

THE PROPHET OF PENTECOST

Joel

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Last Sunday we looked at the Book of Hosea, and I indicated we'd be looking at the Minor Prophets in their canonical rather than chronological order. That is to say, we look at them in the order we find them listed in Scripture. After Daniel comes Hosea, then the Book of Joel. You'll find that we'll speed it along this evening if you keep the Scriptures open to this book—Joel, who has been called, and with good reason, the “prophet of Pentecost.”

We read the introduction to the Book of Joel in verse 1: “The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel” (NIV). The word “Joel” itself comes from a combination of two Hebrew words, *Yahweh* and *El*. In English more commonly in the Old Testament we translate *Yahweh* as “Jehovah.” Actually, a more correct rendering of the covenant name for God by which He revealed himself to Moses and to the people of Israel is the name *Yahweh*. That is the word we'll be using in reference to God in our study this evening. *Yahweh*—the God who has brought Israel out. *El* is the Hebrew word simply for God. Like we say “Jesus is God.” In the Hebrew terminology it was not Baal is God, for Baal was not God. He was simply an idol. Or Ashteroth is God. No, he is not God, but an idol. But *Yahweh* is God. Joel's name therefore is a combination of two words—*Yahweh El*, “*Yahweh is God.*” Joel's name, therefore, is the exact reverse of Elijah's name. Elijah's name was *El Yahweh*.

The fact that his father named him that is significant. It certainly indicates for us something about his father's faith in the living God. So often a person who comes to the fore in speaking the Word of God has been shaped by influences of the home.

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In regard of some background matters in respect to Joel, we, in looking at when this prophet lived, we are somewhat at a loss, especially as compared to other prophets in the Old Testament. We found last week in looking at the prophet Hosea that he dates himself by particular kings—kings of Judah and kings of Israel. But with Joel we find no referencing of himself to a king. In fact, a close examination of the book will find that it appears that there isn't even a king at the time. Joel is ministering at a time when the priests have a predominant role. Whereas many of the revivals of the Old Testament, the king, because he was the head of the nation, was at the forefront of the revival. In Joel, you don't find a king.

This leaves us then with a rather clear idea as to what options are available for the time in which Joel lived. For there are only two times where you could basically fit him, possibly three.

One time would be in the ninth century B.C., in the year 835 or so when King Joash was seven years of age. His mother had been deposed. She was the daughter of Jezebel. Joash was really at a time, because he was such a child, he did not rule in the kingdom. A regent ruled for him, his uncle the high priest. It may be therefore that Joel is one of the earliest prophets writing at a time of his nation's history in the ninth century when there was not the predominance of a king. This has been kind of an older and more traditional view of the date of Joel.

Another possibility, however, is that Joel writes from the time either immediately before the fall of Judah in 586 B.C. or sometime maybe during Ezra and Nehemiah or there around—the fifth century. During this time we know there was no king. Particularly in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the establishment of the priesthood. In the Book of Joel no temple is mentioned, just the vestibule and the altar. And this has led some to the idea that maybe the book was written shortly before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah; the worship sacrifices were still being carried on, but the temple had not yet been reconstituted.

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Another striking thing about the book is it is written with no reference to the Northern Kingdom, which is another strong indication that a later date may be preferable. Because had it been written in the ninth century one would have perhaps expected to find some reference to the Northern Kingdom.

Also another thing about the book that suggests either a real early date or a later date for it is the array of enemies that are opposed to Judah. We know that during the main block of Judah's history its major enemies were either Assyria or Babylon. Yet neither Assyria nor Babylon is mentioned in this book. Rather the enemies are the Phoenicians and the Philistines, the Egyptians and the Edomites. That four-nation federacy would fit well either again in the ninth century or the fifth century.

Also there is the reference in the Book of Joel to Greece, since Greece had not yet come to much predominance in the world scene in the ninth century before Christ and specific reference is made to Hebrews being sold to Greeks as slaves. Again it would seem to fit a better picture to place Joel in the fifth century.

Another kind of interesting aspect is that Joel is a prophet of the Day of the Lord. He's going to have a lot to say about this as we move through the book this evening. As the prophet of the Day of the Lord, again he is either the first person talking about the Day of the Lord or one of the later prophets talking about the Day of the Lord. Here is kind of a unique development in reference to the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament. As the prophets began speaking of the Day of the Lord, outside of Joel in some of the earlier prophets, the Day of the Lord was a time in which the nations of the world would be judged but Israel would be blessed.

