

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets

Studies in the Minor Prophets

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

Jersey Shore Baptist Church

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Message Three – Joel – *Where Is Their God*

Introduction

Joel's prophecy is an exciting passage of Scripture written to the southern Kingdom of Judah prior to the Babylonian captivity. This prophecy speaks of a literal, local destruction of the land of Judah due to locusts. However, this local judgment serves as a picture and foreshadows a coming time of judgment for the people of God, and also for the rest of the world, known as "the day of the Lord".

Joel pleads with the people of God to repent and return to Him, so that he will heal the land. The healing spoken of in the passage also foreshadows the Millennial Reign of Christ on the earth, a future time of blessing and peace for the people of God.

It is interesting to note that there are as many as 73 verses in Joel's prophecy that bear striking resemblances to other Old Testament writings, not to mention the quotes from Joel in the New Testament. Some have stated that Joel's prophecy served as a foundation for some of the later writers. However, we can conclude that the similarities have more to do with the fact that the Holy Spirit is the author of all of these similar passages as well as this prophecy given through Joel.

Key Verses

"Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." - (Joel 2:12-13)

"Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" - (Joel 2:17)

Key Phrase – “*the day of the Lord*” (five times in Joel plus “that day” in 3:14)

The Day of the Lord refers prophetically to the “last day”, the 1000-year period known also as the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. The Millennium is immediately preceded by the Tribulation Period, which is seven years in duration, beginning with the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 18), and concludes with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11 – 21).

However, the phrase “day of the Lord” could also refer to an impending judgment that is prophesied for the immediate future. But even if that is the case, the impending judgment that would occur in the immediate context was also a picture or type of the judgment that will occur during the Tribulation Period.

Joel refers to three important events, each of which he calls a “day of the Lord.” He sees the plague of locusts as an immediate day of the Lord (Joel 1:1–20), the invasion of Judah by Assyria as an imminent day of the Lord (2:1–27), and the final judgment of the world as the ultimate day of the Lord (2:27–3:21). In the first, the locusts are a metaphorical army; in the second, the locusts symbolize a real army; in the third, the locusts aren’t seen at all and the armies are very real and very dangerous.¹

I The Prophet

Joel is a very common Bible name, which means “Jehovah is God”. There are approximately a dozen people in the Bible that had this name, including one of Samuel’s sons (1 Samuel 8:1 – 2). Little is known about this son of Pethuel, but it is believed that he prophesied to the people of Judah during the time of King Jehoshaphat who reigned over Judah from 853 – 780 BC (2 Kings 11 – 12; 2 Chronicles 22 – 24). It is possible that he was a priest as there are several references to the priesthood in his prophecy, but most of the references are rebukes. He is believed to be the earliest of the prophets writing to Judah, with the exception of possibly Obadiah. He was contemporary with Elijah and Elisha.

Extrabiblical tradition records that he was from the tribe of Reuben, from the town of Bethom or Bethharam, located NE of the Dead Sea on the border of Reuben and Gad. The context of the prophecy, however, hints that he was a Judean from the Jerusalem vicinity, since the tone of a stranger is absent.²

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be amazed (p. 47). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 1267). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

Joel was a prophet, and the prophet's job was to use the Word of God (1:1) to bring people back to God. A priest was responsible to teach the Law, but the prophet was tasked with bringing the people back to God when they had strayed from the Law. The prophet also was a foreteller of future events (prophecies). They were foretellers as well as "forth-tellers". Any failed prophecy would disqualify the prophet. (See Deuteronomy 18:17 – 22)

"The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him." (Jeremiah 28:9)

II The People

It is believed that this prophecy was immediately written to the people of Judah. However, the topic represented transcends the immediate context, and applies prophetically to the Nation of Israel, both north and south. Though the passage directly applies to Israel, and not to the people in the present Church Age, there are still many practical applications that we can make, as well as a wealth of information regarding future events.

III The Prophecy

A The Present Desolation – Locusts (Joel 1)

"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;" - (Proverbs 30:27)

1 The Conditions (1:1 – 4; 16 – 20)

This plague of locusts was literal and was worse than anything that this generation had seen previously. It is similar to what was inflicted upon the Egyptians in Exodus 10. The destruction was total.

