

THE DAY OF YAHWEH

A Study of Joel

Study #2

Hear This

(Joel 1:1-3)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. *Joel* is, as we've seen, the second of Israel's writing prophets, chronologically speaking. For this reason, we are approaching his text next in our examination of these writings. But the exact historical setting is difficult to identify, and there is no consensus on specifically when Joel wrote. Even internal evidence does not give much help in this regard. For that reason, we are not going to spend much time discussing it. But *Joel* is rather unique in this regard: the historical setting is almost irrelevant to understanding his message, and the warnings he gives.
- B. The subject of Joel's prophecy is, essentially, the Day of Yahweh. This event is referred to seven times (*cf.* Joel 1:15 [2x], 2:1, 11, 31, 3:14, 18), and five of those use the exact phrase *yom yahwah* (the Day of Yahweh). And so as we move through the prophecy, we will begin to gain a fuller and richer understanding of this prophetic, eschatological Day.
- C. The prophecy essentially breaks itself into two major sections. The first section (1:1 – 2:17) describes the devastation of a locust infestation that occurred in Palestine in the days of the prophet himself. More will be said about this first section in a moment. The second section (2:18 – 3:21) is essentially an oracle from God Himself, speaking about the future of Israel, and of the coming Day of Yahweh.
- D. The opening section (1:1 – 2:17) further breaks itself into two basic parts. The first (1:1-20) describes the desolation caused by the locust plague mentioned above, and what the nation's response should be to this disaster. The second (2:1-17) transitions us from the locust plague, to a greater, even more devastating infestation that is coming. This coming infestation will be demonic rather than natural, and is described in great detail in *Revelation 9:1-12* as the effect of the fifth trumpet judgment (also called the first of three "woes") during the 70th week of Daniel. The connection of these two events in the prophet's mind, the recent locust plague, and the prophetic, demonic one to come, serve to show us that the prophet believed that current events are intended to warn those upon whom they fall, and to lead them to a right response toward God.
1. *Amos 4:6-13* = In this almost repetitive refrain, the Israeli prophet Amos declared five events that God had brought upon northern Israel, in an attempt to cause them to forsake their evil and return to God. And yet, in spite of everything, they refused to return to Him (*cf.* Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). This kind of passage shows that God is in control of all things on Earth and in the heavens, and that He intends every event to draw us to Him.
 2. *Revelation 9:20* = In the passage regarding the locusts, occupying the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments, we are told that the intent of these judgments is twofold. First, God is judging the world by them. Second, He is pleading with men and women to repent before it is too late. And yet, people will not.
- E. We are beginning tonight into the opening part of the prophecy, and will begin with the prophet's call to *listen*, to *hear*, and to *tell* the words of Yahweh. Within this first section of the prophecy, the prophet addresses four distinct groups of people within Judah: old folk (1:2-3), drunkards (1:5-7), farmers and vinedressers (1:8-12) and priests (1:13-14). With all of that as introduction, let's get into our text!

II. TEXT: *JOEL 1:1-3*

- A. *verse 1* = Here the prophet gives us the source of his message, and briefly identifies himself by giving us his own name, and his father's name.
1. "**The word of the LORD...**" = The prophet begins with an unambiguous declaration of the source of his message. Joel makes this assertion several times, as we will see. And large parts of the prophecy purport to be God speaking *directly* through the mouth of the prophet, using "I..." statements.

The Bible as we have it, is unique among the world's literature. Over 3,800 times these writings declare themselves to be the very words of the Creator God Himself. If this declaration is true, that truth has serious ramifications for our accountability in understanding and obeying it.

- a. *Isaiah 55:1-11* = Isaiah, a later Judaic prophet, expresses this truth beautifully. God's word is powerful and active (*cf.* Hebrews 1:1-2, 4:12-13). It always accomplishes its mission as it goes out. And the proper response is to allow it to drive us to obedience and seeking God.
- b. *Jeremiah 23:9-36* = The most prolific of the exilic prophets, Jeremiah denounces the false prophets that plagued the nation in his days. His clear declaration is threefold: first, the word of false prophets is worthless and not beneficial, unlike the uniquely powerful and productive word of God; second, during times of crisis and danger, it is the powerful word of God that people need to hear, not the pussy-footed words of presumptuous prophets and prosperity preachers; third, when people choose to listen to error, those who preach error will be judged, and those who accept such error will have the truth removed from them so that they cannot even remember it.
- c. *2 Timothy 3:16-17* = The Apostle Paul made it so clear that the entire written body of divine revelation contained in the Scripture was breathed out by God, and is therefore uniquely profitable.