However, Amos stood that notion on its head by saying the Day of the Lord for Judah and Israel will be a time in which God's judgment begins at His own house. "For those of you," he was

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saying to his fellow countrymen, “that have been excitedly waiting for the Day of the Lord to come because you’re going to be really blessed and favored, get ready. Because the Day of the Lord isn’t going to be what you thought it would be. It’s going to be a time of judgment.”

Joel really strikes heavily to this theme. Therefore, again it would seem that Joel is kind of wrapping up what a lot of other prophets have said in bringing the concept of the Day of the Lord to a fine point.

There also is the fact that Joel is either quoted in other prophets or quotes other prophets. It depends again whether you take the ninth-century or late sixth- or fifth-century viewpoint of the book.

The thing about Joel in regard to time is here is a message of timelessness. Probably, to really appreciate the message of Joel, you really don’t even need to know the century in which he lived.

The Book of Joel can be interpreted without a background of dates. If you look at the prophet Hosea it would be difficult to understand Hosea’s message without understanding precisely his historical context.

John Calvin wrote of the dating of the Book of Joel, and he wrote almost four centuries ago that as there is no certainty it is better to leave the time in which he taught undecided. As we shall see this is of no great importance. 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 to Joel, there is less need of this. For the import of his doctrine is evident though his time be obscure and uncertain.

As you read the Book of Joel you find that it easily falls into two parts. The first part, chapters 1:2 through 2:17, is for the most part the prophet Joel himself speaking. We’ve entitled it “Judah,

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Locusts and God,” noting three inner related themes which are traced throughout the early part of the book.

The second part is the part of which almost the whole part Yahweh, or God, is speaking. We’ll simply call it “Divine Oracles,” chapters 2:18 through 3:21. The theme of the Book of Joel is the fact that in this little country of Judah, for the most part, the Book of Joel is centered around the territory of Jerusalem. His nation has been overwhelmed by a crisis. Joel’s purpose is to relate the catastrophe to the purpose of God. The Day of the Lord, the Day of Yahweh, is therefore his fundamental message. He is going to appeal, because of the catastrophe that has happened to his nation, the thrust of his nation is that he is appealing to his countrymen to call a national day of humiliation in which they will beseech God for His favor and that God will therefore relent from His course of action which is going to be to severely punish the nation. In fact, Joel, perhaps, is the first one to come up with the idea of a national day of humiliation or a national day of prayer and fasting. This is the intent of his book and the burden of his message.

I. Judah, Locusts and God

As we look specifically at the Book of Joel, we start out with “Judah, Locusts and God.” We find in this section, first of all, Joel giving a summons to national mourning (verses 2–20). Joel by the way, is a master of words. You can see that as he begins: “Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation” (verses 2–3, NIV).

Notice how he begins with an appeal for persons to listen. He’s saying, “This recent catastrophe that has happened to us, this catastrophe that is going on right now, you old men, have you heard anything like it?” This catastrophe is so severe that even if Joel is a fifth-century prophet he is

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almost saying that this is worse than being carried into Babylon. This is the most severe thing that's ever happened to the people of God in our conscious experience. It's going to be something so memorable that you'll want to pass it on to your children and to their children's children.

So what is this event, this catastrophe? Verse 4 spells it out, having gained the attention of his audience. "What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten" (NIV). In the Old Testament there are nine different Hebrew words used for "locusts," probably to describe different developmental stages of locusts in life. Here Joel uses four of them to describe within his lifetime the most severe plague that his people have ever experienced—a time of locusts. Therefore it is a call to the nation. First, in a general kind of way, he's saying there's never been anything like this. And it's a devastation of locusts. Joel says there's never been anything like it in our conscious memory.

Joel having therefore given a call to the nation in general terms begins specifically addressing various segments of his nation in respect to this plague.

The first specific group which he addresses, surprisingly, is alcoholics. He says, "Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white" (Joel 1:5–7, NIV). The first group that Joel speaks to surprisingly is the drunkards, the alcoholics. What he is saying is, "Your wine is running out." Someone has said that for the alcoholic that is a sobering thought indeed.

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The fact of the cutting off of the wine is such that as is characteristic of God's dealing with us—our need drives us to God. So that the first element, the need. Although their need was not a legitimate need, that need nevertheless was a point of awakening in the prophet Joel to begin calling segments of his nation to consider what was happening.

