

Message #1

Various Texts

The average American lives in a nice comfortable home. He is able to sit down and relax without giving much thought to the threat of anything. He turns on his television or his computer or picks up a book and, generally speaking, he spends the evening in a quiet and peaceful way.

Every now and then the average person watches the news and it is disturbing. There are reports of trouble in various parts of the world. There is always trouble in the Middle East. News reports show the devastation of tornadoes, earthquakes and war and death in different parts of the world. There are pictures of people being slaughtered; people starving; cities and buildings that have been demolished and are nothing but debris. These reports are so depressing that after you have watched that for a while; you turn the channel. After all, these kinds of reports make us uncomfortable. Who wants to spend an evening watching these kinds of things that are so depressing?

What the average American does not know is there are some very serious warnings in the Scriptures of a coming time when God will pronounce a worldwide judgment that will not only affect the Middle East; it is a judgment that will hit the entire world including the United States of America. It will be a devastating judgment that will take away all comforts from everyone. In rapid fire speed that judgment will hit in a time called in the Bible “The Day of the Lord.”

The Day of the Lord judgment will feature all kinds of horrible things worldwide that have never occurred in the history of the world. A Great Tribulation will hit the entire world, every nook and cranny. The “times of the Gentiles” will come to an end. A horrible battle called Armageddon will be fought. God will once again gather Israel. Jesus Christ will come back a second time and a Millennial Kingdom will be established. What an incredible moment in history it will be and what a remarkable story it is to tell.

There is one book in the Bible designed to tell this whole story and that book is—**the book of Joel**. In the next weeks we would like to take you on a journey through the three chapters that make up this key book of the Old Testament.

As is our habit we introduce it today by asking and answering six introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Joel?

Let me give you six reasons to study it:

Reason #1 - Because Joel is one of only 66 inspired books in the Bible.

God has given only 66 inspired books to man. We learned from II Timothy that these books are God-breathed books. The fact that Joel belongs in the Bible has never been questioned.

By the beginning of the second century B.C. (190 B.C.), Joel was accepted and documented as an inspired book. In Qumran Cave 4 of the Dead Sea Scrolls there were eight copies found of the Biblical prophets and Joel was one of those books.

Around the year A.D. 90, a council meeting was held in Jamnia, a city two miles east of the Mediterranean and seven miles south of Joppa. This meeting was held by a small group of rabbis to determine which Hebrew books were inspired by God and Joel was recognized as an inspired book of God “without question.”

There is a very early copy of the Masoretic Hebrew Text of the book of Joel. The Masoretic text is the only text authorized by the Jewish scholars for vowel points for pronunciation purposes. A vowel pointed text in Hebrew was discovered in 1955 which had been written in the 2nd century A.D. and there was an entire copy of Joel. As Dr. Leslie Allen said, “The Hebrew text of Joel is well preserved” (*Joel*, p. 36).

Joel is a book that is in the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the O.T. Hebrew; it shows up the old Syriac translation in the first century A.D.; it shows up in the Latin Vulgate translated in the 4th century A.D..

Furthermore, Jesus Christ quoted the book of Joel as being an inspired book. In fact, Joel is quoted at least 23 times in the New Testament, many times by John in the book of Revelation. So Joel is one of those rare books inspired by God.

We just came through a study in which the Apostle Paul told Timothy to carefully study and carefully preach “all Scripture.” Therefore, we are going to study the book of Joel.

Reason #2 - Because very few of God’s people actually study the book of Joel.

So few people actually study the book of Joel that it almost seems unimportant, but as one commentator said, this book is like an atomic bomb.

This book is one book that has a serious message for Israel; it has a serious message for the nations but it also has a very important message to N.T. believers. This book says God will not let His people get away with sin forever. In fact, part of this very book was quoted by Peter when the Church Age began (Acts 2:16-21). Yet what is so tragic is that it still remains a book that is almost completely overlooked and neglected and misunderstood. A. C. Gaebelien said, “The Pentecostal delusion is built up mostly upon wrong interpretations of this prophecy” (*The Prophet Joel*, p. 3).

We know the Word of God is not understood by the non-believer, but what is so problematic is the fact that very few Biblical institutions, very few ministers and very few churches actually teach this book of the Bible to God’s own people. Joel is probably one of the most neglected books of Scripture in the entire Bible. The nonsense of the Charismatic movement comes from misunderstanding a passage in Joel.

The neglect of this book does not just affect the church. It affects Israel and it affects the nations because “people perish for lack of knowledge.” For example, Israel is led by a bunch of priests, ministers and rabbis who don’t know what to do because they don’t have a clue as to what is happening or what they need to do or what they need to tell the people to do (**Joel 1:13**).

If people actually understood what is predicted in this book of Joel, Christians would be very serious about the Word of God, nations of the world would honor Israel, and **Israel as a nation would right now “call on the name of the LORD” (Joel 2:32).**

Frankly, we do not want to fall into the trap of most people. We want to carefully study this book and discover just exactly what it is that God’s Word says.