We will say more about this idea in just a moment. For now, let's look at the identity of the prophet.

2. **"...that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel..."** = Aside from the meanings of the Hebrew names (**Joel** means "Yah[weh] is God," and **Pethuel** means "openhearted toward God"), we really have no information regarding these men. There are at least a dozen different men in the Old Testament with this name, and none of them is a very likely option. The New Testament only quotes from *Joel* once (*cf.* Acts 2:16-21), and does not give any further information regarding the prophet's identity. All we know of him, therefore, is that he is a prophet of Judah (the southern kingdom...we know this from internal evidence, specifically the repeated mentions of Zion, the temple, and the priests). If you have any further questions about who the man is, you can ask him yourself when the Lord Jesus establishes His kingdom on Earth, and you have the opportunity to meet him.
- B. *verse 2* = Here Joel begins to address the first group to which he gives attention: the elders of Judah. He gives one essential command: **hear/listen**. And then he asks a rhetorical question.
1. **"Hear this...and listen..."** = The basic command that Joel issues is: Hear this! Listen! These commands amount to a call to "shut up and pay attention." It is a recognition that, in light of the awful devastation around them, the old men of Judah are probably not focusing on the spiritual lesson to be learned, because their minds are focused on the destruction around them and what that means for the future of their nation and its prosperity and survival. In the midst of the distraction, Joel commands for his listeners to shut up for a moment, to still their minds and force away distractions long enough to give attention, to listen to what God is trying to teach them through their situation.
 - a. *Proverbs 1:20-21* = King Solomon likened God's wisdom to a woman shouting for attention in the town square. In the time of the Old Testament, Jewish society was strictly and emphatically patriarchal. Women were not allowed to be educated as men were. Even the temple worship in Jerusalem was segregated, and women were only allowed past the first gate. For a woman, who traditionally had no societal bearing or status, to stand in the square, at the heads of the city's streets, or at the entrance of the city's gates (these were the places where official business was conducted, and judgments rendered) and to yell for people to pay attention...this is quite a picture. She would not only have been basically ignored. She would have been thought obnoxious, presumptuous, and even blasphemous. This is the picture Solomon is trying to give you. God's wisdom is, to the world, foolishness and presumptuous.
 - b. *1 Corinthians 1:18-25* = Here is Paul's explanation of the difference between God's "foolishness" and the world's "wisdom." For a summary statement, see 1 Corinthians 2:14.
 - c. *Mark 4:21-25* = In Mark 4, Jesus begins to teach in parables. His first parable is recorded in Mark 4:2-9. After He tells the parable, His followers asked Him what the parable meant, and Jesus was very clear to them that He was at once both revealing, and *hiding*, truth. For those who had been granted knowledge of the mysterious kingdom of God, He was revealing truth. To the rest, He was hiding it. After saying so, He explained the parable of the soils which He had just spoken.

Then, He further instructs His followers with two other parables: the lamp; and the standard of measure. Both have the same essential meaning. But with slightly different emphases. The first parable demonstrates that Christ is giving hidden truth to the crowds...but it was not intended to stay hidden. As He says, "Nothing is hidden, except to be revealed." If Christ had wanted to conceal truth completely, He would simply have stopped preaching. Instead, He is giving it in a way that only the chosen would hear and understand...and they were then to take that truth out and make it plain. This relates intimately to our study from Ephesians 3 last Saturday, that we are not to be frightened or intimidated into silence.

The second parable is a parable about how we listen to God's truth. The standard of measure (the significance, weight and attention) you use in intaking and receiving God's truth will be directly reflected in the amount of truth God will disclose to you. If you are serious and intentional about it, God will be gracious and over-abundant in disclosing it to you. If you are lazy and careless, you will *not* stagnate in your knowledge and understanding...no, it will actually be taken from you. Jesus is saying, in verse 23-24, exactly what Joel the prophet says in Joel 1:2.

And so my exhortation to you is this: pay attention! The message of Joel is as pertinent and relevant to you at this moment as it was when Joel received it and gave it out.