I think we should note the fact that when we read verse 7 that Joel is putting things in terms of God's language and it is "My vines, My fig trees that are being affected. My land." We know from the Old Testament, 1 Kings 4:25 as a chief example, that vines and fig trees were a symbol of prosperity and also peace. The thing which was being destroyed is not simply seen as the nation's property. It's God's property which is being destroyed.

Having given a call to the alcoholics to arouse them, Joel turns to the city of Jerusalem. He does not name the city by name, but he uses a verb form which is in the singular feminine imperative mold and therefore gives implication that he's talking about Jerusalem. He's saying to Jerusalem, "Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth." Hebrew marrying practices were different than our marrying practices. When a person became betrothed or engaged in Hebrew society it was regarded as binding as marriage is in our society. Indeed once the betrothal had occurred, even though the marriage had not been consummated, to effect a separation would be to initiate divorce. There is no more tragic a thing in Joel's mind than for a bride to be who is betrothed to a groom to never have the opportunity to see that marriage fulfilled, and moments or days before the marriage the groom is suddenly stricken and cut off from the land of the living. You could just as well imagine the empathy and feel the empathy you would have towards an individual caught in those kind of circumstances. Joel is saying no less a feeling on the part of Jerusalem will do in respect to this plague. It involved that kind of lamentation. Why? Because the cereal offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house

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of the Lord. The priests mourn the ministers of the Lord. The fields are laid waste. The ground mourns because the grain is destroyed, the wine fails, the oil languishes.

See what Joel is doing here? He's very concerned about offerings in the temple. With the morning burnt sacrifice and the evening burnt sacrifice all of these were, of course, perpetual observance within Judah's religious history. Accompanying each morning sacrifice and each evening sacrifice was to be a measure of meal or grain. We call it the cereal offering. It was meal. An oil was put upon it. It symbolized the fact that the product, the produce belonged to God. With that being offered on the fire of sacrifice of the animal was also a libation, or a pouring forth of wine signifying that the drink of the land belonged to God as well. Joel theologically sees this plague and says a most critical effect is going to be that, because of the devastation of the locusts, the worship of God cannot be continued in Jerusalem as it normally is. Even the small portion it takes for the daily meal offerings and drink offerings, even that portion has been cut away, so devastating has been the plague.

Therefore the priests are to mourn, and the ground mourns as well. Joel is a prophet who really stands as a predecessor to the apostle Paul. Paul links together the suffering of nature with the suffering of man. Joel uses poetic terms like "the ground mourns." Later he'll talk about the beasts groaning. What happens in one sphere of God's creation spills over and affects another sphere of God's creation. He speaks graphically and poetically—the land mourns.

Then Joel turns, in giving his call to the nation in regard to this plague, to another group—the farmers (verses 11–12): "Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree—all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away" (NIV). Wheat, the more expensive crop—barley,

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the less expensive crop, the staple of the Hebrew diet. The pomegranate is very hard. Its mention of destruction is an indication of the devastation of the plague that something so hard as a pomegranate has been chopped up by the locusts. All the trees of the field are withered and “gladness fails from the sons of men” (RSV).

This phrase “gladness fails from the sons of men” is a striking one when you consider that the Hebrew economy was basically agricultural. You know that, except for the times you go to church or in the assemblies of believers, your happiest time is when you get your paycheck. That is the fruit of your investment. The fruit of your labor. The happiest time for an agricultural community is its harvest. The Hebrews had two harvests, spring and fall. The spring harvest was marked by the Feast of Pentecost. Its completion. The fall harvest was marked by the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

They were the happiest times of the year. Psalm 4:7 says there is only one joy better than the harvest. That is, “Thou hast put more joy in my heart [spiritual joy] than they have when their grain and wine abound.” That’s the way he describes spiritual joy. It’s compared to the harvest. Isaiah says in regard to a devastation in his time, “Joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field, and in the vineyards no songs are sung, no shouts are raised, no treader treads out wine in the presses. The vintage shout is hushed” (16:10). Here’s the agricultural scene of grapes being gathered in a stone vat, and it was the custom that in order to produce wine from the grapes a person get in and tread out the grapes. So that the juices would flow down through a spout that was prepared in the ground through the stone and the juices would come forth. This was a happy time when the treader of the grapes gave the happy vintage shout.

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Joel has, by looking at these groups, so analyzed the disaster that had occurred in his country as to present a series of arguments to draw his people, his nation, to its knees. That is his purpose, to give a specific articulation of these events so as to elicit a spiritual response.

