



Joel: God of Repentance

Memory Verse: Joel 2:32 "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, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls."

Background

Joel is the 29th book of the Bible and the 2nd book of the minor prophets in the Old Testament. The Hebrew name of the book *Yo'e'l* means "Yahweh Is God." Little is known about the prophet Joel who authored the book other than the fact that he was the son of Pethuel (1:1) and references in his writing indicate that he likely lived in or near Jerusalem and was familiar with the temple worship. Joel preached to the Southern Kingdom of Judah and although no time frame or specific king is named in the book, many scholars believe that Joel preached around the time of 835 BC. At this time, the legitimate king of Judah was young Joash whose early reign was governed by the high priest Jehoida who ruled until Joash was of age. Jehoida's ruling for Joash could explain why Joel did not mention a specific king in his writings. Other evidence in the book of Joel supports this time frame which would make Joel one of the earliest writing prophets and a possible contemporary of the prophet Elisha of Israel.

Joel's ministry to Judah is a call for repentance from sin. Unlike many other prophets, Joel does not focus on any specific sin of the Jewish people. Joel prophesies judgment on Judah and describes the "great and terrible" day of the Lord (2:11) that is to come. His message of repentance is a universal appeal for all to repent and return to God, for the day of the Lord is near.

The Short Story

Terrible locust plague illustrates God's coming Day of Judgment.

What's the Big Idea?

Joel begins by discussing a recent locust plague that had occurred in Judah. The locusts had utterly destroyed everything including the grapevines, fruit trees, and grain harvest leaving nothing but barrenness in its wake. Additionally, the people of Judah were experiencing a drought leaving them in dire straits. Joel uses these natural catastrophes as an illustration of the Day of the Lord that is to come. Compared to this coming judgment, the damage done by the locusts and drought will seem trivial. Joel describes an imminent day of judgment that would be against God's people of Judah, and after this, an ultimate day of judgment when all of the nations would be held accountable for their actions against God's people (3:1-16, 19). Yet there is hope to be found as Joel calls them to repentance and reminds them of the character of God. "Rend your heart and not your garments. 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" (2:13). While the book of Joel begins in a state of desolation for God's people, great restoration and blessings (both material and spiritual) are to be had for those who repent (2:18-32).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Like many prophecies in the Bible, some prophecies in the book of Joel have been fulfilled while others have yet to come. God takes sin seriously and the ultimate Day of the Lord, a day of great judgment is still coming. God is loving and compassionate, giving us the gift and hope of repentance. God desires a sincere inward repentance of the heart, not just the external evidence of change: "*Rend your heart and not your garments*" (2:13). 2 Peter 3:9-10 tells us that "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." Joel's appeal to Judah is still God's appeal to us today: Repent for the day of the Lord is near. God in His rich grace and mercy offers repentance and promises salvation for "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord" (2:32).

Teaching Text

“And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”
Joel 2:28-29/Acts 2:16-21

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- What words does Joel use to describe “The Day of the Lord?” (See Joel 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14). What personal applications can we make from these descriptions?
- What is the meaning behind, “rend your heart and not your garments” in Joel 2:12? To what sin is God referring?
- What New Testament passage quotes Joel 2:28-32? Why is the passage being referenced?

Practical Application

- Recount any time in your life when you have seen God “make up to you for the years that the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).
- Joel 2:29 lists prophesy, dreams, and visions as evidence of God’s outpouring of the Spirit. Have you had the Lord communicate with you in this way? 1 Corinthians 14:1 tells us to “desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.” Consider asking God for greater manifestation of the gift.
- 1 Corinthians 10:14 tells us to “...flee from idolatry.” Is there any area of idolatry that the Lord is making you aware of?

Hitting the Highpoints

- Joel 2:8 “They never jostle each other; each moves in exactly the right position. They break through defenses without missing a step.”
- Joel 2:25-27 The LORD says, “I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts...”
- Joel 3:17-21 “Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, live in Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be holy forever...”

Bonus Features

Where is Jesus: God desires a sincere inward repentance of the heart, not just the external evidence of change: “*Rend your heart and not your garments*” (2:13). 2 Peter 3:9-10 tells us that “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.” Joel’s appeal to Judah is still God’s appeal to us today: Repent for the day of the Lord is near. God in His rich grace and mercy offers repentance and promises salvation for “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” (2:32).

Personal Takeaways and Notes