation.

The final verse of this chapter (verse 32) triumphantly proclaims that salvation is in God. As in Obadiah 17, many will escape the judgment and all who call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered just as in this day of grace all who call upon the Lord Jesus shall be saved. Whosoever will may come. While

many do not come to the Lord, those who do shall be saved. It has been rightly said that those who are caught up at the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 will escape the great tribulation.

As with other minor prophets such as Habakkuk and Zephaniah, Joel also has three chapters dealing with the sins of the people, a call to repentance and a restoration.

Chapter 3 of Joel begins with the day of reckoning when the nations, who have been enemies of the Jews, will be brought into the valley of Jehoshaphat to be judged by God for what they have done to His people and reference is made as to how the

Jews have been scattered. Historically, this valley of Jehoshaphat event has not yet happened and these verses follows on from the last day prophecies in the preceding chapter and must refer to the second coming. This judgment of the nations comes at the end of the great tribulation with the coming of Christ to the earth in great glory to deliver His people which ties up with Zechariah 12 8ff, 14.3 and Revelation 19, 11-21. All the days of their darkness and persecution will be turned into light. In Matthew 25 31-46 we read that when the Son of Man comes in great glory He will assemble all nations together before Him for judgment which will be assessed on how they have treated the Jews. There will be blessings for those nations that have treated the Jews well and those who have persecuted them will be cast into hell. There is a reference to boys and girls sold to be slaves or for immoral purposes. A boy would be sold for a night with a prostitute and a girl for a drink of wine.

God has to deal with these affronts and Joel goes on to say that He will also deal with the Gentiles. In verses 4 and 5, he mentions Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines who had stolen the treasure of the Temple to put in their own pagan temples with their lifeless and useless idols.

The next two verses talk about the slave market and how God will do to these evil nations what they have done to the Jews. Many Jewish people were sold as slaves to the heathens in Greece.

Verses 9 and 10 speaks again of the judgment of the nations with a proclamation of war and these Gentile nations are to prepare for war. The nations of the north are involved, (Daniel 11. 44ff), Revelation 16.12 suggest the armies of the far east

and Daniel 2. 35, 44 and 7.26 state western powers being there. This refers to the final military outburst at the end of the great tribulation and prior to the coming in great glory. And there will be a great judgment says verse 11 and 12. The Lord is now sitting to pass sentence. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe for the wickedness of the nations is great and there will be multitudes in the valley of decision (verses 13 and 14) Evil cannot go unchecked for ever. There will the Lord inevitably crush His foes.

Verses 15 and 16 refers again to the celestial disturbances with the sun and the moon darkened and the thunderous sound of God's voice upon the evil nations and His reassuring voice to His own He will be a stronghold and a refuge to His people.

These verses may refer to a dreadful storm convulsed by a fearsome earthquake. Truly this day of the Lord will be terrifying. At this time, the Jews will be protected. The Lord was known in the early history of His people and now they will know Him, love Him and admire Him and He is worthy. He will stand on the Holy Mount and rule in Jerusalem which will also be holy. Strangers have trodden its streets for centuries as invaders, but no more and, in the millennial reign, Satan is bound and there is peace. Blessings will abound and this is reinforced in Verse 18. The land will be fertile and prosperous no longer torn by strife and conflict. When we think of all the suffering of the Jews (sometimes, but not always, brought upon them by themselves) but this unfair suffering particularly in the 1930s and 1940s and, indeed, since then must also be considered. They are certainly going to be seen as the apple of God's eye and all the world will know it. It will also be the end of awful anti-Semitism.

The enemies of the Jews will have desolate lands such as Egypt and Edom. No nation that sets themselves up against God or His people will prosper. Divine punishment will be severe on those who have shed innocent Jewish blood. Ezekiel 29.9 prophesied the time when Egypt would be desolate and waste.

Judah and the Jews shall live for ever from when the Lord dwells in Jerusalem.

For the Christian there is blessing. They have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, received their rewards at the Judgement Seat of Christ, feasted at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and, we read, will judge the nations.

Times may be tough now for Christians as well as for Jews but the ultimate result is victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ.

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