

THE DAY OF YAHWEH

A Study of Joel

Study #4

Cut Off from the House of Yahweh

(*Joel 1:8-9*)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The prophecy of Joel 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.
- B. 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.
- C. The prophet, in the ensuing verses, addresses three distinct groups within Judah. In verse 5, he addresses drunkards and wine drinkers. In verse 11 he addresses farmers and vinedressers. And in verse 13 he addresses priests, the ministers of the altar. Although certain specifics are different in each address, there is one common theme: he instructs all of them to *wail*.
- D. Tonight, we will begin to examine the next stanza of the prophet's command to lament and wail. Last week, we saw that those accustomed to drunkenness were commanded to wake up and take note of the destruction around them. Because of the agricultural devastation, the wine they were so accustomed to drink was now "cut off." In the same way, the passage before us tonight will assert that the grain and drink offerings were "cut off" from the house of Yahweh.
- E. This passage in Joel's prophecy is intensely emotional, and for that reason I have chosen to neglect my original outline in this portion of the book, and slow our study down a bit, just to be sure we have given due attention to the expressive and heartbreaking cry of the prophet in these verses. Before we get into the text, there are a couple of related issues connected to the text, which I want to elaborate for a moment.

II. CUTTING A COVENANT

- A. *Genesis 15:1-21* = This is the first time in the Bible that we see this picture given. Yahweh had given a promise to Abram, which we have recorded in *Genesis 12:1-3*. Here though, that promise is ratified for the first time, and the ratification is described succinctly in 15:18, "On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram..." The phrase "made a covenant" in the English is actually a translation of the Hebrew phrase "cut a covenant" (Hb. *kārāt' b'rīt*). This phrase reflects the practice of taking an animal (or several), and cutting it into two parts. The halves would be laid across from one another, forming a path of sorts between them. The parties to the agreement would then walk together through the pieces, and the covenant was thus ratified. Of particular note in this passage is that Abram never passed through the pieces, as he was fast asleep on the ground. This indicates that the Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant (the keeping of the covenant relies on God's faithfulness, and *only* God's faithfulness...Abram has no part to play in fulfilling this covenant).
- B. *Exodus 19:1-6* = In *Genesis 15:13*, God told Abram that his promised descendants would spend 400 years in a land that was not their own Promised Land, and that afterward they would come out. *Exodus* records for us this fulfillment. The land where they lived for 400 years was Egypt. And afterward, Moses brought them out, in order to bring them to the land promised to them (Canaan, known today as Palestine). Moses

received command to do this, directly from God, who appeared to him on Mount Sinai in a burning bush (*cf.* Exodus 3:1-11). God gave Moses a sign which, when he would see it, would confirm for him that it was God at work. That sign was that the people would worship God “at this mountain,” Mount Sinai (*cf.* Exodus 3:12). When the nation *did* finally arrive at Mount Sinai (*cf.* Exodus 19:1-2), God met with Moses. And through Moses, God mediated a covenant (called the Mosaic Covenant) with the nation of Israel. That covenant was ratified with the blood of an animal as well, which is recorded for us in Exodus 24:3-8. Verse 8 of that passage uses the same expression, “Behold, the blood of the covenant, which Yahweh has made [Hb. *kārāt* = cut] with you...”

- C. *Jeremiah 34:8-20* = During Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem, Judah’s King Zedekiah made a covenant (again, the Hebrew text says “cut a covenant”, *cf.* 34:8) to release all the Jewish slaves who were enslaved to their own people. All the people agreed to this covenant (*cf.* 34:10). Following their agreement, however, the people changed their minds, and re-enslaved those they had freed (34:11). The result was the judgment of Yahweh poured out on them (*cf.* 34:12-20). But notice verse 18, where Yahweh says that the people “have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts...” This is a very clear statement of the practice.
- D. *Jeremiah 31:31-34* = Yahweh also promised, through Jeremiah, a new covenant to be cut (*cf.* 31:31, same word used), which would come in Israel’s future. This new covenant, when it came to pass, was ratified by the shedding of blood as well: the crucifixion of Israel’s Messiah. Jesus made this very plain to his apostles the night He was to be betrayed (*cf.* Luke 22:14-20). And the Apostle Paul referred to this as well, writing to the Corinthians (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). And very boldly and clearly, the writer to the Hebrews elaborated the picture (*cf.* Hebrews 8:6-13, 9:18-26).
- E. **Remember This.** This concept will be key in the passage before us in Joel tonight, so please fix it in your minds carefully. In the meantime let’s briefly consider another, related issue.