Reason #3 - Because Joel warns the entire world of the ferocious coming judgment of God.

It is predicted in this book that there is coming a time of such horror, the likes of which has never been seen before in the world. In fact, Joel says, “there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it” (**Joel 2:2**). **The central theme of this book is “The Day of the Lord.”** The Day of the Lord is a time that will feature various things, one of which is a ferocious judgment that is coming directly from God and is aimed directly at this world, including Israel. In fact, the day is called a “day of darkness and gloom” (**Joel 2:2**).

This is a book that presents a serious warning that God will eventually and dramatically intervene in human history and it will not be pleasant. This day of the Lord includes all of the horrors of the Great Tribulation described in Revelation 6-19.

We have had the privilege of living in the age of grace. But there will come a time when this age will end and when that happens, God will pour out His wrath on this God-mocking, Israel-hating, Christ-rejecting world. Joel tells that story. In this book of Joel, present physical disasters point to future Tribulation judgment. Severe droughts and locust plagues all show what God is capable of doing and point to what He will do. This is a point we all need to grasp.

Reason #4 - Because Joel warns the nations that they had better treat Israel in a respectful and honorable way. **Joel 3:2, 12-13**

We are living in a day in which many nations and many leaders think nothing of speaking out in a demeaning way against Israel. Many say horrible things about Israel and do horrible things to Israel. But Joel says God will eventually gather all nations for judgment on behalf of Israel (**Joel 3:2**).

Those who demean Israel are going to face Jesus Christ in serious judgment. This judgment will include individuals, political leaders and nations. The end result will be Israel-hating individuals and leaders will fill up the wine vat of the ferocious wrath of God (**Joel 3:12-13**).

Reason #5 - Because Joel encourages Israel that one day she will be the esteemed nation of God forever. **Joel 3:20**

Those who support Israel today are far and few between. Some have even questioned the commitment of the United States to Israel. Israel has been the most hated, hounded and hurt nation of any nation in the world. She has suffered one tragic negative after another.

But this book of Joel says that is not how the story will end for Israel. One day, she will be in her land and one day Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem as her King and when that happens, she will be esteemed by all nations of the world as the great nation of God.

Reason #6 - Because Joel is a book that offers grace to those who have sinned greatly.

God invites rebellious sinners to “call on the name of the Lord to be saved” (**Joel 2:32**). In fact, this book says, “whoever” calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Even if one is a believer and has done things that deserve God’s wrath, God invites people to call to Him. This book presents the truth that God does punish, but He also saves. God is a God of destruction, but He is also a God of redemption for those who call out to Him. God will discipline, but He also will forgive. Joel is an amazing book that presents grace.

QUESTION #2 – Who is Joel?

Joel was a relatively common name in Israel. **The actual name Joel means Jehovah God or Jehovah is God.** This is a reversal of the name Elijah which means “God *is* Jehovah.”

There is some discrepancy as to how many actual Joel’s there are in the Bible. As near as we may determine, there are at least ten guys named Joel in the Bible:

- 1) Joel, the son of Samuel - I Sam. 8:1;
- 2) Joel, the son of Joshibiah connected to Simeon - I Chron. 4:35
- 3) Joel, connected to Reuben and Nebo - I Chron. 5:4, 8, 12; Ezra 10:43
- 4) Joel, the son of Izrahiah connected to Issachar - I Chron. 7:3; II Chron. 29:12
- 5) Joel, the brother of Nathan - I Chron. 11:38
- 6) Joel, the son of Gershom - I Chron. 15:7
- 7) Joel, the son of Zehieli - I Chron. 26:22
- 8) Joel, the son of Pedaiah - I Chron. 27:20
- 9) Joel, the son of Zichri, connected to Benjamin - Neh. 11:9 (v. 7).
- 10) Joel, the son of Pethuel - Joel 1:1**

What we learn about this Joel comes from what is in this book. We learn from **Joel 1:1** that he was the son of Pethuel. **We may assume by virtue of the fact that Pethuel names his son Joel, that he was a very God-fearing and God-honoring father.**

Although his message is for all of Israel, Joel was a prophet who apparently lived and ministered to Judah and Jerusalem in the south (Joel 3:1, 6, 8, 18, 19, 20).

In fact, we may assume that he lived in Judah, perhaps near or in Jerusalem because he specifically refers to the spot known as Zion (2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:16, 17) and he obviously had a great familiarity with the Temple and the priests (1:9, 13, 14, 16; 2:14, 17; 3:18).

One thing we do know about Joel is that he was not afraid to take on the religious and political hierarchy with the truth of God. He was not afraid to warn Israel's leaders and the nations that they were heading to terrible judgment. Joel did not present messages to them that they wanted to hear; he presented to them the truth of God that they needed to hear.

Joel would have no problem looking the Prime Minister of Israel in the face and warning him to turn back to God. He would have no problem telling him that because he and the religious leaders have refused to turn to Jesus Christ; God is going to send horrible judgments against Israel the likes of which she has never seen before or will see again.

