

The Day of the Lord

An Expository “Journey” Through the Prophecy of Joel

• The Plague of Locusts and the Day of the Lord

August 16, 2020

Joel 1:1-20

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

2 Hear this, O elders, And listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has *anything like* this happened in your days Or in your fathers' days?

3 Tell your sons about it, And *let* your sons *tell* their sons, And their sons the next generation.

4 What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

5 Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, On account of the sweet wine That is cut off from your mouth.

6 For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.

7 It has made my vine a waste And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away; Their branches have become white.

8 Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth.

9 The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off From the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, The ministers of the Lord.

10 The field is ruined, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, Fresh oil fails.

11 Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

12 The vine dries up And the fig tree fails; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up

From the sons of men.

13 Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God.

14 Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord.

15 Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

16 Has not food been cut off before our eyes, Gladness and joy from the house of our God?

17 The seeds shrivel under their clods; The storehouses are desolate, The barns are torn down, For the grain is dried up.

18 How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly Because there is no pasture for them; Even the flocks of sheep suffer.

19 To You, O Lord, I cry; For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.

20 Even the beasts of the field pant for You; For the water brooks are dried up And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

On November 1, 1755, one of the most powerful earthquakes of all time- happened near the city of Lisbon, Portugal. The epicenter of the quake was located several miles off the Portuguese coast, in the Atlantic. And the tidal wave that the quake formed is what caused most of the damage.

The earthquake struck at 9:40 A.M. and lasted for only six minutes. But in those six minutes- all public buildings and 12,000 dwellings were completely demolished. Sixty thousand human beings perished- including those who were killed as a result of the tidal waves and the fire, which raged for six days. Heavy damage occurred in Fez, Morocco, to the south, and in Algiers, 700 miles to the east. On the coast, the tidal waves were sixty feet high. At the island of Martinique, 3,740 miles away (which the waves passed ten hours later), the crest was *twelve feet* above normal!

Now there had been earthquakes before this one and there have been many since- in Europe, the Pacific, San Francisco, and Nicaragua. But there

were facets to this *particular* earthquake that have not been present to the same degree either before or since. For one thing, the first half of the eighteenth century had been a time of relative Peace and Prosperity all throughout Europe- which was a condition particularly welcomed following the many “religious wars” of the 17th Century. So, while the thirteen Colonies were being radically transformed by the First Great Awakening- this Era had been marked in Europe by a philosophy of great Optimism associated with the name, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716), who had died less than forty years before. Leibnitz argued that that time in History was,

“the best of all possible worlds.”

Leibnitz viewed the concept of “Evil” as simply “Imperfection”; and he argued that...

“... the best of all worlds proves the existence of a Wise and Benevolent Creator.”

... and his view had been popular among the so-called “Christian” thinkers of his day. But with this quake- suddenly all the Optimism was shaken. And people began to ask,

“How could a Good God allow such an Evil as the Lisbon earthquake? If God is “Good”, then He must have lacked the Power to prevent it. And if God had the Power to stop this terrible quake and yet chose not to- then God must not be “Good”.

... some were even taking this logic even further to say,

“Since God did not stop this quake and allowed this Evil to destroy 60,000 people- then God must either be dead; or maybe He never existed in the first place.”

And as if to dramatize the uniquely “spiritual” dimensions of this Tragedy even more- the earthquake had occurred on “All Saints’ Day”, which meant that many pious people had gathered in the Churches at the very hour the earthquake struck. And the Churches collapsed along with the

other public buildings- killing the people as they worshipped.

Christians around the world responded by trying to find a Reason for the Tragedy. In England, many argued that Lisbon was destroyed because its inhabitants had been deceived by the “Roman religious system.” But in Lisbon, most people concluded that God was angry because they had tolerated a few Protestant heretics to live among them. And so, in order to appease the Wrath of God- many of the despised Protestants were rounded up and executed- including women and even some children.

In general, non-Christians simply mocked the believers about the entire affair. Among them was François Voltaire (1694-1778), who “never allowed a tragedy to go to waste” in his *relentless* attacks against God and His Church. Voltaire specifically attacked the views of the Orthodox believers about the Lisbon earthquake in his book, *Candide (Optimism)*, published in 1759. There, Voltaire argued that within fifty years of his death-

“... Christianity will have been forgotten; and the Bible will have become an unknown book.”