III. THE BRIDE OF YAHWEH

- A. *Jeremiah 31:32* = In the context of the promise of the New Covenant, Yahweh makes a powerful statement regarding His relationship to Israel under the old covenant. He says that Israel broke that covenant, “although I was a husband to them.”
- B. *Isaiah 54:5-6* = In this passage, which promises future restoration for Israel, Yahweh called Himself Israel’s husband, and refers to Israel as “a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one’s youth when she is rejected.”
- C. *Hosea 1:2-9* = The first interaction that the prophet Hosea (whose name, incidentally, is the same Hebrew name as our Savior’s, that is, Joshua) has with Yahweh is very unique. He is told to take a prostitute as his wife, and so he marries a woman named Gomer. Yahweh intended this agonizing marriage to be an object lesson for the northern kingdom of Israel (*cf.* 1:2), to demonstrate the agony Yahweh experienced in the covenantal relationship that His wife, Israel, repeatedly violated. Hosea fathers three children with Gomer (two boys and a girl). Their names have a special significance, in view of the object lesson.
 - 1. *Jezreel*. The first child, a son, was to be named Jezreel (*cf.* 1:4). The historical significance of the name will be discussed in some detail when we study this passage, in our future study of Hosea. Note that the name Jezreel means “God sows,” the point of which will be explained clearly in Hosea 2:22-23. For now, be aware that the name in Hosea refers us back to an historical incident involving Israel’s King Jehu (*cf.* 2 Kings 9:1 – 10:36; *see specifically* 10:1-11). God was displeased with the aftermath of this incident, and through Hosea, promises to punish the house of Jehu for it.
 - 2. *Lo-ruhamah*. The second child was a daughter, whose name, Lo-ruhamah, means “she has not obtained compassion,” (*cf.* 1:6). The reason for this name is given at the end of verse 6, when Yahweh says He will never have compassion on Israel anymore, that he would ever forgive them.
 - 3. *Lo-ammi*. The third and last child born was another son, who was to be called Lo-ammi, meaning “not my people,” (*cf.* 1:9). This sad indictment is explained at the end of the verse, which reads, literally, “for you are not My people, and I am not yours.”
- D. *Hosea 2:1-13* = Yahweh describes quite vividly His intent to punish Israel for her adultery.

- E. *Hosea 3:1-5* = After Gomer fled her covenantal marriage with Hosea and took up adulterous residence with another man, Hosea was forced to literally buy her back, at a price the text indicates he could barely afford. He forced her to live with him in abstinence for a period of time (“many days,” *cf.* 3:3) before he was willing to restore marital relations to her, in the same way that God would leave Israel “many days” without a kingdom or religion (*cf.* 3:4), but would finally accept Israel back into full intimacy when they return, seek him, and come trembling to His goodness, which will not happen until “the last days,” (*cf.* 3:5). All of this was a clear object lesson, and was picked up in rather graphic detail by the later prophet, Ezekiel.
- F. *Ezekiel 16:1-63* = You cannot help but hear the agony, the intense, burning jealousy and anger of Yahweh at the betrayal of His covenant wife, Israel. And yet He promises to forgive them “for all that you have done” (*cf.* 16:63).
- G. **The Cumulative Picture.** These two pictures (cutting a covenant, and Israel as Yahweh’s covenant wife) joined together paint for us a vivid picture. At Sinai, Yahweh entered into covenant relationship with Israel. He was to be her husband. She was to be His wife. He had done everything necessary to woo her and cherish her. And together, they cut a binding covenant at Mount Sinai. She had agreed without reservation to this covenantal, committed relationship (*cf.* Exodus 24:3, 7; *see also* Joshua 24:14-28). And yet she proved faithless; and not just once, but repeatedly and often. It is for this very reason that the prophets were sent to warn her. If she would not return in humility and loyalty to her covenant pledge, Yahweh would drive her away. This is, essentially, the overarching theme of the writing prophets (with the possible exceptions of Daniel, and the post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi). And it is in this light that we come to the next few verses of Joel, first quickly taking a look at a verse we examined last week.

