

Message #2**Joel 1:1-20**

When we lived out west, I took a couple of courses on training horses. One of the specific courses I took was a course on how to teach a horse to go into a horse trailer. It is not normal for a horse to go inside some large metal box on its own. Horses are animals who like to be free, not stuck in a trailer. Now I have used what I learned in that course to teach at least four horses to trailer load and one of the horses was a real piece of work. He did not want to go into a trailer at all. But in the end, we had him trailer loading like a dog on a leash and a little girl walked him into the trailer.

Now the one principle that is so important to understand is this—when you teach a horse to go into a trailer, you make going into the trailer the most pleasant thing for that horse to do and you make anything else other than that very unpleasant. In other words, you create an environment in which the best place for that horse to be is in that trailer. No matter what that horse does, I am going to hassle him until he gets in that trailer and once in that trailer, he is petted and assured and he begins to think life is good here, that guy leaves me alone when I am in this trailer.

That principle is not new to training horses. God has used this principle with His people for a long time. **God wants His people in a right relationship with Him and when they are not, He can and will make things very uncomfortable and very miserable.** Life is not happy for one of God's people who aren't right with Him. But once His people choose to get into a right relationship with God, life is good.

That is what this book of Joel is really all about. Israel was way out of line in her relationship with God so God decided to make life miserable for her in order to get her to turn to Him. In fact, what this first chapter in Joel teaches us is this:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY USES DEVASTATING THINGS TO HAPPEN TO HIS PEOPLE TO BRING THEM INTO A STATE OF MOURNING SO THEY WILL WAKE UP AND TURN TO HIM AND CALL OUT TO HIM FOR HIS DELIVERANCE.

Now God has many things at His disposal in order to make life miserable for His people. We will see many of those things right here in this first chapter. There are five realities to see:

REALITY #1 – God speaks to His people through His revealed Word communicated by His man. **1:1**

In this first verse we immediately see that what we will hear and be taught is “the word of the LORD.” This is a specific God-inspired and God-revealed message of God that was designed to be communicated to Israel through Joel, the prophet. **The book opens with a focus on God's Word.**

The job of a true man of God is to accurately communicate the true Word of God and the specific message that Joel will communicate is not one that is real positive. So the Word of God is given to the people of God, and in that Word are some serious things.

REALITY #2 – God commands His leaders and His people to hear and communicate His Word.
1:2-3

As we work through this book of Joel, we will discover that God’s Word is for many different audiences. God’s Word is for all people. But Joel specifically starts by challenging the Elders of Israel to hear this instruction. The Elders were the experienced men who served as leaders and advisors. They were involved in leading and guiding Israel. It is kind of sad that Joel has to challenge the Elders to hear the Word of God, because you would naturally think that is what Elders would always do. But unfortunately that is not the case. **If any groups of people are to receive the blessings of God, it needs leaders who are dead serious about hearing God’s Word.**

Many Elders today in churches don’t care if they are seriously taught the Word of God at all. Many would rather hear the people or the music rather than the Word. But Joel challenged the Elders to hear the Word.

Then he challenged all the people in Israel’s land to hear it. In fact, **God challenges the fathers and grandfathers and great-great grandfathers to tell their sons about something very important—the angry side of God.** Our young people need to know that if you make God angry by your persistent rebellion against Him, He can cause horrible and devastating things to happen to you.

Now the specific thing that he wanted communicated was something that had happened that typified something that would happen, the likes of which has never happened (**1:2**). Something had happened that pointed to something that no one in the history of Israel had ever experienced before. It was so different that this was to be communicated.

REALITY #3 – God has permitted horrible things to happen to His people in order to wake His people up so they will turn to Him. **1:4-7**

There are two negative facts that are brought out in this text:

Negative Fact #1 - A locust plague had invaded the land and decimated the crops. **1:4-5**

Now we who live here in the United States do not think much about a locust invasion or locust plague because for the most part, we have never seen one. There was a major locust plague in the U.S. in 1875 that spread from Montana to Texas (1800 miles long and 110 miles wide). But we have not seen it. But for those who have lived through something like this, it is devastating.

Back in 1915, a locust plague hit Palestine and Syria. I have actually seen a picture of the Garden of Gethsemane before and after this locust plague. John D. Whiting described it in the National Geographic Magazine: “They stripped every leaf, berry, and even tender bark. They ate away layer after layer of the cactus plants, giving the leaves the effect of having been jack-planed.