That was 261 years ago. And today, there are *more* Bibles in circulation around the world than any other book. And there are *more* genuine believers on earth today than at any time in the history of the Church.

Voltaire’s book made fun of the “best of all possible worlds” idea (and Christianity itself) through the foolishness of the philosopher Pangloss. “*All this is for the best,*” he said.

“For if there is a volcano at Lisbon, it cannot be anywhere else; for it is impossible that things should not be where they are; for all is well.”

Sadly, for Pangloss, the philosopher became one of the victims of the Roman religious system’s sinful reaction in Lisbon- Voltaire’s way of saying that

“... this should be the fate of all who utter such nonsense.”

So, is believing and hoping and trusting God- even in a terrible tragedy, “nonsense”? Is it “foolishness”? Well, the Bible says that it is. As God the Holy Spirit moved on the Apostle Paul, he wrote this in

1Corinthians 1:21-25:

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Now there is a word that seeks to encapsulate all of the various things in this life that trouble us. Persecutions; Diseases; Pain; Tragedies; Afflictions; and even “Natural Disasters” are all included in the word, “Suffering”. When we are persecuted- we suffer. When we are sick- we suffer. When we are betrayed by friends; or when an earthquake or a locust plague comes- we suffer. And as we discovered in our “journey” through **1Peter**- Suffering for God’s people- is the norm. So, Suffering is NOT an aberration. The most- godly men; the most holy women; the most devout people the world has ever seen- suffered- sometimes horribly; always seemingly “unfairly”. Here is how the writer of **Hebrews** put it from **Hebrews 11:35b-38**

... others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Now, many of the modern Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Preachers teach that, since it is ALWAYS God’s Will to heal our sick bodies; and since it is ALWAYS God’s Will to deliver God’s people out of their troubles; and since it is ALWAYS God’s Will to prosper His people financially- that the only reason that these people here in **Hebrews** suffered and were not delivered- was because they didn’t have enough Faith. And that Theology is very attractive; and it sounds very reasonable- until you read the very next

verse that says:

Hebrews 11:39a

And all these, having gained approval through their faith...

So, these “suffering saints” believed. In fact, the Bible says their Faith gained God’s “Approval.” So, these people were saved. They belonged to God. And they had pleased God. The writer says they had “gained approval” through their Faith. And yet, they suffered. Badly. Horribly. And these *particular* saints were NEVER delivered from their Suffering in *this* life.

So, once again, we are forced to ask, “*How could this be? Why would God do this? Wouldn’t it have been better if God had showed Himself mighty by rescuing them out of their Suffering?*”

Well, evidently not- or else God *would* have rescued them. So, from this we can conclude that, for some strange reason that we don’t entirely understand- five things are true about the Mystery of Suffering:

- Through Faith- God *can* and He absolutely *does* work powerful “Miracles” and “Acts of Providence” to bring practical earthly Help and Deliverance to His people.
- God does *not* always work Miracles and Acts of Providence for our Deliverance from Suffering. Sometimes- *by this very same Faith*- God chooses to *sustain* His people *in, by, and through* their Sufferings.
- Having Faith or not having Faith is *NOT* the ultimate determining factor in whether you suffer or you are delivered. God’s sovereign Will and Wisdom and Love takes *precedent* over our Faith.
- The common feature of the Faith that *escapes* Suffering; and the Faith that *endures* Suffering is this: both of them involve believing that Jesus is better than anything this life can give to you now; and He is better than what death can take from you later.
- Those who love God *more* than this life; and who suffer willingly and joyfully- awaiting something “better” than what this world can offer- are God’s great Gifts to the world.

... and this portion of the **Book of Joel** was written to show us this Truth.

Now, as we discovered last time- the name, “Joel” (or “Yo-el”) means “Yahweh is God” and probably constitutes a short Confession of Faith, something like the elementary New Testament Confession “*Jesus is*

Lord.” The Prophet’s name probably points to genuine Faith on the part of Joel’s father, Pethuel. But aside from this- nothing further is known about either Joel or Pethuel. So, all we can assume is that Joel lived in or around Jerusalem and that God raised him up as a Prophet of God- on the occasion of a destructive locust invasion.