IV. A QUICK REVIEW

- A. *Joel 1:5* = Because we didn’t address these issues last week when we covered this verse, and because they come up clearly in the verses before us tonight, I want to take a quick second look at this verse, to see the same connections here, as they were first mentioned in the prophecy.
1. **“Awake...weep...and wail...”** = The drunkards and wine-drinkers of Judah are called to wake from their drunken stupor and respond properly and appropriately to the situation at hand. A locust plague has devastated the nation.
 2. **“...wine-drinkers...”** = We sometimes think of drunkards and wine-drinkers as sloths and layabouts, and this is certainly one way the term is used in the Old Testament. But in the context of Joel’s words, I think there is something more attractive in the picture he is trying to paint.
 - a. *Joel 3:18* = Here, the prophet describes an abundance of “sweet wine,” the very thing being “cut off” from the drunkards and wine drinkers in 1:5, and says that such an abundance is a sign of Yahweh’s covenant blessings (*see also* Amos 9:13).
 3. **“...on account of the sweet wine...”** = The word translated “sweet wine” (Hb. *‘āsīs*) is not the normal Hebrew word for “wine” (Hb. *yā’yin*). This rare Hebrew word has distinct connotations and overtones of sexual intimacy within the confines of the marriage covenant (*cf.* Song of Solomon 8:2) and the few prophets who use the word (only Isaiah, Joel and Amos) certainly have this covenantal intimacy between Yahweh and Israel in mind when they use it. The use of it here by Joel is especially significant, as I hope I can show you.
 4. **“...that is cut off from your mouth...”** = The first part of this phrase, “cut off,” is a key thought in the opening passages of Joel’s prophecy. It is used three times (*cf.* Joel 1:5, 9, 16). What makes it so emotionally devastating is the connection it has to Yahweh’s marriage covenant to Israel, because of the Hebrew word used (Hb. *kārāt*).
 5. **Conclusion.** The idea expressed in verse five is that the locust plague experienced in the days of Joel (ca. 3174 TT, or 830 BC) was a result of the fact that the covenantal marriage relationship between Israel and her God, Yahweh, was beginning to fracture because of repeated violations on the part of Yahweh’s wife, Israel. If she did not repent quickly (*cf.* Joel 1:13-14, 2:12-17) the relationship would be severed until such a time as restoration and reconciliation could be made. But when that happens, the result will be great, renewed blessing (*cf.* 2:18 – 3:21).

V. TEXT: JOEL 1:8-9

- A. *verse 8* = The prophet commands contrition from the people of Judah, because the covenant relationship is in danger of being severed and broken.

1. **“Wail...”** = As we noted last week, this command is repeated four times in this opening chapter (*cf.* 1:5, 8, 11, 13). However, this is the only time in Joel this particular Hebrew word is used. In fact, this is the only time in the entire Bible that this specific Hebrew word is used. It is a unique call to mourning!
2. **“...like a virgin girded in sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.”** = The picture is powerful and poignant...and utterly devastating in its implication. Imagine the scene: the young virgin has waited for this day all of her life. Tomorrow she will be joined in marriage to the man she loves most in this world, the man she’s loved from childhood, from the first moment she set eyes on him. Her dress is silky and luxurious, the ceremony will be filled with the people who mean the most to her. Their faces will be radiant with joy and rapture, all celebrating for her happiness. She barely sleeps the night before, her body quivering with excitement, nerves, and anticipation. The day dawns, her attendants arrive early, and a flurry of activity ensues as they style her hair, use expensive cosmetics and perfumes on her person, and carefully dress her to perfection. Her excitement builds until she can barely contain it!

And then a messenger arrives, his face grave and pale, his hands trembling. At once they know something has happened. There is a moment of awful silence. And then he speaks, his voice shaky and hoarse with grief, “Dead. He’s dead! Your beloved has died in the night!”

Her face falls, her eyes widening as tears begin to pour. Her life, as she planned to spend it with her well-beloved, has ended before it can begin. She will never experience intimacy with him. She will never feel his cheek against hers. She will never cry into his strong, safe shoulders. She will never hear his voice whisper words of love and tenderness. She is devastated! She cries softly at first, and then as the first real waves of understanding and terrible, heart-rending agony begin to roll over her, she begins to wail, her voice piercing the early morning softness. She tears her dress off, shredding it to pieces. And as she wails, she replaces the silky dress with the rough, harsh, sackcloth frock made from coarse goat hair. It itches and scratches her perfumed skin, and causes her to sweat and chafe. But it seems utterly appropriate for her body to experience this measure of discomfort, given the awful anguish of her heart.