Note – some take the position that this destruction of locusts was symbolic, representing a great army, but the language used here does not indicate that we should take the Scripture at anything other than its face value.

Notice in verse 4, different insects are mentioned. However, these seemingly different insects are really representative of different stages of locust growth, or possibly are different descriptions of the behavior of the locusts. (ie. gnawing, swarming, lapping, devouring)

A swarm of locust could number in the billions, and have been known to devour everything green for thousands of square miles. They have also been observed to eat other food sources, and even clothing, including leather.

Note - Revelation 9:1 – 12 describes a future "trumpet judgment" during the Tribulation Period, which involves demonic creatures referred to as locusts.

Joel wanted the people of Judah to understand what God was saying to them through the plague and the drought. In our own times, the nations of the world are experiencing severe droughts and famines, frightening epidemics, unexpected earthquakes, devastating floods, and other “natural disasters,” all of which have greatly affected national and global economy; yet very few people have asked, “What is God saying to us?” Joel wrote his book so the people would know what God was saying through these critical events.³

2 The Cause (1:5)

The only specific sin mentioned in the Book of Joel is drunkenness. We know from history that Judah had many other problems in addition to drinking. Drunkenness was specifically mentioned here because the locusts destroyed the vineyard.

3 The Cure (vs. 13 – 14)

a God calls for the priests to proclaim a fast. Repentance is the only cure for a sin-sick nation.

b God calls His people to weep. God does not want his people to mourn all the time, but when he calls them out for their sin, he does not want them to be rejoicing.

c God also called the people to gather together in the assembly. Today, the church house is a good place to go when the nation is in trouble.

d God called the people to pray – “cry unto the Lord”

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." - (2 Chronicles 7:14)

4 The Connection – (v. 15)

We see here the first reference to “*the day of the Lord*”, and it refers to it in the future tense. The destruction caused by the locusts foreshadowed the judgment that would come when “*the day of the Lord*” comes. This verse connects the present reality with the future prophecy.

Joel stated in verse three that there had never been another plague of locusts like they had experienced. It was unparalleled. So also, will be the terrible judgments of the Tribulation Period. There has never been a judgment in history that comes close to the severity of the Tribulation. (See Matthew 24)

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be amazed (p. 50). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

B The Future Destruction (Joel 2)

1 The Description of the Day of the Lord (vs. 1 – 11)

Man has had his day – now it is time for God to have His day.

The description of destruction given in chapter two is future, whereas the destruction of the locusts mentioned in chapter one was referred to as in the past. God uses the local, locust devastation to picture a coming military devastation.

The description given in these verses could fit many different scenarios in Judah's future. We know from the vantage point of history that the Assyrians came down and ravaged the northern kingdom of Israel and also many of the cities of Judah surrounding Jerusalem around 720 BC. Also, the great Babylonian army came and invaded Judah in 586 BC. Also, in 70 AD, Titus came with his Roman army and utterly destroyed Jerusalem. However, this passage refers to the time period, yet future, when the nations of the world would all line up against Israel. (See [Ezekiel 38:14 – 23](#)) The Day of the Lord begins with darkness, just as the Hebrew day does. The four bands of locusts may be a picture of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. (See [Revelation 6](#))

2 The Directive for the Day of the Lord (vs. 12 – 17)

Here again we see the call for personal and national repentance. Repentance does not begin on the outside; it begins with the heart. (notice vs. 12 – 13) If genuine revival is going to come to our nation and even to our church it will begin in a movement of God in the hearts of His people. There will be a contrition – a mourning for our sin, followed by real repentance, which is a desire to forsake the flesh and forget the world, and then turn with all of our hearts to the Lord.

Revival always begins with God's people:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Revival always involves contrition, confession, and conversion (repentance).

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." (Hosea 10:12)

Notice the phrase: "where is their God". (see also Psalm 79:9 - 10; Psalm 115:1 - 2) When God's people live in defeat, the world looks at them and says, "where is their God". We shine the light of God brightly when we live the victorious, abundant life that Christ intends for us; a life

submitted to His will, surrendered to the indwelling Holy Spirit, and separated from the wickedness of this world.

