

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14F_Prophecy in the Prophets_Joel_Content)

Outline of Book¹

The devastation of the locust plague (1:1-20)

- ❑ Introduction (vv. 1-3)
- ❑ Desolation of the land (vv. 4-7)
- ❑ Call for mourning (vv. 8-12)
- ❑ Call to repentance (vv. 13-20)

The coming day of the Lord (2:1-32)

- ❑ The desolation of the “day of the Lord” (vv. 1-11)
- ❑ Exhortation to sincere repentance (vv. 12-17)
- ❑ Deliverance of the land (vv. 18-27)
- ❑ Promise of the pouring out of the Spirit (vv. 28-32)

The judgment on the nations (3:1-17)

- ❑ The time of judgment (v. 1)
- ❑ The place of judgment (v. 2)
- ❑ The basis of judgment (vv. 3-8)
- ❑ Preparation for judgment (vv. 9-12)
- ❑ Execution of judgment (vv. 13-17)

Promise of Millennial Blessing (3:18-21)

- ❑ The prosperity of the land (v. 18)
- ❑ Desolation of the nations (v. 19)
- ❑ The habitation of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 20)
- ❑ The presence of the Lord in Zion (v. 21)

Historical Setting

In our last lesson, we learned that there are two primary eras of Israel/Judah’s history that could provide the background for Joel’s prophetic book. The two major categories are pre-exilic and post-exilic. I tend to favor one of two pre-exilic datings for the book. If we assume that the book was written early in the reign of Joash, then 2 Kings 11:4-12:21 provides the biblical background. Joash (835 B.C. to 796 B.C.) came to the throne of Judah as a boy, having been hidden by his aunt Jehosheba from wicked Athaliah who murdered the royal offspring when she usurped the throne (2 Ki 11:1-3). Joash was crowned king of Judah at the age of seven by Jehoiada, the high priest. Jehoiada ordered the royal guard to dispose of Athaliah. Jehoiada served in the role of advisor until Joash came of age. If Joel wrote during this period, then he wrote urging Judah to repent before a judgment even greater than the locusts would come upon her. In a sense, Joel was way ahead of his time if this dating of his writing is correct. Judah escaped the 5th Cycle of Discipline when Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.

The dating I prefer provides perhaps a clearer understanding of the reason for Joel’s concerns. If Joel ministered during the last 25 years or so of Judah’s existence as a nation prior to the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.), then Joel would have written and ministered around 610 to

¹ Taken from Ronald B. Allen, “*Notes on the Book of Joel*” (Unpublished class notes prepared by Dr. J. Carl Laney, revised by Dr. Ronald B. Allen for 304N, Old Testament Prophets, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 1996). See identical outline in Earl D. Radmacher, gen editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1465.

600 B.C. This dating is bolstered by Joel's use of phraseology and tone that is very similar to Zephaniah who wrote around 627 B.C. Joel would have been a contemporary with Zephaniah and Jeremiah. Joel's message of an impending national disaster in which he used the recent locust plague as a backdrop for his message would have been even more persuasive. The Babylonian empire was emerging and was virtually sitting on Judah's doorstep. Judah experienced her first deportation of captives to Babylon in 605 B.C.

The Day of the Lord – Joel's Prophetic Announcement

In our introduction to this prophetic book, we studied the Old Testament usage of the phrase – the "day of the Lord." We studied one of the passages that deals with one use of the phrase – in reference to an actual (now past) historical event. There are four biblical texts in addition to Joel (2:15) that describe and interpret the Day of Yahweh (the Lord) in terms of past judgments (Isa 22:1-14; Jer 46:2-12; Lam 1:1-2:22; Ezek 13:1-9).²

Joel uses the locust plague described in chapter 1 as the backdrop for his prophetic pronouncements in chapter 2 and following. In our study of Joel, we are most interested in chapters 2 and 3 since these are the chapters that contain eschatological references. We only have time in this study to focus upon a select section of these two chapters.

From Joel's description of the day of Yahweh, we see that the day of Yahweh will be both a time of judgment (Joel 1:15; 2:2 cf. Isa 13:6, 9; Zeph 1:14-18) during which there will be discipline and destruction upon those nations that have persecuted Israel (Joel 3:12-14) as well as on the rebellious and disobedient of Israel (Amos 5:18-20). At the same time, it will be a time of deliverance and unparalleled blessing for God's people (2:32; 3:16, 18-21 cf. 1 Thess 5:2-5).

In Joel 2:1-11, Joel describes the coming judgment in terms of an invasion of an army that is comparable in number and devastation to the locust invasion of chapter 1. The Babylonian army in its conquest of the Southern Kingdom of Judah comes to mind. In verses 10-11, Joel uses a mixed metaphor to describe both the historical "day of the Lord" which was soon coming and the eschatological "day of the Lord" which is still to come. This is an example of dual prophetic fulfillment in Scripture. There is a strong relationship between the eschatological overtones in verses 10-11 and the prophecies of Jesus recorded in the book of Matthew and of John in the book of Revelation (e.g. sun, moon and stars diminishing – see Matt 24:29 and Re 6:12, 13).

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the **sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven**, and the **powers of the heavens will be shaken**. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt 24:29-31)

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the **sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of the heaven fell to the earth**, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of

² Ibid., 5.

the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"
(Re 6:12-17)

The Call to Repentance

In chapter 2:12-17, Joel issues a call to repentance to God's people. This call to repentance recognizes the principle that runs throughout the entire Bible of God granting grace prior to judgment. God would not be satisfied with mere outward acts of repentance (v. 13), but He was looking for true spiritual repentance of the mind. The Jews of ancient Israel and Judah would tear their clothes to demonstrate remorse. The classic example of this act without the reality of spiritual repentance is found in the actions of the chief priest during Jesus' trials just prior to His death (Matt 26:65). Even at the last moment, the Lord would turn from judgment if Judah repented (v. 14). The situation should cause the Jews to sit aside normal practices in deference to its urgency. All ages should be summoned (v. 16) and the bride and bridegroom should not follow the normal practice of being excused from reciting daily prayers on their wedding day, a practice or exception codified in the Mishnah.³ Joel excused no one from prayer at this time of national emergency. If the people and leaders would demonstrate true repentance, then God would be obligated to deliver lest He be made a mockery among the Gentile nations (v. 17).

Deliverance and Millennial Blessings (2:18-32)

In verses 18-27, Joel describes the more immediate blessings that Judah would experience if she repented. In verses 28-32, Joel describes the more distant, eschatological blessings that will one day be experienced by a repentant Judah. (The events at Pentecost were a mere foretaste of what Israel would one day experience in full). These verses correspond to judgment and deliverance associated with our Lord's second advent. Ezekiel speaks of an outpouring of the Spirit in similar fashion (Ezek 39:29). This outpouring will be universal and without distinction of person. Ancient and modern barriers of sex, age, and class are broken (2:28-29). Among the signs associated with this universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit are wonders of nature affecting the heavens. This is to focus the attention of people heavenly in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. The clinching phrase is in verse 31 – "before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord."

Those who "call upon the name of Yahweh" (v. 32) will be saved. To proclaim the name of Yahweh in the Old Testament is the equivalent of confessing saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ See Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible*, 1468.