Therefore, he secondly gives a call to the priests, and he gives a call to prayer (Joel 1:13–14). To the priests he tells them, “Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn” (NIV). So great is the mourning that Joel is seeking from the priestly community who are the leaders of the people that he tells them, “Go! Pass the night in sackcloth.” Normal mourning would simply involve the wearing of sackcloth in the daytime, and at night it could be put off. But he’s telling the priests, go, stay awake during the night and keep the sackcloth on or sleep in the sackcloth if you sleep. “You who minister before my God...the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God” (NIV). He, then, in speaking to the priests, gives them an indication of what they should do about this. They are to call for a public service of humiliation and fasting (verse 14). To the priests, “Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD” (NIV). His solution was a corporate meeting of the people of God. We’ll see more what he has in mind for this as we continue to look at the book.

In verses 15–18 he addresses the entire community and returns once more to the theme of devastation and the need for doing something about what has happened. For he talks about the fact that the locusts are really sort of a precursor or a forerunner of the Day of the Lord.

“Alas...for the day of the LORD is near” (NIV). That is, going through this locust plague gives us an idea of what it is like to really go through God’s judgment. “It will come like destruction from the Almighty” (NIV). That word for “Almighty” is interesting. It is the word for God, “El Shaddai,” God Almighty. In other parts of the Scripture that is a source of comfort to believers.

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How many of you in a time of distress have quoted Psalm 91, which talks about abiding in the shadow of El Shaddai. Abiding in the shadow of the Almighty. Somehow in a time of trial it's a great comfort to realize that the God upon whom we rely is indeed almighty. But what has previously been a comfort to His people is now a discomfort. For he turns the word against them and says, El Shaddai, God, is bringing destruction. "Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes— joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering" (verses 16–18, NIV).

Then in verses 19–20 he gives a prayer. It is really more of a sob than an articulate prayer. It is simply "To you, O LORD, I call!" (NIV). It is a disaster too deep for easy speech and language. Have you ever found yourself in that kind of condition in prayer where the situation is so extreme that it does not easily give forth to some fancy and polished speech? But, simply, "I call." Why? Because the fire has devoured the pastures of the land. Here fire may be a symbolic term for the locusts or perhaps after the plague of the locusts as would be common the fires devoured what had remained.

The pastures in the wilderness. "To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures" (verses 19–20, NIV).

Notice it's not only the domesticated animals that had been affected by this, but wild animals as well. The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

With this kind of summons to national mourning, which this first chapter involves, next Joel turns to talk about divine judgment and human repentance that are on the brink for Israel. As he

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starts chapter 2 we may guess that chapter 1 reveals the first sermon, which Joel preached. As we begin with 2:1, there is a second sermon which he preaches. (The books of the prophets are really collections of speeches the prophets gave.) There may have been some distance of time between 1 and 2. Maybe the people really didn't respond to chapter 1. Or it may simply have been that chapter 2 is a deeper recapitulation of the intensity which the prophet feels toward the situation. Verses 1–11 he talks about Yahweh's army of locusts. It's an incredible kind of imagery. In verses 1 and 2 we see a warning that was sounded: "Blow the trumpet in Zion" (NIV). Zion is a term for Jerusalem, and it is in reference to the fact that in days of danger and alarm persons were stationed on the city wall to blow the trumpet that gave advance warning to the people that something was going to happen.

We have replaced the ram's trumpet in our society with the air raid siren. Joel is saying, "Sound the alarm." Why? Because the locusts are simply the forerunner of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is coming. "A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and powerful army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come" (verse 2, NIV). Clearly, here all of a sudden he's leaped right out of the present into a future and distant age. Which, to the prophets who could not see valleys of time in between epochs, to him the Day of the Lord was imminent. We know now there's been a great deal of time that has elapsed. But Joel is leaping out prophetically to see that what they felt psychologically about the locusts is nothing compared to what they're going to feel like when the Day of the Lord has come. He says "There has never been from of old nor will there again be anything like it." Here Joel is showing his deep knowledge of the Old Testament which had preceded him. In the plague of locusts against Egypt in Exodus 10:14, in that plague God had promised that that plague was so severe that there would never be another plague as severe as

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that. So Joel's plague wasn't even as severe as the plague against the Egyptians. But he is using conscious biblical language to say in that last day, that plague, the Day of the Lord, there will never be anything like it.