3 The Deliverance in the Day of the Lord (vs. 18 – 32)

These verses describe the deliverance that God will bring from both their present calamity, and the future “day of the Lord”. God will restore what the locusts had taken (vs. 18 – 27), but he will also bless the nation in the future, if they return to Him. Ultimately, God’s mercy and grace upon Israel will not be realized fully until they receive the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. (vs. 28 – 32)

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." - (Zechariah 12:10)

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." - (Zechariah 13:1)

Notice in vs. 28 – 32 that this is the passage that Peter was quoting from in his famous sermon at Pentecost. (See Acts 2:16 – 21) Peter was not stating that all of these signs were to be fulfilled during his time, but that these signs were all to be fulfilled in the “*last days*”, which included the “*day of the Lord*”.

C God’s Faithful Deliverance for His People (Joel 3)

1 The Day of the Lord’s Awful Retribution (vs. 1 – 17)

a. The Judgment of the Nations (vs. 1 – 8)

The description given here in chapter three is one of God gathering together His people back from the lands where they had been scattered. God will also gather together the nations that hate Israel, along with their leader, the Anti-Christ. Then the great Battle of Armageddon will take place where God will wipe out the enemies of God’s people; and then Jesus will set up His Kingdom on the earth. (See [Matthew 24](#))

Verse 1 begins with the regathering of the Nation of Israel, and here it would definitely have to do with all of Israel, both the northern and southern Kingdoms. “The captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” here is not about the Assyrian captivity, or the Babylonian captivity, but rather the regathering of Israelites back into the land. Israel was given part of her land back in 1948, and at that time there were many Jews from around the world who moved to Israel. There were also many Jews from within the Soviet Union who were able to return to their homeland after the

wall came down. God will bring many of His people home to Israel before He sets up His kingdom.

"And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." (Deuteronomy 30:1-6)

Read Isaiah 11:10 - 16

God will gather all of His elect in the end of the Tribulation – Israel as well as saved and surviving Gentiles.

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matthew 24:31)

Note – The phrase “bring again the captivity” can also mean “reverse the fortunes”. The people of Israel were not all that was taken captive; the wealth of Israel had also been plundered often throughout their history.

Verse 2 speaks of the gathering of all nations for judgment. “The Valley of Jehoshaphat” literally means the valley of judgment. The nations will be judged, and God will severely punish the nations that have been cruel to Israel.

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:3)

Verses 2 – 8 give us some examples of the nations that will be punished along with some of the crimes that they have committed against Israel.

Notice that they had sold their children to satisfy their lusts for harlots and wine; they had stolen the wealth of Israel; and they had enslaved the people.

Notice the reference to the Grecians in v. 6:

The judgment threatened here probably was fulfilled, at least in part, in the fourth century b.c. Allen explains, "The people of Sidon were sold into slavery by Antiochus III in 345 b.c., while the citizens of Tyre and Gaza were enslaved by Alexander in 332 b.c." (The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah, p. 114). Perhaps Jews were involved in some of the transactions. [J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, p. 1422). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.]

Read Matthew 25:31 – 46

Read Zechariah 14:1 - 4

b. The Battle of Armageddon (vs. 9 – 17)

Matthew 24 told us that the heathen would be gathered where "the eagles (vultures) be gathered." Revelation 16 tells us that they will be gathered to Armageddon:

"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."
(Revelation 16:16)

The Valley of Megiddo or the Plain of Esdraelon (Valley of Jezreel – Esdraelon is Greek for Jezreel) could be the same as the Valley of Jehoshaphat as well as the valley of decision (v. 14). However, many believe that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is south of Jerusalem and west of the Dead Sea, while the Valley of Megiddo (Esdraelon) would be to the north of Jerusalem.

However, the difficulty that I am having is differentiating between the two judgments, which seem to possibly take place in two different locations. I believe the order of events (if there is one) is first, the Battle of Armageddon, and next, the Judgment of the Nations. The difficulty that I am having is that it seems that all unbelievers will be killed at the Battle of Armageddon leaving no one else on the planet who will need to be judged. It seems to me that the Nations (Gentiles, Heathens, unbelievers) are judged at the Battle of Armageddon.

Read Revelation 14:14 – 20; 19:11 – 21

2 The Day of the Lord's Awesome Reign (vs. 18 – 21)

The final verses of chapter three, as well as for the entire rest of the Book of Joel deal with the Millennial reign of Christ. (references to the river - Ezekiel 47:1 – 12; Zechariah 14:8)