But we don’t even know when this Invasion occurred or exactly when Joel prophesied. But there are three main possibilities.

- Joel prophesied in the early part of the reign of King Joash in the 9th Century, BC.
- Joel prophesied just *after* the Captivity- around 400 BC. (5th Century)
- Joel prophesied just *before* the Babylonian Captivity around 600BC. During the reign of King Zedekiah

... I simply don’t know. John Calvin said,

“As there is no certainty it is better to leave the time in which he taught undecided; and 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.”

.. and since Calvin was a fairly spiritual person- I’ll just go with him.

But the important point is that Joel had witnessed a *devastating* Invasion of Judah by locusts. But, unlike many others- Joel had been gifted with the ability to recognize that it was God Himself, and NOT mere “chance”, Who was responsible for the Destruction.

And that put Joel in the difficult position of having to “sell” the idea that the “Good” God of Israel, Who was the Almighty God (*Elohim*), Who had revealed Himself to Moses (*Yahweh*); the God, Who had called and chosen the Jews above all the peoples of the earth (*El-Elyon*); and the God, Who was there (*Yahweh-shammah*); the God, Who had *provided* for Abraham (*Yahweh-jireh*); the God, Who had *healed* them (*Yahweh-rapha*); the God, Who was their Banner (*Yahweh-nissi*); the God, Who was their Righteousness (*Yahweh-tsidkenu*); the God, Who was their Peace (*Yahweh-shalom*); the God, Who was their Shepherd (*Yahweh-Ra’ah*); and the God,

Who had *sanctified* them (*Yahweh-m'kaddesh*)- was now the God,
Who was *attacking* them- as Israel's Judge.

Now today in North America, where a locust invasion is quite remote, we can't really comprehend the Desolation and Desperation that would accompany a great locust Plague. But there have been *similar* Invasions around the world in relatively modern times from which we can make a reasonable "guesstimate".

For example, back in 1915 a Plague of locusts covered Palestine and Syria from the border of Egypt to the Taurus mountains- an area of about 71,500 square miles! The first swarms appeared in March of that year. Now those were adult locusts that came from the northeast and moved toward the southwest in clouds so thick- they obscured the sun. The females were about two and one-half to three inches long, and they immediately began to lay eggs by digging holes in the soil about four inches deep and depositing about 100 eggs in each. The eggs were neatly arranged in a cylindrical mass about one inch long and about as thick as a pencil. And those holes were everywhere. Witnesses estimated that as many as 65,000-75,000 eggs were concentrated in a single square meter of soil, and patches like that covered the entire land from North to South. And after they laid their eggs- the locusts flew away to do more damage.

So, within a few weeks the young locusts hatched. And, at first, they resembled large ants. They had no wings- but within just a few days they began moving forward by hopping along the ground like fleas. They would cover four to six hundred feet a day, devouring any vegetation before them. By the end of May they had molted. And in this stage- they developed wings- yet they still could not fly. Instead they moved forward by walking- jumping only when frightened. And they were bright yellow in color. Finally, the locusts molted again- this time becoming the fully developed adults that had invaded the land initially.

Now according to a description of this Plague by John D. Whiting in the December 1915 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*, the earlier stages of those insects attacked the vineyards. Whiting wrote,

“Once entering a vineyard the sprawling vines would, in the shortest time, be nothing but bare bark. When the daintier morsels were gone, the bark was eaten off the young topmost branches, which, after exposure to the sun, were bleached snow-white. Then, seemingly out of malice, they would gnaw off small limbs, perhaps to get at the pith within.”

Whiting described how the locusts of the last stage completed the Destruction begun by the earlier forms. They attacked the olive trees, whose tough, bitter leaves had been passed over by the earlier creeping locusts. Whiting wrote,

“They stripped every leaf, berry, and even the tender bark. They ate away layer after layer of the cactus plants, giving the leaves the effect of having been ‘jackplaned’. 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 the juicy pith.”

