

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes: Book of Joel

5/17/17

Chapter 1

An Invasion of Locusts - Verses 1-12

¹The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.² Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? ³ Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. ⁴ What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten. ⁵ Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. ⁶ A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. ⁷ It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white. ⁸ Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the betrothed of her youth. ⁹ Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD. ¹⁰ The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the olive oil fails. ¹¹ Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. ¹² The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree—all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the people's joy is withered away.

1:1 Joel was a prophet to the nation of Judah, also known as the southern kingdom. Although the 12 tribes of Israel had been united under David and Solomon, after Solomon's death, the kingdom had divided into two parts. Two of the tribes—Judah and Benjamin—stayed loyal to David's line and accepted Solomon's son Rehoboam as king. They became the southern kingdom, also called Judah (after the larger tribe). The other 10 tribes followed Jeroboam, set up a new kingdom with a new capital at Samaria, and called themselves Israel or the northern kingdom. The book does not mention when Joel lived, but many believe that he prophesied during the reign of King Joash (835-796 B.C.). But the date of Joel's book is not nearly so important as its timeless message: Sin brings God's judgment; yet with God's justice there is also great mercy.

1:3 God urged parents to pass their history down to their children, telling over and over the important lessons they learned. One of the greatest gifts you can give younger people is your life's story to help them repeat your successes and avoid your mistakes.

1:4 A locust plague can be as devastating as an invading army. Locusts gather in swarms too numerous to count (1:6) and fly several feet above the ground, seeming to darken the sun as they pass by (2:2). When they land, they devour almost every piece of vegetation (1:7-12), covering and entering everything in their path (2:9).

Joel's detailed description has caused many to believe that he was referring to an actual locust plague that had come or was about to come upon the land. Another view is that the locusts symbolize an invading enemy army. Both may be foreseen. The locusts represent devastation, and Joel's point was that God would punish the people because of their sin. Joel calls this judgment the "day of the LORD."

1:5 The people's physical and moral senses were dulled, making them oblivious to sin. Joel called them to awaken from their complacency and admit their sins before it was too late. Otherwise, everything would be destroyed, even the grapes that caused their drunkenness. Our times of peace and prosperity can lull us to sleep. We must never let material abundance hinder our spiritual readiness.

1:9 Because of the devastation, there was no grain to make fine flour for the grain offerings and no wine for the drink offerings (see Leviticus 1 and 2 for a detailed explanation of these offerings).

A Call to Lamentation - Verses 13-20

¹³ Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God.

¹⁴ Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

¹⁵ Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. ¹⁶ Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes—joy and gladness from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. ¹⁸ How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering.

¹⁹ To you, LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. ²⁰ Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness.

1:13 Clothing of sackcloth or burlap would be worn by mourners at a funeral. Used here, it would be a sign of repentance.

1:14 A fast was a period of time when no food was eaten and people approached God with humility, sorrow for sin, and urgent prayer. In the Old Testament, people often would fast during times of calamity in order to focus their attention on God and to demonstrate their change of heart and their true devotion (see, for example, Judges 20:26; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:21; Jonah 3:5). This solemn assembly was a public religious gathering, called so that everyone could repent and pray to God for mercy.

1:15 The "day of the LORD" is a common phrase in the Old Testament and in the book of Joel (see 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). It always refers to some extraordinary happening, whether a present event (like a locust plague), an event in the near future (like the destruction of Jerusalem or the defeat of enemy nations), or the final period of history when God will defeat all the forces of evil. Even when the day of the Lord refers to a present event, it also foreshadows the final day of the Lord. This final event of history has two aspects to it: (1) the last judgment on all evil and sin and (2) the final reward for faithful believers. Righteousness and truth will prevail, but not before much suffering (Zechariah 14:1-3). If you trust the Lord, looking toward this final day should give you hope, because then all who are faithful will be united forever with God.

1:15-19 Without God, destruction is sure. Those who have not personally accepted God's love and forgiveness will stand before him with no appeal. Be sure to call on God's love and mercy while you have the opportunity (2:32).