

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



JEHOVAH IS GOD

JOEL

The prophecy of Joel is a small book, but it is surrounded and initiated by great tragedy. Its message contains a devastating plague of locust and a famine that results, leaving the people in a terrible amount of desperation.

A plague of locusts was one of the most feared occurrences during this time period. Without modern pesticides, these insects would multiply in unimaginable numbers, so much that their presence would literally blot out the sun and cover the ground like water. After this, they would march around and if there was anything green, or any vegetation, it was quickly and completely consumed without a trace of its previous existence.

Obviously, because of this kind of destruction, we are looking at families with absolutely no means of physical sustenance. Men, women, children all struggling to survive because of the resulting famine. Livelihoods destroyed. Entire lives have to start over from nothing. You can understand, then, why these creatures would be so feared and hated by those who fell under their wrath.

Then there is the prophet Joel who spoke to God's people during this time. Aside from his message, even the name of Joel was used to speak to God's people. The name Joel is a fusion of names meaning "Jehovah is God." In the first portion of his name we see the letters "J" and "O" which gives us the "Jehovah" portion. And then there is "El" which also means God. And if you put these two names of God together, you have the name, "Joel."

Aside from his name and his message, there is not much else known about this prophet of God. He is not mentioned anywhere else, and there is nothing in the book which provides a way to accurately date the book. Because of this, many scholars believe that Joel is an early prophet whom God used to speak to His people.

How to think About Joel

Because Joel is only three chapters long, and because the message of judgment is so direct, it is not difficult to navigate through the chapters. Joel's message can be broken up into three different scenes.

The Scene of Historical Judgment (1:1-1:20)— These verses provide the message, context, and request to those who were experiencing judgment.

A Message for the Masses (1:1): Here we find the name of Joel and the authority behind what was about to be spoken. Joel was God's prophet, and his message was directly from God.

An Answer for the Questioning (1:2-12): Joel asks the people to think about why judgment had fallen on them and asked for the message to be carried on to their children, and their children's children. This will be covered to a greater degree in this chapter, but a remark needs to be made here that judgment (or any experience from God, for that matter) should not exist in a vacuum. Our learning should always be for the benefit of those around us—especially our children. In this case, Joel was used to explain why the locust had fallen on them, and they, in turn, were to teach the following generations.

A Call to Repentance (1:13-1:20): Despite the devastation, God was not done. Though fire broke out, though the livestock was suffering for lack of grass, and would soon be lost to hunger, a call goes up to God in verse 19, "O LORD, to thee will I cry..." Even in judgment we can call out to God's mercy.

The Scene of Illustrated Judgment (2:1-17)— An alarm is sounded here because of a day coming filled with "darkness" and "gloominess" but it isn't a reference to the insects any longer. Now these hoards of locusts are used to illustrate an army of horsemen. The invasion of these insects are used to describe an invasion of an opposing military force against God's people. This is an indication that there will be a judgment coming that is far more devastating than that of the locust who strip the bark of trees or devour vines and vegetation, but the judgment would, in fact, be turned toward the people of the nation.

The Scene of Future Judgment (2:18-3:21)— In the last section of the book we actually find a very exciting prophecy regarding the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, all the way through the church age to the end times.

What to Look for in Joel

Phrases—

Day of the LORD: You will encounter this phrase five times in the reading of this book. This is a phrase used by other prophets, but it is used in a specific way in this book. In Joel, these words are to identify a period of time when God will pour out His wrath on the gentile nations because of their sins against the Jewish nation.

The counterpart to this narrative exists in Revelation 6-19, when we read of the time of the Great Tribulation after the rapture of the saints on earth. In other words, it is a term that signifies ultimate judgment for the wicked, and ultimate salvation for the righteous.

Words—

Spirit: The word here can mean breath, wind, or air, and when we see it in 2:28, once again, there is reference to the future and continued out-pouring of the Holy Spirit from the time the church was empowered, until Christ returns.

What to Gain from Joel

What is incredibly interesting about Joel is the fact that when we compare his prophecy to that of the New Testament, we find that he is one of the few prophets whom God allowed to see all the way to the end of human history.

Hardships Are A Great Time to Look for God's Hand— If you look at any of the prophetic writings, whenever some hardship happened, they took it as a message from God. That's what we see from Joel. We see an instruction of warning so that the people could correct their course and avoid further danger.

Now, in terms of the prophetic office, God did in fact instruct these men in what was to be said and how to interpret certain disasters, but it is not out of the question to realize that God still uses tragedy to capture the attention of His people. In our

personal life, is God trying to tell us more than we realize? In our churches, does God instruct by way of hardships? As a nation, does God speak through the various rumblings of national disasters? I am persuaded that He does. Does this take caution and Spirit-guided prudence? Absolutely. Just because tragedy strikes does not mean that there is only judgment attached. However, as we understand God's sovereignty in all things, we can certainly trace God's hand in order to seek His purpose.

The Present is A Great Time to Reflect on God's Victory— We are brought to this fact over and over again in the prophetic writings, and even in the historical books. God's command of the future is absolute. God continually has His prophets point to the future toward the end of their prophecies. This is a pattern worth noting as we understand where God ultimately wants our focus.



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