And that is *exactly* what Joel saw in his day, which would explain why he said this in verse 4,

What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

... now, probably, this is simply the different stages of the same insect. And, if so, Joel certainly captures the nature of the utter Destruction by reporting, no doubt with perfect accuracy. Whiting also thought of this ancient Prophet’s report when he said,

“We marvel how this ancient writer [Joel] could have given so graphic and true a description of a devastation caused by locusts in so condensed a form.”

But the most important aspect of Joel’s Prophecy is NOT that he described the locust invasion so accurately- but in how he dealt with it. Joel doesn’t treat this Disaster lightly- as many Christian people tend to do. In other words, the Prophet doesn’t just put forth a “brave response” or have a “positive mental outlook.” He was neither stoic nor was he frivolous. No, Joel was *biblical* in his response.

In Voltaire’s book, *Candide*, the philosopher, Pangloss is unshaken by the Evil of the Lisbon earthquake. He rationalized that since the earthquake occurred in Lisbon- it didn’t occur anywhere else. And since that was the “best of all possible worlds”, the fact that it had

not occurred anywhere else and occurred only in Lisbon was “Good”.

But that thinking was entirely alien to Joel- and to any other of the Hebrew Prophets. Those holy men described Evil as, “Evil”. And instead of “playing down” the Disaster- Joel and the others usually *magnified* it. So, as far as the locust Invasion was concerned- Joel called it the very *worst* thing that had ever happened to Israel:

Joel 1:2b&3

... Has *anything like this* happened in your days Or in your fathers' days? Tell your sons about it, And *let your sons tell* their sons, And their sons the next generation.

... and the Answer was, “No!” In Joel’s mind- that Invasion was an *unprecedented* and *unmitigated* Disaster. But Joel was also very concerned that *everyone* in Israel needed to see the Disaster the way he did- which meant that he did NOT tolerate any humanistic or pragmatic Optimism. So, instead of *slighting* the Problem- the Prophet described it in all of its full Horror. And then he called on various groups of Jews within the devastated Land to mourn with him.

First, he called on the *Elders*- because they were the Leaders of God’s people. And it was their job to take the lead in facing up to the enormity and meaning of this Disaster. And Joel instructed these men to measure the Devastation completely and write it down- so they could tell it to their children; who would then relate it to *their* children. (v. 3).

The *second* group Joel appealed to- were the *drunkards*.

Joel 1:5-8

Awake, drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you wine drinkers, On account of the sweet wine That is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness. It has made my vine a waste And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away; Their branches have become white. Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth.

Now, at first glance- this seems strange. But Joel is using sarcasm here. Drunkards are normally oblivious to anything that is going on around them. All they really care about is their next drink. And so, while others

might shrug this Disaster off- the drunkards won't- precisely because the Invasion of locusts has destroyed all the vineyards from which come the grapes to make their wine. But then Joel addressed the farmers:

Joel 1:9-12

The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off From the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, The ministers of the Lord. The field is ruined, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, Fresh oil fails. Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up And the fig tree fails; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up From the sons of men.

And the last group the Prophet addressed were the Priests. And Joel was moved to call on them to lead the nation in Mourning:

Joel 1:13-15

Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord. Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

And at the end of the Chapter, Joel, like Daniel, led the people of God in the correct way they should Mourn before the Lord and repent (turn from) their Sins.

Joel 1:16-20

Has not food been cut off before our eyes, Gladness and joy from the house of our God? The seeds shrivel under their clods; The storehouses are desolate, The barns are torn down, For the grain is dried up. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly Because there is no pasture for them; Even the flocks of sheep suffer. To You, O Lord, I cry; For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. Even the beasts of the field pant for You; For the water brooks are dried

up And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

But we have a great need to learn from Joel's approach to Suffering. We may not have a "best of all possible worlds" philosophy in our day, but we do often tend to treat Disasters lightly- *especially* when the Disaster doesn't happen specifically to us. And we tend to use euphemisms. For example, when we go to the dentist to have a tooth filled and he tells us to "open wide," we know what is coming. But the dentist says, "This may cause a bit of discomfort." "Discomfort?" No, this is going to hurt like all get-out!

