

Week 2 | “An Overview of The Book of Joel”

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Over the past three weeks as the COVID-19 crisis has shut down the globe I’ve had a range of emotions. During the first week I felt paralyzed as a leader. The second week I felt hopeful, and optimistic about having a plan, and leading God’s family into Christ, and health during a season of physical separation.
- B. But during the third week I felt a sense of sobriety, seriousness and concern about where life is headed. I could feel this internal nudge to take in the scope of what’s happening not just locally, but globally.
 - 1. The economic outlook isn’t clear right now, and we don’t have assurance from anyone that we will bounce back and return to life as normal. This is a season where God is rousing the Church to follow Him into an unknown future.
- C. In an attempt to walk with the Spirit, I’ve taken a turn from our previous series in 1st Thessalonians and have started a new series through the book of Joel titled, “Return.” In this series we will take time to walk through the book of Joel verse by verse working to understand the historical context of the book, as well as finding its application for us today.

II. JOEL AND HIS MESSAGE

- A. The Bible gives us limited information about Joel, other than he’s a prophet, most likely from Judah, who’s well versed in the scriptures, especially the book of Deuteronomy, and he’s acquainted with temple worship and sacrifices. Joel’s name is only mentioned one time in the Bible, right here in **Joel 1:1**.
- B. Although dating the book of Joel is near impossible, most commentators place his prophecy in the pre-exilic time period, prior to the Babylonian invasion. John Calvin had this to say about the dating of Joel, *“Not to know the time of Hosea would be to readers a great loss, for there are many parts which could not be explained without a knowledge of history; but as Joel there is less need of this, for the import of his doctrine is evident though his time be obscure and uncertain.”*
- C. The main theme that dominates Joel’s prophecy is the Day of the Lord. Joel saw the Day of the Lord not as a single event, but a series of events that both afflicted God’s covenant people with trouble for their harlotry among the nations, while at the same time driving out their enemies, all those that opposed His good rule and reign as God extends His sovereign authority over every nation.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF JOEL’S PROPHCEY

- A. The book of Joel is broken into 4 major sections; **Joel 1:1-20**, **Joel 2:1-27**, **Joel 2:28-32**, and **Joel 3:1-21**. Through each of these sections we understand what was happening in Joel’s day, and what would come in the future, beyond Joel’s day. Joel was a prophet standing in the middle of one crisis, looking at another crisis on the way.

B. Section #1—Joel 1:1-20;

1. The opening section of this prophecy pictures Joel standing as the prophet of God in the midst of a horrifying, and devastating locust invasion that's nearly decimated their city and region.
2. The people of God, God's covenant people Israel seemed to be stunned by this disaster, maybe not knowing why it's come, or how to take it. And therefore, Joel calls the attention of the elders, the drunkards, the farmers and the priests, asking them if they'd seen anything like this in their day, or in their father's days.
3. It's clear, from **Deuteronomy 28:42**, when the people are experiencing drought and locust invasions that God's judgments are in the land. Joel's appeal is to *wake up, shake off the slumber, get free from the spirit of the age, and look around*, this devastation isn't accidental, it's been brought about as, "...the day of the Lord...as destruction from the Almighty."

C. Section #2—Joel 2:1-27;

1. In the middle of this crisis, with it's impact still being felt, the bodies of water dried up, animals languishing, and the total ruin of their crops, Joel raises his voice again, speaks about another, future, far greater invasion, not of locust, but a northern army, Israel's sworn enemies, the Babylonians.
2. Joel assures them, on the heels of this locust invasion, is an army, an army that will first be seen on the mountains in the distance, then suddenly they will heard like horses prepared for war, eventually making their way into the city, Jerusalem, and ultimately into their houses.
3. Joel assures them, the land will be, "...like the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness...with nothing escaping them."
4. Again, for the second time in this book, Joel appeals to God's covenant people to shut down business as usual, to gather before God with torn hearts, with repentance, returning to Him. Joel understood the two-fold nature of God's covenant with Moses, one of both curses for those that disobeyed Him, but blessing if they RETURNED to Him with all their hearts.
5. This is Joel's confidence, no in their ability to RETURN, but in God's commitment to show mercy!