QUESTION #3 – When did Joel write?

This has been the most debated point of the book. There have been four views as to when it was written:

- 1) Some suggest it was written before Israel was taken into exile because the priests were still operating. This would date the book around 800 B.C.
- 2) Some suggest it was written about mid-way through the exile as Israel in the north was in the process of being taken captive. This would date the book 792-740 B.C.
- 3) Some suggest it was written late in the exile when Israel had been taken captive and Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed. This would date the book 597-587 B.C.
- 4) Some suggest it was written after both Israel and Judah were taken captive at 500-400 B.C..

We believe it is possible to accurately date the book.

First, there is no mention of the Assyrian captivity (800-659 B.C.) or Babylonian captivity (650-538 B.C.), which makes the book written before these dates.

Second, Amos quotes **Joel 3:15** in Amos 1:2 and quotes it as inspired Scripture already in existence. Amos wrote in 762 B.C., so Joel was written long before that.

Third, Jerusalem is still standing and the priests are regularly ministering when Joel writes.

Fourth, Joel says God will pay back what the Philistines did to Judah (**3:4**). The Philistines did horrible things to Judah during the days of Joram from 889-883 B.C. (II Chron. 21:16). So this means that Joel was written after 883 B.C.

Based on all of these facts, we conclude that **Joel was written from 860-850 B.C.** What is fascinating about this is that he sees the entire prophetic program of God with Israel, including the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the Millennial Kingdom.

QUESTION #4 – Where is the book of Joel placed in the Bible?

In the Hebrew Bible, Joel is placed among the minor prophet books after Ezekiel and Hosea before Amos. In the Greek Bible, Joel is placed after Daniel and Hosea before Amos. **Our English Bibles place it where the Greek Bible places it. Joel is book number 29 in the O.T. and is number 2 of the minor twelve prophets.**

QUESTION #5 – What is the theme of Joel?

The central theme of the book of Joel is “the Day of the Lord.”

In **Joel 1:15** the day of the Lord is prefaced with the word “Alas.” It is a day of destruction.

In **Joel 2:1** the day of the LORD is coming and in **verse 2**, it is not a happy day.

In **Joel 2:11** the day of the Lord is a great and awesome day.

In **Joel 2:29** the day of the Lord is a series of days in which God pours out His Spirit.

In **Joel 2:31** the day of the Lord is a great and awesome day.

In **Joel 3:1** the day of the Lord is a series of days that leads to God restoring Judah and Jerusalem.

In **Joel 3:14** the day of the Lord takes place in part in a valley of decision.

In **Joel 3:18** the day of the Lord ends with great blessings flowing in Israel.

This “Day of the Lord” speaks of great destruction against people but also of great salvation offered to people, especially in regard to Israel. God takes decisive action to punish His nation but then also takes decisive action to bring her into her promised land to enjoy all of her blessings forever.

Now if we take all of these things into consideration, we conclude that Joel’s theme is one that communicates this point:

BECAUSE OF ISRAEL’S REFUSAL TO TURN TO THE LORD, GOD WARNS THAT HE WILL SEND A HORRIBLE JUDGMENT AGAINST HER. THIS SPECIFIC JUDGMENT HAS A SPECIFIC NAME, “THE DAY OF THE LORD” AND IS FOR A SPECIFIC TIME. THIS JUDGMENT WILL PUNISH ISRAEL AND WILL DESTROY ISRAEL-HATING NATIONS AND, ULTIMATELY, IT WILL END WITH ISRAEL BEING IN HER LAND, TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY BLESSED BY GOD.

QUESTION #6 – What are some practical lessons we will learn from this book of Joel?

There are seven practical lessons we may glean from this book:

Lesson #1 - Catastrophes and tragedies are sovereignly controlled by God whether or not people like it or believe it.

There is no such thing as some natural accident or disaster. Just this past week it has been reported that hornet populations are exploding and many tornadoes are destroying.

God has His reasons for every bit of this, even when we don't know what those reasons are. These things do display the sovereign power of God.

Lesson #2 - People can escape horrible things in life by calling out to the Lord and turning to Him for help.

God will not ever let His people get away with sin. If they will turn to Him, He will forgive it. Just recently someone was going through a dark time and I suggested that this person turn to the Lord and turn the life over to the Lord. Most will not do this.

Lesson #3 - God is sovereign and His will most definitely will be accomplished in precise conformity to what He has said in His Word.

If God says He will give Israel a land, He will do that. If God says He will Rapture His Church, He will do that. If God says you may earn or lose rewards, He will do that too. God is sovereign.

Lesson #4 - Israel has been, is and always will be the special nation of God.

No nation will ever replace Israel. All nations of the world would be wise to realize this.

Lesson #5 - Those who demean Israel have a guaranteed judgment coming and at that judgment they will be condemned.

Lesson #6 - This book of Joel says that no matter how much God's people wander and fail, in the end they will be with God forever.

Lesson #7 - If God's people turn to the Lord and seek Him, even when they have been rebellious, He will turn His anger from them and bless them.