But using the word, "Discomfort" is a euphemism. The dentist actually means, "This is going to really hurt. I'm going to make you suffer." So, we use words like that to *downplay* the Reality of what is going on- to make it easier to take. And we all do this.

But that is NOT the way the Prophets spoke. They called Evil, "*Evil*"; they called, Suffering, "*Suffering*"; and they called, Sin, "*Sin*". They even cried out in their Pain. So did Jesus. For example, He is called "A man of sorrows" and one "acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus wept over Jerusalem's unwillingness to repent (Luke 19:41). In His Agony in the Garden Jesus prayed so hard, the surface blood vessels ruptured on His Face, and His sweat, "became like drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). And in His Agony on the Cross, Jesus cried out with a loud Voice, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34).

There is never an attempt in the Bible to downplay the Agony; or the Suffering; or the Pain; or the Horror of a Tragedy. Now the Bible never *glorifies* Pain- but it never *denies* it either.

But far too many within the modern Church have a very *simplistic* and often *wrong* and even *unbiblical* understanding of "Good" and "Evil"- *including* Sufferings and even Natural Disasters. In their minds, God is "Good" and satan is "Bad". Therefore, anything that looks "Good" in their eyes- they say, "God did it"; while anything that looks "Bad" or "Evil" to them- prompts them to say, "The devil did it".

And many have been taught that any time the devil does something- they should "rise up in their Faith" (whatever that means) and they are to "bind" the devil and cast him out. And if they do this "binding" and "casting out" *correctly*- (and nobody really knows just what constitutes proper "binding" and casting out)- then God will ride in like the 7th Calvary and rescue them; or deliver them; or heal them; or bless them.

Since God is "Good"- their Man-centered Theology teaches that it is

ALWAYS God's Will to heal or bless or deliver or rescue. So, if there is no recuing; or delivering; or healing; or blessing- then the individual either doesn't have enough Faith; or else he has "unconfessed Sin in his life; or he is walking in Unforgiveness; or he is struggling with "Generational Curses; or who knows what else might be wrong.

And that's the point. You never know. You're *always* left hanging- condemning *everything* about yourself that you can think of; and repenting of everything back to the Civil War. And since the overwhelming majority of all who are sick or who are suffering are NOT healed or delivered or rescued- this affects *most* people.

But the Bible is crystal clear that satan MUST go to God and get Permission from the Almighty BEFORE he can hurt God's people. (**Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Luke 22:31**). And the Bible goes on to teach that satan can ONLY do what God sovereignly ALLOWS him to do. (*ibid*). So, *ultimately*, God is always the primary Source of all our Sufferings; and God is ALWAYS in total and complete Control over the intensity and the duration of the Sufferings of God's people.

Isaiah 45:5-7

"I am the Lord, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.

Now one of the most important things about Joel's handling of that locust Invasion- is that he understood God Himself as being ultimately responsible for it. But as I say that- make sure you understand that this does NOT mean that God is the "Author" of Sin- as though He *caused* the rebellion of Satan; or the original Transgression of Adam and Eve. He didn't. But it *does* mean that God sovereignly ALLOWED it.

So, even though God *could* have stopped our first parent's Sin- He chose not to. He *passively* allowed Adam and Eve to do what was already in their hearts. Now why would God do that? Because by allowing that degree of Evil to *temporarily* succeed- a greater GOOD came forth- that would NOT have come forth- had God not allowed the Evil. BY allowing Adam and Eve to sin- God created our NEED for Grace. So now- wicked rebels are saved and made Righteous- "By" Grace and "Through" the Gift of

“saving Faith”- and NOT by Works.

So, even though most would have never done that- God Himself (through the Prophet Joel)- did not hesitate to take full Responsibility for the horrible locust Disaster and the resultant Suffering that the locusts caused.

Now many within the modern Church don't like Sermons like this. Because, to them- teaching that God is fully Responsible for both what we would call, “Good” and what we would call, “Evil”- makes God look “bad”. But in addition to Joel believing this- this was the very *same* Theology about Suffering that Job had. Look at what **Job 2:1-10** says,

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"

Make no mistake about this- Job was *absolutely* saying that both “Good” and “Adversity” come from God. And the Theology that flows from that- is that Satan is really nothing more than a “tool” (Means) that God uses to sanctify His people.