In verses 3–9 he describes the invasion and advance of the locust army. Here very clearly he's talking about something more than simply locusts. He is talking about a foreign invading force at the end of the age, which is crunching in upon Israel. Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them and after them a desolate wilderness. Nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses. "They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows" (2:4–9, NIV).

In America we've never lived through an invasion. We can hardly realize what is being communicated here. The absolute fear of being without any military resources or strength to defend against that kind of invasion.

Revelation 9, the fifth trumpet judgment that is forecast, the writer of Revelation cast the same language he takes from Joel. He talks about from the bottomless pit there is released a plague of locusts that comes against the people of God. It's definitely a fitting together in a prophetic mold to describe a kind of demonic-like possession of humans by demons in a great army against God's people.

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Then in verses 10–11 Joel describes cosmic disturbances associated with the Day of the Lord. In respect to locusts it had been symbolic quite clearly. “Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and the moon are darkened” (NIV). When a locust plague came over, the sun and the moon quite naturally were darkened. But it wasn’t anything that happened to the sun and the moon. It was that something had happened on earth.

Therefore when we come to prophetic language in Revelation which talks about the sun and the moon being darkened or the moon being turned into blood it may not be so much as the idea that something is happening out there. But rather that something is happening on earth, which disturbs our perception of things out there. There is a real cosmic disturbance.

Joel goes on to indicate that this invading army coming on the Day of the Lord is God’s army. It is the Lord’s army. This is a figure of speech in the prophets. That they can frequently say even of the Assyrians that they are God’s rod of His anger. Even though they’re not God’s people, God is using them against His people for a refining kind of purpose. In the Book of Revelation we see that even the Antichrist is seen as simply a tool in God’s hands to accomplish His purposes. Joel has taken natural impressions from a locust plague and created a religious nightmare. He strips away the veil of our normal perception of simply leaving the nation with a locust plague, and from that normal (or abnormal) event he weaves the thought of a great day of disaster.

Having therefore stirred his hearers to the pitch of excitement by the occasion of the locusts, Joel now is ready to channel their emotions to a point of spiritual release. Now, beginning in verse 12, he starts holding out some hope. Up till now it’s been a day of gloom and a day of darkness.

In verses 12–17 he calls for national repentance. The call for national repentance, its summons, its exposition, its implementation and its act. The summons to repentance, verse 12. ““Even

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now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning'" (NIV). Here the Lord is saying now is the time to turn. Now is your opportunity to obey and avoid the Day of the Lord. This is a clear promise that the New Testament holds out. That those who belong to God will escape God's wrath. God's wrath will never be poured out upon His people. So Joel is saying, you've gone through the locusts. Let this be a warning to not have to go through the Day of the Lord when He pours out His wrath upon the world. Instead, return. Retrace the steps where you've gotten lost and come wholeheartedly. Come with fasting and with weeping and with mourning. Then, verses 13–14, he gives an exposition of what he means by repentance. There is the necessity for sincere inward repentance. "Rend your heart and not your garments" (NIV). One of the great phrases, by the way, of the Old Testament, because the Hebrew way of expressing grief would be to, in a time of disaster, to simply tear the clothes. Joel is saying, "This now which I ask you to do is more than an outward expression of grief. It is an inward repentance."

Then the grounds for the repentance, the hope, for God to keep Israel from the awesome day of His judgment—the Day of the Lord—the grounds for that hope in the character of God. There's something very striking here. Joel is calling for intensity of repentance. But he does not lead Judah to the notion that God is going to grant repentance simply because they carry out all of the right kinds of things. *If you cry loudly enough, if you cry long enough, if you do things intensely enough, then God will hear.* That's not Joel's message. God's message through Joel is simply you mourn and you grieve over your sin. But you recognize that repentance and forgiveness is possible because it is rooted in the character of God. It is grounded in God himself.

Therefore Joel says, "Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn

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and have pity and leave behind a blessing— grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God” (verses 13–14, NIV).

Joel is deep into the Pentateuch; he’s been reading the Book of Exodus which had come anywhere from 600–900 years before him. He has read in Exodus 32 about the time when God was going to cut off His people for making the golden calf. God speaks to Moses and says, “I’m going to make of you a people, but as for this people, they are stubborn and stiff-necked and I’m not going to have anything to do with them. Moses, they’re your people.” Remember what Moses’ response to God was? “God, they’re not my people. They’re Your people. And if You don’t help them then the nations are going to say that it was Your fault. For the sake of the fact that these are Your people do not judge them. But rather grant them repentance and grant them mercy.” Then in Exodus 34 God gave the great revelation to Moses where Moses was hidden in a cleft of the rock and God’s glory passed before Moses and the words God spoke on that occasion were simply these, that He was a God of mercy, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. Based upon that way that God had revealed himself in His nation’s history Joel turns around and says, He can do it again.

