

Minor Prophets #2 JOEL

HOSEA took a faithless wife and spoke of judgement, love and life
JOEL told of locust plagues The Spirit and the end of the age

We know virtually nothing about Joel. Possibly, he prophesied in the eighth century BC. But his message was centred around a great locust plague and its implications.

1. The day of the Lord

- Judah was beset by a great army of locusts (chapters one and two)
- Although he describes this like an enemy army invading, both at the beginning and the end of his description, Joel makes it clear that it was an army of locusts (1:4 and 2:25).
- The whole land was devastated

The damage wrought by the locusts was like that of a great invading army (Joel 2:7-11) Joel's language seems extravagant but a severe locust plague *does* darken the sky and *does* destroy everything in its path. Here is a contemporary description:

Locust plagues decimate everything in their path. Related to grasshoppers these insects are one of the most destructive pests on earth.

Plagues of locusts devastated crops, pastures, orchards and entire countries and continents since mankind began keeping written records. Passages in the Bible even make reference to these destructive outbreaks. Once locusts are compelled to swarm they amass quickly and in such great numbers that they actually blot out the sun while in flight. During a migratory "plague" one swarm can be made up of millions, sometimes billions of insects. After homing in on a food source, the entire swarm lands and then proceeds to eat everything in its path, devastating the area within a matter of hours. Then the swarm rises up as a single massive unit and moves on to the next field or orchard. Swarming locusts can cover distances of several hundred miles in a 24 hour time frame.

Once a plague of locusts breaks out there is little that can stop it. A single band is sometimes miles wide and besides blotting out the sun will interfere with land and air travel, clog machinery like car radiators, not to mention devour an entire country's food supply in a matter of days. Like grasshoppers, different species of migratory locusts are found in many regions of the world from the deserts of Australia and Africa to the plains of the United States and Canada. Since locusts travel on wind currents it's not uncommon for swarms to cross oceans, jumping from one continent to another. Consequently these insect pests continue generating billions of dollars in crop losses around the globe.

http://sdsd.essortment.com/locustsplagues_rkgh.htm

Particular warnings were given to:

- **Drunkards** (1:5): no more wine
- **Farmers** (1:10-12): no more crops
- **Priests** (1:9, 13): no more offerings

In other words, all aspects of society suffered

Joel refers to this as the day of the Lord (1:15; 2:11)

- The day of the Lord is a day of judgement
- It typifies the one great day still to come (Joel 2:31)

Other prophets refer to that day eg Amos; Zephaniah; Zechariah; Malachi. So did:

- Jesus – Lk 21:34; John 12:48
- Paul – Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 3:13; Phil 1:10; 1 Th 5:2, 4; 2 Th 1:10; 2:2, 3; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8
- The writer to the Hebrews – 10:25
- Peter – 1 Pet 1:12; 2 Pt 2:9, 3:7-12
- John – 1 Jn 4:17
- Jude – v.6
- It will be an awesome day!
- Read all the above references

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (ESV)

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

[9] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, [10] when he comes **on that day** to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed.

This is a far cry from the Christmas story of Jesus coming to the earth as an innocent baby. Next time he will come 'in flaming fire.' Those who do not obey the gospel (ie who do not repent and believe) will be excluded from God's presence forever. What this means is not clear but it certainly means separation from all that comes from God:

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness

- self-control

Imagine a world without even the slightest touch or glimmer of such qualities. It would be intolerable and terrifying.

The day of the Lord is coming. It will be a fearsome day. We need to be ready!

2. Five R's

- **Rend** (2:12, 13). Rending garments = destroying all that hinders us from pleasing God. Joel tells us to rend our hearts, not just our garments.
- **Return** (2:12, 13). Turn around and come back to God
- **Repent** (2:14-17). Mourn over our sin
- **Rejoice** (2:23). God has done great things (20, 21)
- **Restore** (2:25-27). God restores all that is lost

3. The outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-32)

- Poured out – not dribbled or sprinkled! An abundant supply
- On all flesh – all God's people are recipients
- On men and women (emphasised twice) – both men and women are equipped for service
- On young and old – children and young people can be Spirit-filled. Children need the fullness of the Spirit to live for Jesus. (To wait until they are 'ready' may be a mistake. Like asking soldiers to prove they can fight and only then giving them weapons!)
- With visions and dreams – remarkable insight into the purposes of God
- With prophecy – throughout both the OT and the NT, in almost every case, people responded vocally to the coming of the Spirit (ie with some form of prophetic speech).

The promise of Joel was fulfilled at the day of Pentecost

- Read Acts 2:1-41
- Never before had the Spirit been poured out on all God's people
- A special kind of prophecy (glossolalia) was witnessed
- This was a unique sign for a unique event. For the first time in history, the Spirit was poured out on all God's people and for the first time ever, glossolalia was expressed. Like the rainbow it was an ongoing sign, a constant reminder of God's fullness.

We can be filled with the Spirit

- A wonderful privilege
- A source of effectiveness (eg Acts 1:8)
- It is important not to be afraid of change. Those who resist change have no fear of God (Psalm 55:19). Only those who are perfect have no need of change.
- Are we willing to risk being taken to a new place?
- When we step out (in faith), God steps in (with power).

4. The valley of decision

- God will judge all nations (3:1-13)
- A global day of decision (3:14)
- God's everlasting kingdom will be established (3:17-21)

We are in a 'valley of decision' today. Will we follow the 'five R's'? Or will we continue to go our own way?

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Biblical

1. What sort of damage was done by the locust plague across the land? (chapter one).
2. What do you think was the purpose of dressing in sackcloth? (13).
3. What are the qualities of God that always cause him to be ready to forgive? (2:13)
4. What were the signs of God's restoration of the land? Make a list (21-27)
5. What would be the results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? (2:28-32)
6. What do you think 3:12-16 are all about? When you have thought about it, read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Personal and practical

7. Which of the qualities mentioned in 2:13 means the most to you? Why?
8. How does your experience of the Holy Spirit in your life compare with 2:28-29? Isaiah 44:3-5 might also be relevant.
9. What do you find encouraging about 3:16?
10. What does 3:18 mean to you personally?
11. Which verse in Joel stands out most to you? Why?

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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