D. Section #3—Joel 2:28-32

1. Joel's prophecy takes a radical turn from picturing God's covenant people as being left out, and under the judgment of God, to a people vindicated as God's Spirit is poured out, not only on one or two national prophets, but upon EVERYONE, *male and female, young and old*.
2. The outpouring of God's Spirit, the salvation of those that call upon His name is nothing new, just the fulfillment of God's promises to their forefathers.

E. Section #4—Joel 3:1-21

1. Joel continues His prophecy by calling all the Gentile nations into the valley of Armageddon where God will make an end of those that hated Israel and the people of God. It's a fight, where God Himself will remove rebellious nations and usher in His good, right and eternal rule.

2. God's vindication of Israel and the people of God doesn't only mean *restored lands, the outpouring of the Spirit* and *the salvation of many*, it also means the destruction and retribution of God upon the gentile nations that have worked to destroy God's covenant people Israel.
 3. This prophecy ends where the Bible both starts and ends; the people of God, dwelling together with God, not in a Garden, but in a garden city, forever (**Gen. 1,2,3—Rev. 20,21,22**).
- F. One commentator rightly summed up Joel's prophecy saying, "*The Locust plague in Judah is a manifestation of the day of the Lord. It's an act of judgment and a sign of further judgment to come. But the image of the Locust invasion of the land in Joel 1 is suddenly transformed into another image of destruction, that of the northern army sacking Jerusalem. The Bible then presents repentance and restoration as a means of healing. Rains come and restore the land; the northern army is destroyed, and God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh. Finally, apocalyptic fury falls upon the gentile nations in retribution for their hatred of Israel and the despoiling of Jerusalem.*"

IV. THE GOSPEL OF GOD IS MORE THAN INDIVIDUAL SALVATION

- A. Well, if this message has shocked you, if it's bothered you, if it's left you unsettled, two things are rightly happening; (1) you are hearing correctly about both the severity and goodness of God. (2) And secondly, maybe your unfamiliar with the Gospel, the story of God in creation, fall, redemption and restoration.
- B. The Good News isn't simply good because our sins are forgiven, which is great! The Gospel in very sad ways has been reduced to salvation, even further, it's been reduced to the individual. The majority of the contents of the Gospel have been sucked out, and replaced with western ideology concerning the individual.
- C. Regarding this point Iain Murray says, "*According to the reformers in the Puritans, the message of Christianity is not simply about how man is to be saved, it is about how God is glorified in man Salvation ... The worship of God, is to be preferred to the safety of men and Angels.*"
- D. Look what Paul said in **1st Corinthians 15:19** regarding the resurrection of the dead, "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable.*" Paul's saying, "*guys, look, if your idea of salvation is solely about this life, about your individual experience, to the neglect of eternity, and the larger story of God in the resurrection of the dead, your largely missing God's intention in salvation.*"
- E. Beloved our hope, the **Titus 2:13** "*...blessed hope...*" transcends this age and anchors us in the age to come. The **Colossians 1:5** hope, "*...which is laid up in heaven...*" isn't primarily about making your life comfortable in the midst of discomfort; it's about rooting your life in another age, an age that's unshakable, that's real, and still yet awaiting us.
- F. The Bible is for you, but it's not about you; it's about GOD! This is man's great rebellion against God, our great insurrection, not only in the garden, but also in the Church; we've stepped onto the natural and cosmic stage, a stage created for God and His glory and we've assumed it's for us, about the individual.

1. **Ephesians 1:9-10** *“Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”*
- G. Beloved, the mystery of God’s will, that which was once hidden, now made known, is that God is joining everything together, both in heaven and on earth, together in His Son, Christ Jesus the Lord!
- H. But Paul continues, encouraging us to pray a certain way, in light of God’s revealed will;
 1. **Ephesians 1:15-18** *“Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the Saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; That you may know what is the hope of HIS calling, what are the riches of the glory of HIS inheritance in the saints...”*
- I. Joel prophecy presents a storyline that’s often unfamiliar to us, although it’s central to the whole of the Bible. But when you and I connect our lives to something bigger than individual salvation, such as we see in the book of Joel we are caught up in the greatest drama the human experience has ever known.
- J. The Gospel, the Gospel of the Kingdom is GLORIOUS, CAPTIVATING, FILLED WITH UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT and SPLENDOR and WORTHY OF OUR AFFECTIONS and LIFE’S DEVOTION in comfort or discomfort.
- K. My encouragement to you is read the book of Joel a few times this week. Underline phrases, circle words, highlights thoughts that come to mind, and get familiar with his prophecy.