Even on the scarce and prized palms they had no pity, gnawing off the tenderer ends of the swordlike branches and diving deep into the heart, they tunneled after juicy pith.” He said, “they would cover four to six hundred feet a day, devouring any vegetations before them.” After seeing this, Mr. Whiting quoted the book of Joel and he said, “We marvel how this ancient writer could have given so graphic and true a description of a devastation caused by locusts in so condensed a form” (John D. Whiting, *Jerusalem’s Locust Plague*, *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (December, 1915, pp. 511-550).

We know from **verse 6** that this locust plague illustrates what God would permit to happen in the land of Israel, namely, permit a nation to invade the land. The big question of these verses is whether or not this is a literal locust plague or a metaphorical picture of an invasion of military enemies.

We take the position that God literally sent a locust plague into Israel’s land and it demolished everything as an illustration of what He would permit nations to do to Israel if she did not turn to Him.

When this locust plague hit, nothing escaped. Now what is significant to keep in mind is that God did this; God caused this; God takes responsibility for this. This was no accident or unusual occurrence of Mother Nature; **this was directly caused by God**. I love something James Montgomery Boice said about this—“The most important thing about Joel’s handling of disaster is that he sees God as responsible for it” (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 104).

In fact, in **verse 5** Joel challenges the drunkards to get out of their drunken stupor and see the fact that everything, including their wine, was gone. Notice the text says, “all you wine drinkers.” God had allowed the land to be completely ravaged and His blessings were gone and the disaster didn’t seem to faze any of these people. They just sat around drinking as if life were good and would go merrily on its way.

In 2013, just a few weeks before Passover, another plague of locusts came out of Egypt heading for Israel. Instead of the nation turning to Jesus Christ, they immediately put planes in the air to spray pesticides in order to reduce the swarm. Instead of Israel turning to God, she trusted in herself and the leaders and the pesticides and went back to life as usual. God says there is coming a day when that will all change. The Day of the Lord is coming.

Negative Fact #2 - A nation had invaded the land and destroyed the people. **1:6**

Now this is where the prophecy gets real scary. If it isn’t bad enough that God let locusts invade the land, God was going to permit a nation to invade the land. The nation would be mighty and without number.

He uses two metaphorical descriptions that describe the ferociousness of the enemy:

- 1) It has teeth like a lion;
- 2) It has fangs like a lioness.

What is described here is the force and power of the destructive teeth, including the molars of a powerful lion. This enemy is able to literally rip its prey to shreds.

This could be a prediction of the Assyrian invasion (722 B.C). It could be the Babylonian invasion (538 B.C.). It could be Greece or even Rome. But we think it also speaks of the future Tribulation when God will permit the revived Roman Empire to invade Israel and do brutal things to Israel because she refuses to turn to Jesus Christ.

As **verse 6** says this power will devour Israel and the land that should be blessed by God will be laid waste. Don't overlook the fact that God calls Israel's land "my land." **God is in sovereign control of everything He permits to happen to His property.** According to **verse 7**, God permitted everything to be stripped bare—land, vineyards, and fig trees. This locust disaster affected everyone and everything and it is a prelude "foretaste" of a Day of the Lord coming judgment that will come against God's own people.

Now why would God permit this to happen to His own people? The answer is to get His people to return to Him (Joel 2:12) and cry out to Him for salvation (Joel 1:14; 2:32). **When God permits disasters to hit, His purpose is individual and national repentance. He wants individuals and nations to turn to Him and call out to Him.**

REALITY #4 – God specifically tells His people what they are to do. **1:8-14**

There are seven actions God wants His people to take if they want to get back into a relationship with Him, in which He will bless them:

Action #1 - God's people need to Wail. **1:8**

God calls his people to emotionally wail with the same sorrow of a Hebrew girl who lost her bridegroom. This describes a young virgin (betula) who was engaged to be married but before he was able to come get his bride, he died. It broke this girl's heart and caused her to wail.

God's people should wail like that. Now just exactly what should the people be wailing about? They should be wailing about the fact that they are missing out on the blessings of God, and a wonderful relationship with God because of their sin and they are suffering because they refuse to turn to God, so God is letting them suffer.