I think that’s tremendously exciting when you start thinking about that. You get all kinds of applications. If God could use Simon Peter, He could sure use me. If He could take anybody that big a clod and develop a brick out of him, or rock, then surely He can do something with my life. If He could cleanse Mary Magdalene then He could cleanse me. If He could associate with persons of ill repute then He would associate with me. If He longs to gather people of the Gospels to himself then His attitude towards me is the same way. I am grounded in the character of God as has been revealed to me in Scripture. Therefore, because of what we know about the nature of God, we can expect that when we come to Him in absolute sincerity He will forgive us.

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Not simply on the basis that we've done a good deed by repenting, but because it's God's nature to forgive when we come.

Therefore never hesitate to come to God. And Joel holds out the prospect for blessing. Maybe if there is repentance, the Lord will not only grant forgiveness and escape from the Day of Yahweh but perhaps as well He will restore the cereal offering and the drink offering.

Thus Joel has a program for implementing this repentance. It's not something to be something just internal but it's to have a biblical expression in the community (verses 15–16): “Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber” (NIV).

Again, if you're looking at the Old Testament, you realize that the Hebrews had by revelation of God this marvelous law of the honeymoon. After you were married you were supposed to not work for a year. You're exempt from military duty. The bride and bridegroom were exempt from all the normal obligations of life. But here he is saying the situation is so crisis that what had been normal exemptions are now canceled. The bride and bridegroom themselves are to interrupt their joy of the honeymoon and be present for this service of national humiliation and fasting.

Even the nursing infants are to be there as well so that the entirety of the people of God are represented there before Him.

In chapter 2:17 he spells out the specific way that repentance was to be accomplished. “Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar [between the entrance of the court of the priest and the large altar of burnt offering where the sacrifices were laid]. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of

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scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?”” (NIV). They were to root their cry in the character of God himself.

This finishes the first part of the Book of Joel. This kind of gives you a framework of where this prophet is coming from—the severity of what he’s calling for. He has spoken, and the message is before the people. Evidently, the people act in response to the summons for a national day of humiliation and fasting because we find God beginning to speak in verse 18. The presupposition is the people have done what Joel has called for, therefore now God can freely speak.

II. Divine Oracles

We come to the second major section of the Book of Joel, divine oracles. In these divine oracles God promises material and spiritual blessings—material and spiritual promises are made in verses 18–32 of chapter 2.

First, there are immediate blessings that are given (2:18–27). God, in reference to the prayer of the priests says, “Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. The LORD will reply to them: ‘I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations’” (verses 18–19, NIV). Here is an immediate way of God saying, “I have answered your prayer.” The prayer has been answered because He loves his people. The simple reason is the freedom of His love.

Notice how God is seen phrasing His response. It is His land (verse 18). It is His people (verse 19). The emphasis is upon “His.” God has been predisposed to intervene all along because what was being destroyed was His people, His land. We always know that God is predisposed to come to our aid in mercy because we’re His. And because when we’re hurt, we’re God’s property, we’re God’s people, we’re God’s family. Just like you would want to come to the rescue of your child when the child was hurting and asked for your help. Even if the child is a grown person,

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and maybe blowing it terribly, now he is saying, “I’ve at last come to my senses. Will you help?”

Because there’s something grounded in your person, if you’re a healthy person, you help.

I think if we really understand the message of the prophets, some of the hang-ups we have about God will get blown to smithereens. The fear that God doesn’t want to have anything to do with us. The fear that God is down on us. The fear that God wants to send us to hell. The fear that God wants to put His thumb on us and keep us down. All of that is blown up by a prophet like Joel. He goes on to indicate, “I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land” (Joel 2:20, NIV). You could say here’s what God promises to do with the locusts. He’s going to blow them away. But I think there’s something deeper in this than simply locusts. Again, Joel all of a sudden has reverted to the end days, the last days, the Day of Yahweh. He’s saying this invading army, this army from the north, the end time army according to Ezekiel, is to be a northern army against Israel. He is going to turn them aside. Their remains are going to be in the Dead Sea and Mediterranean Sea, the sea on either side, and a stench and foul smell will go up from them.

