

Old Testament Survey—Joel

It's wonderful to give a positive message to people, a message that makes them feel good. But that's not always possible, nor wise. When would it not be wise? When their situation calls for painful truth.

e.g.—a doctor who tells a patient with a terminal disease he “looks good” today...

The prophets of Israel were men who spoke the painful truth, often to people who did not want to hear it.

Discuss: Why is it people often don't want to hear the truth?

This evening we'll be looking at the prophecy recorded by God's servant, Joel. What do you know about the book of Joel?

Who wrote the book?

--Joel

General Observations:

--Very little is known about Joel as a person

--He tell us his father's name, Pethuel (1:1), but little else in a personal nature

--His interest in Jerusalem suggests he may have been a resident there

--His stress on priestly ceremonies supports the theory that he was a temple prophet (L.H.B. 438)

--No kings are mentioned in the book.

When was the book written?

The date is very difficult to determine. Various possibilities:

--In the period of Jehoash, 800 B.C.

--After the return from exile, 5th century B.C.

--A contemporary of Zephaniah, at time of Josiah's death, 609 B.C. (L.H.B.)

Why was the book written?

The book of Joel addresses the subject of "the Day of the Lord." See:

1:2 "Hear this...has anything like this ever happened in your days...?"

1:15 "For the day of the LORD is near..."

2:1 "Blow the trumpet in Zion...for the day of the LORD is coming."

2:11 "...The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?"

3:14 "For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

What is the day of the LORD? Before answering that question in light of our knowledge of other Scripture, we must ask what the phrase meant to Joel.

The prophet seems to have three specific events in mind:

1. A recent disaster

As Joel speaks, he has in mind a catastrophe that just occurred.

Q: What was it, acc. to 1:4? An invasion of locusts (also 2:25)

Q: What did the locusts do, acc. to 1:10-12? Destroyed the crops throughout the land

Q: What kind of impact did that have on worship in Israel, acc. to 1:13? There was no grain for grain offerings!

These locusts have caused a problem of interpretation for many. Many Christian interpreters have followed the Jewish Targum in viewing them as foreign armies, which ravaged Judah in successive waves (see L.H.B., 439).

It seems more plausible, however, to assert that Joel has in mind an actual locust invasion that just happened. He uses the past tense (1:2, 4). He says the locusts stripped the vegetation away in Israel.

See: Deut 28:38-42 God predicted, "If you disobey Me, I will use locusts to judge You..."

To Joel, this past locust disaster was a fitting proto-type of a future day...

2. A coming disaster by foreign invasion

Q: What does Joel call this time of destruction, in 1:15? The day of the Lord

Joel announced that God's people needed to repent and live for God, or God would raise up a Gentile army to judge His people.

Q: What would that day be like, acc. to 2:1-2? A day of darkness and gloom (note the mention of the large army in 2:2)

Note: Joel mixes these three aspects of judgment together. One verse he may have in mind the locusts, and in the next, the coming armies. He sees both as instruments that God uses to bring judgment on His wayward people. Furthermore, they represent...

3. *The Ultimate Day of the Lord*

In the ultimate day of the Lord, God will judge not only Israel, but all nations on the earth.

Q: When will that occur? The Great Tribulation (2 Thes 2:2)

Also, to Joel, the Day of the Lord could be repeated over and over, each time God judged His people. The judgment was not whimsical, but to produce repentance (see: 2:12).

Summary: Joel connects the Day of the Lord to the locust plague that just happened. Joel says, "Learn from what just happened, and repent, or something worse will happen."

What is the outline of the book?

The book contains two nearly equal parts. In the first section, the prophet speaks, while in the second, the Lord speaks. (see L.H.B.; Archer, 310). Note: There are three chapters in English, but four in Hebrew.

I. The Locust Plague, and the Day of the Lord (1:1 - 2:17)

A. The Plague of locusts as a type of the Day of the Lord (1:1-2:11)

B. A Call to Repentance (2:12-17)

II. The Victory to Come (2:18 - 3:21)

A. Promise of Blessings (2:18ff)

B. Final triumph of God in the Day of the Lord (ch 3)

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Joel teaches us about the Day of the Lord, a time when God both judges His people and restores them to Himself.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. *Joel teaches us about repentance.*

Q: What does repentance involve, acc. to 2:12? A turning from the heart

Q: What accompanies genuine repentance, acc. to 2:12? Genuine remorse

Q: What makes restoration possible, acc. to 2:13? The character of God

Note: The theme of repentance was central in the presentation of the gospel in the book of Acts. We tend to leave it out. (see appendix below**)

Discuss: What does it mean to say a person must *repent* and believe in Christ in order to be saved?

2. *Joel teaches us that God uses disasters to turn men to God.*

The prophets saw God at work in nature. They believed that God was in complete control of nature. To Joel, no one or nothing else is responsible for the locusts. They are *God's army* (2:11). The prophets didn't operate by a dualism that suggested that some other force in the universe was responsible for calamities. God is Lord over all.

We tend to miss this in our 20th century, scientific age. We have a Deistic view. What's that?

3. *Joel prepares us for the coming Day of the Lord.*

To Joel, the Day of the Lord happened when the Lord broke into history to take drastic action with His people.

Day >>>Day>>>Day>>>Ultimate Day (The Tribulation, followed by Millennium)

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32. See Acts 2:16-21.

Q: To what did Peter attribute the pouring out of the Spirit? 2:16-17 Fulfillment of Joel

Q: Was all that Joel prophesied fulfilled at Pentecost? No. e.g. Acts 2:19-20 (We will see another manifestation of the Spirit. When? In the Millennium)

****Repentance in the Book of Acts:**

(Acts 2:38) "Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

(Acts 3:19) "**Repent** ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;"

(Acts 5:31) "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give **repentance** to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

(Acts 8:22) "**Repent** therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

(Acts 11:18) "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted **repentance** unto life."

(Acts 13:24) "When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of **repentance** to all the people of Israel."

(Acts 17:30) "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to **repent:**"

(Acts 19:4) "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of **repentance**, saying unto the people,

that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

(Acts 20:21) "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

(Acts 26:20) "But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should **repent** and turn to God, and do works meet for **repentance.**"