But false Teachers like Creflo Dollar; Fred Price; Joyce Meyers; Benny Hinn; and others teach that Job was simply confused. And so, in the agony of his soul- Job was speaking things that simply weren't true. And I might even agree with them- were it not what the very next part of the verse says,

Job 2:10b

... In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Now I'm not sure who wrote the **Book of Job**. But *whoever* wrote it- gave an inspired, inerrant; and infallible *Commentary* here at the *end* of verse 10 about what Job was saying in the *first* part of verse 10. And as this writer was "moved" by God the Holy Spirit- he said that Job had NOT sinned with his lips about saying that God was the Source of all of Job's Blessings AND all of Job's Troubles. Even Moses agreed with both Job and Joel when he said this in **Exodus 4:11**:

The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

Moses here quotes the Almighty God in saying that, in *addition* to creating Moses' mouth; and creating those who can see- that God also creates those who can't speak; and who can't hear; and who can't see. And *this* is the reason why Joel dealt with the Disaster caused by the invasion of the locusts the way he did.

Now, to be sure, the first Chapter of **Joel** simply *bemoans* the Disaster. But as we get further into the Book- we will discover that the locust Invasion is a *Foretaste*; a *Sign*; or a *Symbol* of the coming "Day" of God's Judgment. And we will see that *this* Judgment was sent in *advance* of that Day- as a Warning of it.

In Chapter 2, where the locust Invasion is treated as a Symbol of a *future* "Day of the Lord"- Joel makes very clear that God causes both:

Joel 2:11

The Lord utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?

... but will Judah repent? This is the Goal of Joel's Burden:

Joel 2:12-14

Yet even now," declares the Lord, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow

to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent And leave a blessing behind Him, *Even* a grain offering and a drink offering For the Lord your God?

Now there will always be people who object to Teaching like this- arguing, as many did in Europe in the 18th Century, that such Judgments are very “selective” and therefore “unjust.” *“Why should Lisbon be destroyed and not other cities?”* they ask. *“Why should Judah be judged by God through the locusts and not other nations?”*

And many would conclude that these Objections present problems for those who believe and trust in the Sacred Writings that simply CANNOT be overcome. But as you actually go through the Bible- you find that Objections like this never troubled the writers.

The men who were chosen by God to be “moved” by the Holy Spirit to write down words that “don’t have the *ability* to be wrong” (Infallible)- had a Vision of the Greatness and the Majesty and the Holiness of God- that literally *consumed* them. So, before they wrote the first syllable- the men God used to pen down the only perfect words the world has ever known- were *overwhelmed* by their Vision of God- in His Glory. But they also had a much more accurate understanding of the Sin and Depravity of the very *best* men and women on earth. And that is *why* the Bible sounds so much different than any other book.

Jesus Himself was confronted with this very same Issue. Herod’s soldiers had fallen upon a group of Galileans at the very moment when they were offering their sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem and had slaughtered them. And many were asking, *“Why them?”* And the common Answer was, *“Well, obviously, those men were wicked sinners and so, they deserved the Judgment of God.”* Others were asking, *“How could this happen in a world run by a ‘Good’ God? Those people were killed at the very moment they were apparently being the most devout. Why would God do something like that?”*

And around that same time- the tower in Siloam collapsed and killed eighteen people. Again, the Questions came. *“How could that happen? Are we to assume that those people were more sinful or more deserving of God’s Judgment than the others who were spared?”*

But Jesus did NOT teach that those who were killed were MORE Evil than those who were spared- *whatever the outward appearances might be.* But neither did the Lord answer the way that many of those in the modern

church might have by saying, "Well, accidents just happen." Instead Jesus said,

Luke 13:2-5

... Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*"

So, what was Jesus teaching here? When we listen carefully, we hear the Savior say that those who object to Tragedies like Lisbon; or the slaughter of the worshippers; or the Tower of Siloam; or the locust plague do so- because they ask the *wrong* Questions. They ask, "*Why should Disaster fall upon them? Why should God strike down such 'innocent' people?*" And Questions like that are wrong- because they focus on what appears to be "random Tragedies" on "good people"- for "no apparent reason".