Because God has made this response, there is a song of praise that can be given to God (verses 21–27). “Do not be afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things” (NIV). Notice that the Lord hasn’t done anything yet. Just made a promise. But what the prophets understood in speaking for Yahweh was that when God says it, it was as good as done. So what if there was an interval of time between the moment the Word was first spoken and the event actually came to pass. Because God has spoken it is sure to be. Therefore one could already begin to give praise. It had happened.

You know how that has ramifications in the New Testament? In the concept of life, John says that Jesus has given us life and life is in the Son. Because God has spoken it through Jesus that

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you're going to have life, you already have it. It's there. It's for you. It's for me. We are already alive unto the ages. Because God's promises have moved into the present.

Therefore the song of praise. "Be not afraid, O wild animals [I love his speaking to the animals. The inclusion of the animals in God's plan for the ages], for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches [The fig tree and the vine, remember, are symbols of prosperity. They have returned. That's the promise]. Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before [The early rain was the fall rain, the heavy rain. The latter rain, the spring rain, helped the crop come up]. The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm— my great army that I sent among you [Here I think is a relationship promise for persons whose lives have been wrecked by sin, that when you come to Jesus there is a restoration that goes on. Some of the years you've lost you pick back up]. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed [Here he's leaping back and forth between the present and the distant future]'" (2:22–27, NIV).

Verses 28–32 are spiritual promises with care made to Israel. Here, of course, is where we pick up the theme of Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost, for this is the Scripture that Peter quotes on the Day of Pentecost. Remember when Peter quoted that Scripture he knew what its context was. It's exciting, therefore, to see where he picks through the prophet Joel in explaining the outpouring

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of God's Spirit which had occurred. "And afterward [after what? After that great and significant event when God intervenes on behalf of His people], I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (verses 28–29, NIV).

Here is a series of profound promises which are far deeper than the physical blessings in regard to the agriculture which had just been promised in verses 21–27. Only a person who has had his agricultural fortunes reversed and now has food in his stomach and something to drink can turn around then and be ready for something spiritual. Too often we try to cram something spiritual into somebody when they've got physical hurts. First take care of the physical hurts and then talk about the spiritual blessings. This is what Joel does. "Afterward. After the physical needs are met then I will pour out My Spirit." There will be a rain of the Spirit that is more profound than any rain naturally. It will be upon all flesh. By this Joel understands the Jewish community. Peter enlarges it to all of those who believe in Christ. It does not refer to every human being for the word "all" is defined by its context—every person who belongs to God. All.

In the Old Testament God gave His Spirit to specific persons on specific occasions for special tasks. The responsibility of the people at large was not to receive special guidance for themselves but to recognize and obey God's voice as mediated to them through Spirit-filled leaders. Joel goes beyond this point and sees the outpouring of the Spirit of God as a manifestation of God's indwelling which would be revealed in a far clearer way than simply physical prosperity. In physical prosperity was one way in which God manifested His presence; the deeper way would be the prosperity of the Spirit.

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Moses had said in Numbers 11:29, “Would that all God’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them.” Joel is picking up on that wish of Moses and saying in that day all of God’s people will be prophets. At Ephesus, the disciples being made prophets. “O that we were all prophets and spoke the word of the Lord.” Inevitably prophecy is a sign of being filled with the Spirit. Again, prophecy not predictive. Joel has been very little predictive up to this point. But in a sense of grasping a situation and saying here God is at work.

This giving of the Spirit would be without distinction of age, sex or class. All of those distinctions would be swept away. Peter on the Day of Pentecost stands up, and he’s asked the questions, “What is this? These people drunk with new wine? The wine of the Spirit? What’s happening?” (Acts 2). Peter noticed on the Day of Pentecost and does not say, “This is that which Joel spoke and is now fulfilled.” He omits the use of the word “fulfilled” and instead says, “This is that...” What Peter is doing is a common phenomenon of Old Testament prophecy. It’s so striking we should get it. What the New Testament does is say in between the time the prophet potential is spoken and the time it is fulfilled there is present realization so that the giving of the Spirit is prophesied as an end-time condition for God’s people. I think even after the Day of Yahweh, when all of God’s people are safe and everyone in the kingdom of God—the millennial reign or the reign in heaven—is full of God’s Spirit. Peter simply stands up and says this has already moved into the present. Just like Jesus said, eternal life has moved into the present. So the giving of the Spirit has moved into the present age and the little container we have in this age is big enough just to take some of this potential. Even though some of this potential is poured out from the cup, the cup has a special way of reviving itself so that in the end it expresses fully the potential what was in the beginning.