2. **"...O elders...and all inhabitants of the land..."** = Joel mentions these two groups together twice (see also Joel 1:14). The context of the passage (both the rhetorical question in 1:2 which, to answer, would require a long life and a long memory; and also the command in 1:3 to pass the teaching down to the next generation) indicates that **elders** does not refer to a ruling group of elders, such as existed when Moses brought Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Instead, it simply refers to old men (the noun is masculine). The point is, the older generation is to lead by example here. The awful destruction Judah is experiencing because of the locust plague under consideration, was allowed by God in order to teach the nation a spiritual truth. It was up to the older generation to ensure that the younger generation understood this, and learned the necessary lesson.
3. **"Has anything like this happened in your days or in your father's days?"** = The destruction unleashed by this horde of locusts was of such a magnitude that no one living in Judah had ever experienced anything like it in their lifetimes. There was no record of such an awful disaster in the nation's history. And yet the people are called to tear their focus off of the disaster, and look beyond it to the spiritual truth God was trying to teach them. The phrase also expresses a certain kind of surprise at the magnitude of God's intervention. There are a few times in the Old Testament where this same kind of surprise is expressed.
 - a. *1 Samuel 3:11* = When the first prophet of the kingdom of Israel, Samuel, was still a child ministering in the temple under the direction of Eli the priest, Yahweh spoke to him about something coming soon upon the house of Eli. Notice the sort of incredibility of what God has promised to do.
 - b. *Habakkuk 1:5* = One of the later prophets, Habakkuk, had a similar revelation given to him. At the beginning of his oracle, he cries out to God regarding the injustice and violence he sees perpetrated all around him within Judah. When he asks God how long God is going to let it continue, note Yahweh's response. It contains the same sense of incredulity...Yahweh even says that if He were to explain clearly what He was about to do, Habakkuk wouldn't believe it!
 - c. *Job 26:5-14* = Job rebukes his unrighteous friend, Bildad, with a scathing pronouncement of God's awesomeness.
 - d. *Job 42:3-6* = And yet, even righteous Job, after He was confronted with the greatness and majesty of God's power directly, exclaimed that he truly did not understand God at all. And he promptly repented of his arrogance and presumptuousness.
 - e. *Psalms 139:6* = King David, confronted with the reality of God's omnipresence and omniscience, spoke the same kind of words.
 - f. *Psalms 131:1-3* = In this Psalm, David expresses his humility, recognizing that being in right relationship with God means not always needing to know everything about everything. God's knowledge is perfect, and so should my trust be, although my knowledge or understanding is not.

- C. *verse 3* = Joel issues a second command to the old men he is addressing.
1. **“Tell your sons about it...”** = Do you note that they are not instructed to tell their neighbors or their friends. They are to tell their **sons**, who are then to pass it down to their own sons. This obviously does not mean that the men were not allowed to talk about these things to anyone outside their own families. But it means that they bore a particular and special responsibility before God to educate their own children in the works of God and the lessons He intended to teach by them. Of course we might assume that, like our own children, other people had a part in teaching these things as well. But the responsibility for spiritual instruction was laid squarely and primarily at the feet of the parents.
 - a. *Deuteronomy 4:9-10* = Moses made the same point very clearly and profoundly. Remember that he was speaking to the *second generation of Israelites* that came out of Egypt. What had their parents passed down to them? Rebellion and stubbornness...and their corpses were consequently rotting in the wilderness as Moses gave this speech to their children.
 2. **“...and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation.”** = The perpetuation of God’s truth, and the witness of God’s work both nationally and personally, is a great responsibility entrusted to those who know of it. Those who have experienced God’s work and who have learned from His truth, are to speak it to those with whom they have opportunity and legitimacy.
 - a. *2 Timothy 2:1-2* = Paul, who considered Timothy a true child (*cf.* 1 Timothy 1:2) and a beloved son (*cf.* 2 Timothy 1:2), now exhorts that son to entrust what he has heard to other faithful men, and those men will, in turn, be able to teach others as well. This is a heavy burden placed on our shoulders, a very grave responsibility. But it is also a marvelous privilege!

III. CONCLUSION

- A. *Psalms 1:1-3* = In the passage we examined tonight, Joel begins his oracle by commanding that those to whom he spoke, stop what they were doing, put aside their distractions, and pay attention to God’s words. The Psalmist here makes a remarkable statement. Those who stay focused on God’s word will be blessed, like a tree which is abundantly watered and prolifically fruitful. In the parable we examined from Mark 4, Jesus said that God would overabundantly supply His rich wisdom and insight to those who take care what they listen to, and what standard of measure they use when intaking the word of God.

So I must ask as we close, what is your standard of measure? How much time do you devote to intaking and seriously grappling with the truth of God’s word? Not just reading; but pondering, meditating and devoting yourself to digesting, being nourished, and being changed by it?

And how much time do you spend talking to your “circle” about God’s work in your own personal life, and in the world around you?

IV. PRAYER