But the correct Questions SHOULD be: "*Why haven't those Disasters come on me? Why hasn't God destroyed me?*" And Questions like that are correct- because they *force* us to look at our *own* Relationship with God (or the lack thereof). You see, one of the biggest Problems with us- is that our understanding about *ourselves*- is all wrong. And that is why I object so strongly to secular Psychology, Psychiatry, and Sociology. Those so-called "sciences" are just flat out wrong about the only two things that matter: 1) What is wrong with people and 2) How to fix them. Other than that- they're just great.

The Truth is that most people have forgotten or never even thought about how sinful we really are. Most people do not think much about how *often*; and how *deeply* we all *offend* God; how we *insult* His Righteousness on a regular basis; and how we *belittle* His Glory- *constantly*. And that is *why* it usually takes a Disaster of unparalleled proportions- to wake us from Sin's Deception- like a Hurricane or a locust Plague.

And that brings us to the bottom line- which is the main point of Joel's Prophecy. Both the "*delays*" in God's Judgment (the periods of Grace) and the "*previews*" of Judgment in such catastrophic Events like locust Plagues and Earthquakes- are for the ultimate "Good" of God's people! How? They

come- so we might recognize how sinful we really are- and repent. But we should repent- NOT merely in being saved- but in our *ongoing* Arrogance about trusting in God and NOT in ourselves; and in learning to find the fullness of our Joy in Jesus- rather than in things that are passing away.

Now here in America, we have not seen many Disasters of this magnitude. But I would suggest that an invisible and deadly global Pandemic might suffice. But again, the main point is NOT that we simply see this as coming from God (which is more than what most see)- but in *how we will respond* to what God has done. So, for example, will we join in with the political Conservatives and say that this Plague is nothing but a ruse to bring in Socialism? Or will we side with the Liberals- who would blame Capitalism?

Or is there a *third view*; a *biblical view*- that God is *obviously* judging our nation? And the fact that He has not judge everybody- doesn't change that. So, like Joel- we should see the time between the first leaf being eaten by the locust and when the Hammer finally falls- as a Time of Grace; a time for Repentance; a Time for Fasting; and Mourning; and Weeping between the Porch and the Altar.

Few of us would deny that our days are not very "good" right now; and that even *worse* times may lie just ahead. We have not had earthquakes of the size of the one at Lisbon; or a locust Plague like Joel saw- but our cities have been ravaged by blight and rot and riot; by corruption and other forms of decay. We have not been destroyed by locusts- but we have seen our Economy weakened by the refusal of any elected official- of either Party- who we *continue* to re-elect- to stop spending more than the Government takes in! And so, "Economic Armageddon" is coming to this nation! Now it may not come this year or even in ten more years- but hear me- it IS coming! And when it does- NOBODY will be spared!

And that is why I have been crying out for over forty years that the beggars are a Sign. The human beings, who live under bridges; and who dwell in the alleys of the mightiest and the wealthiest nation in the history of the world- cry out to us: "*God is NOT pleased! Judgment IS coming!*" And their voices join in with John Calvin, who taught,

"... they who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised up by Him to punish the wickedness of the people ..."

Don't you find it odd that the man, we all probably voted for to lead our

nation (and the one we will all probably vote to *re-elect*) is a serial adulterer and, at best, engaged in unethical (probably illegal) practices as a businessman- and he is the “good guy”?

So, how are Bible-believing; Blood bought; Heaven-bound; Sin hating; Holy and Godly people supposed to respond? Are we to make light of such things? Are we to dismiss them and then merely go our normal way until even *greater* Judgment overtake us? Are we so foolish to assume that what God has brought to our door will all just “go away” if we only elect the “right man”? Are we to say, “*Things like this- just happen*”? Maybe we can blame Russia or Communism or Iran or Islam?

Now, no doubt God does use visible and earthly “Means.” And the *opposition* of these or other countries may be *among* those Causes. But the Humble and the Broken; and those who tremble at God’s Word- will see all these things as having come- from God. And when they see- they will lead us in personal and national Repentance. And they will echo the words of Joel:

Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord.

Amen. Let’s pray

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