Action #2 - God's people need to Mourn. **1:9-10**

The mourning needed to be expanded to God's leaders and God's house. Why? Everything is ruined, including worship.

When God permits enemies to dominate His people, they need to turn to God and call out to God and because if they don't, they lose their ability to worship Him. One reason why the people could not worship God is because there was no grain and no wine to even offer proper offering.

As **verse 10** says, fields ruined, land mourns; grain ruined, new wine dried up and oil fails. So there was nothing to even give to God for offerings.

So the specific mourning is due to the fact that God has stopped blessing His people and they cannot properly worship Him.

Action #3 - God's people need to be ashamed. **1:11-12**

The farmers and vineyard owners and fruit producers and vegetable growers should all be ashamed of themselves. They were successful for a while, but they did not seek to obey God's Word or do God's will and, as a result, they lost everything.

The people should be ashamed of themselves. The reason all of this happened is because they had done the evil that caused God to cut off all of their productivity.

Action #4 - God's leaders need to Lament. **1:13a**

Now Joel targets the priests and two times he mentions the ministers. Joel says you need to mourn and wail before God. You need to model for the people a mourning lament that will turn the people back to God. It is one thing when the people drift away from God, but it is quite another when the leaders have lost their focus. That was the case here.

Action #5 - God's leaders need to Humble themselves. **1:13b**

To spend an entire night wearing sackcloth is not only uncomfortable and unusual, but it shows great humility. Now normally there were not activities at the Temple during the night. Night time is the normal time most people sleep. However, this was a point of time when the leaders had better stay away in prayer because this was a time of great emergency. The religious leaders needed to humble themselves before God and spend the night in prayer.

Now notice why—the grain offerings and drink offerings are “withheld from the house of your God.” That word “withheld” (nimna) implies God did this Himself. God had stopped the cash flow to His own Temple because no one was interested in being right with Him.

Action #6 - God's leaders need to have a public ceremony of repentance. **1:14a**

What the priests could do was call for a national gathering in order to worship and rededicate themselves to the Lord. This would be a “solemn assembly,” not some fluffy praise service. These leaders needed to gather the people to the “house of your God”.

Action #7 - God's people need to cry out to God. **1:14b**

God's people must **cry out to the Lord** for help and salvation. **If God's people do not cry out to the Lord, God will not respond and they will not be saved.**

REALITY #5 – God describes how destructive God’s judgment day is against His own people.
1:15-20

Now God takes this from the personal and practical to the prophetic. These are things Israel needs to know right now, because this judgment is coming. There are five facts brought out about this “Day of the Lord” judgment.

Fact #1 - It is a judgment day of destruction. **1:15**

The word “alas” is a “panic expression.” The Day of the Lord will first be a time of terrible destruction, disaster and tribulation. In Revelation 9:1-12, the fifth Trumpet judgment will feature a demonic, locust-type invasion the likes of which the world has never seen.

Fact #2 - It is a judgment day that cuts off joy. **1:16**

The Day of the Lord judgment will feature a complete loss of joy. When people realize God has stopped blessing them because of their sin, all joy is lost. The Day of the Lord judgment will not be a happy day for anyone.

Fact #3 - It is a judgment day that eliminates prosperity. **1:17-18**

The Day of the Lord judgment will take away all potential food. No seeds, no grain and no cattle and no sheep will survive this.

Fact #4 - It is a judgment day of fire. **1:19**

The Day of the Lord judgment will feature a burning of the land with fire. Fire is used over and over again as a means of Divine judgment (Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:2; Num. 11:1; 16:35; Deut. 9:3). God will once again send fire out of heaven during the Tribulation (Rev. 8:7; 9:18). It illustrates a future fire in which one will burn in hell forever.

Fact #5 - It is a judgment day against water. **1:20**

The Day of the Lord judgment will feature a lack of water. The book of Revelation speaks of a time when God will literally pronounce judgments on men by using water (Rev. 8:8-11; 16:3-4).

Now what is God doing in allowing all of these horrible things to happen to His own people? He is trying to get His people to turn to Him and cry out to Him.

Disasters for the people of God are specifically designed by God to get His people to turn back to Him, to call out to Him and to depend on Him for deliverance.

We must ask God to keep us so close to Him that He will never have to use major disasters to get us to come back to Him.