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We're already now experiencing some of the blessings of the age to come when the Spirit is outpoured. You want to know what it's like in the age to come? Then begin living in the Spirit and you get an idea kind of what it is like in the inner man to be with God forever.

Joel then talks about the cosmic signs of the Day of Yahweh. "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (verses 30–32, NIV).

The cosmic signs of the nations would herald the Day of Yahweh even as the locusts in Joel's time heralded the Day of Yahweh. What the locusts were to Judah, the cosmic signs will be to the nations, that the day of God's judgment has arrived.

The pouring out of the Spirit should not be thought simply of occurring in the Millennium, but perhaps here is the fulfillment going on now. Some would hold it to be a fulfillment even during the time of the reign of the Antichrist. The great pouring out of the Spirit of God.

Chapter 3 contains the judgment of the nations. In this significant chapter Joel gives a summons to the nations to gather in Jehoshaphat's valley. "Jehoshaphat" is the name which literally means "Yahweh judges." It has been called "Verdict Valley." The Lord summons the nations of the world. They think they're being summoned to fight Him. They don't realize it's God's summons. But the Lord is summoning them to judgment. It is God's "Nuremberg," when He evens the score with the nations. Joel sees the potential of the resurrection and all men being judged. The foolishness of the nations coming to that valley is seen so clearly in verses 9 and 10: "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near

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and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears [the farmers are to arm]. Let the weakling say, ‘I am strong!’” (NIV). The Lord says that when these nations are gathered in Verdict Valley then God is going to judge the nations. Joel uses expressive terminology. “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness” (verse 13, NIV). There’s a striking term there—the vats overflow. That’s the reason why they should be treaded. Here you get the imagery. The great harvest is in, and they’ve been put in the vat. There are so many grapes in the vat that already the grapes are pressing on one another and the juice is already spilling out. Because they’re piled in such a way they are crying out for a treader. What Joel therefore is saying is that at the end-time age, the age which brings in the Day of the Lord in judgment, it is going to be a time so ripe with judgment that literally the conditions of the time cry for judgment.

Isaiah does an incredible thing in respect to this concept when he notes in Isaiah 63:1–6, “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson [Edom is a place where Israel had been defeated]? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.’ Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress [and here, by the way, we must understand the Savior is speaking. Only He is speaking from the context of His judgment of the nations]? ‘I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my

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wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground” (NIV). The Book of Revelation, in picking up on this theme in reference to the return of Christ, sees Him as One coming from heaven to trod out the winepress. Specifically it is noted in Revelation 19:13, “He is clad in a robe dipped in blood.” A clear reference to the prophecy of Isaiah 63 and the prophecy in Joel 3. The coming Day of the Lord. Joel’s great message which glistens through is God’s people, if they repent, are spared from the Day of Yahweh.

It is a theme which Paul hammers on so hard in Thessalonians that he nearly cracks our consciousness and our shell of resistance, saying God has not appointed His people unto wrath, but unto salvation. For Joel there was no doubt. God has a day in which He will judge the world. It is Yahweh’s day. In comparison to man’s day. This is Yahweh’s day, a day of great judgment, but a day for God’s people of salvation.

Closing Prayer

I think, Lord, as I reflect upon Your Verdict Valley, when You come to judge all men represented in the figure of nations, that one of the criticizers which You will use is how they responded to Your people. Throughout this Book of Joel You are saying to the nations that if Your people are hurt, You are hurt. You are saying to us that there is a day to us in which justice will be finally and fully accomplished. We need to get a hold of that, for unless we really grasp that great heart of Yours which speaks to us of equity and justice we will tend to be casual about justice and inequitable ourselves. We confess the truth that You have appointed a day in which You will judge the world. We praise You that when we have come to You and have rent our heart, not our garments, but truly repented, that for us that day of Yours will never break upon us. For, having come to You, we have been saved from Your awesome wrath. So as we gather together for service and culminate our time together with commemoration of Your broken body

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and spilled blood, we are given a new context and a new meaning for what this symbolizes for us. We have been invited by You to sit down at the table with You as Your friends—indeed, closer than friends. Invited to sit down as Your special guests, Your bride whom You love so dearly that You gave Your life for us. Let this be a time of great seriousness. But a time of consummate joy as well. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.