This is Joel’s command to the people in verse 8. They are to experience real, genuine, and devastated agony of heart, and to manifest that physically by loud lamenting and wailing. But why should a mere locust plague be cause for such an agonized response?

- B. *verse 9* = Joel gives the cause, the reason why this locust plague should bring the people to their spiritual knees.

1. **“The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off...”** = When most modern Christians think of the Jewish sacrificial system, they think mainly of animal sacrifices. But two important parts of the sacrificial system were *grain* and *drink* offerings. There is so much that could be said about these, and so many passages from the Law of Moses that might be useful as references. But for the sake of time, let me say this just briefly. These two offerings were specially used for two internal purposes:
 - a. *As a Sign of Covenantal Fidelity.* The grain offering was always to be seasoned with salt (*cf.* Leviticus 2:13). This salt was to be an everlasting reminder of the loyal, faithful covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel (*i.e.*, Numbers 18:19). That is why the salt is called the “salt of the covenant” in Leviticus, and why the covenant is, conversely, called a “covenant of salt” in Numbers. The drink offering was to accompany every grain offering. It was a heart-response from Israel, as they recognized Yahweh’s covenantal fidelity to them, and in response poured out their own hearts and lives before Him in faithful, committed devotion.
 - b. *They Were a Sign of Yahweh’s Blessing.* Both of these offerings were from the fruit of the ground (grain and grapes). That meant they had to be grown in the soil and required rain. It is remarkable that rain falls in this region of southern Palestine, seeing that it is basically a desert region. But this is a unique land that Yahweh loves and cares for (*cf.* Deuteronomy 11:10-12). And for that reason it has fertile soil...but would nonetheless grow *nothing* unless God Himself

provided the necessary moisture. And He *does* provide it in a special way for that land...but His provision is a sign of blessing. And in times of disobedience, Yahweh often withheld that rain (*cf.* Deuteronomy 11:13-17) as a sign of His discipline. Even the book of Joel makes reference to this phenomena (*cf.* Joel 2:18-19, 21-24).

And in the setting in which Joel is prophesying, God *had* provided the necessary rain, and the crops had been bountiful. But rain in the desert also brings the threat of desert locusts. In fact, it is only by God's faithful mercy that they do not invade every rainy season in that land. But this time, Yahweh has indeed sent such a locust plague. It is called His *army* (*cf.* Joel 2:11). And the result is that there is no fruit of the ground, neither grain nor grapes, to produce the necessary offerings.

2. **"...are cut off from the house of the LORD."** = Just as in 1:5, the phrase "cut off" is the same word used in the phrase, "cut a covenant." It refers back to the act of cutting a covenant, by now threatening to cut off the covenant promises using the same word. The point is this: *whose* act was this? Who is the One acting to begin the process of severing the covenantal cords? Who provided rain, but then sent locusts to cut off the offerings? This is Yahweh's act. It is He who is threatening to initiate divorce proceedings. He is threatening to leave His adulterous wife to her own devices. He's warning her that she's about to be kicked to the curb, if I can say it that way.
3. **"The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD."** = Those who were responsible to carry out the sacrifices, charged with the actual offering of these gifts, were in mourning. This is, in reality, a very pragmatic sadness. Only a portion of the grain offering was burned before Yahweh. The rest was given to the priests (*cf.* Leviticus 2:2-3). This was how the priests survived, because they had no portion of land as an inheritance on which to grow food. They were set apart to minister to Yahweh, and so portions of the offerings were to be set apart for them as sustenance (*cf.* Deuteronomy 10:8-9, 18:1-8, *et al.*). Now, that sustenance is being cut off from them. How will they live or survive?

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. *Hosea 13:1-6* = Here the problem is defined precisely. Israel relied on Yahweh...until one day, they didn't. They became self-reliant and ran away from Him.
- B. *Hosea 14:1-9* = And here is the solution. "Take words with you and return to the LORD."
- C. *James 3:13 - 4:10* = Lest you think this teaching of spiritual, marital fidelity to the Lord is just an Old Testament teaching for an Old Testament nation, please hear the words of our Lord's brother Jacob very clearly.

VII. PRAYER