

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Overview Book of Joel

5/10/17

A Single bomb devastates a city, and the world is ushered into the nuclear age. A split atom—power and force such as we had never seen.

At a launch site, rockets roar and a payload is thrust into space. Discoveries dreamed of for centuries are ours as we begin to explore the edge of the universe.

Volcanos, earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes, and tornados unleash uncontrollable and unstoppable force. And we can only avoid them and then pick up the pieces.

Power, strength, might—we stand in awe at the natural and human-made display. But these forces cannot touch the power of omnipotent God. Creator of galaxies, atoms, and natural laws, the Sovereign Lord rules all there is and ever will be. How silly to live without him; how foolish to run and hide from him; how ridiculous to disobey him. But we do. Since Eden, we have sought independence from his control, as though we were gods and could plot our destiny. And he has allowed our rebellion. But soon the day of the Lord will come.

It is about this day that the prophet Joel speaks, and it is the theme of his book. On this day God will judge all unrighteousness and disobedience—all accounts will be settled and the crooked made straight.

We know very little about Joel—only that he was a prophet and the son of Pethuel. He may have lived in Jerusalem because his audience was Judah, the southern kingdom. Whoever he was, Joel speaks forthrightly and forcefully in this short and powerful book. His message is one of foreboding and warning, but it is also filled with hope. Joel states that our Creator, the omnipotent Judge, is also merciful, and he wants to bless all those who trust him.

Joel begins by describing a terrible plague of locusts that covers the land and devours the crops. The devastation wrought by these creatures is but a foretaste of the coming judgment of God, the "day of the LORD." Joel, therefore, urges the people to turn from their sin and turn back to God. Woven into this message of judgment and the need for repentance is an affirmation of God's kindness and the blessings he promises for all who follow him. In fact, "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (2:32).

As you read Joel, catch his vision of the power and might of God and of God's ultimate judgment of sin. Choose to follow, obey, and worship God alone as your sovereign Lord.

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To warn Judah of God's impending judgment because of its sins and to urge the people to turn back to God

AUTHOR: Joel son of Pethuel

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The people of Judah (the southern kingdom)

DATE WRITTEN: Probably during the time Joel may have prophesied, from approximately 835-796 B.C.

SETTING: The people of Judah had become prosperous and complacent. Taking *God* for granted, they had turned to self-centeredness, idolatry, and sin. Joel warned them that this kind of lifestyle would inevitably bring *God's* judgment.

KEY VERSES: "'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' 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" (2:12-13). **KEY PEOPLE:** Joel, the people of Judah

KEY PLACE: Jerusalem

THE BLUEPRINT

1. The day of the locusts (1:1—2:27)

2. The day of the Lord (2:28—3:21) The locust plague was only a foretaste of the judgment to come in the day of the Lord. This is a timeless call to repentance with the promise of blessing. Just as the people faced the tragedy of their crops being destroyed, we, too, will face tragic judgment if we live in sin. But *God's* grace is available to us both now and in that coming day.

MEGATHEMES

Punishment

EXPLANATION: Like a destroying army of locusts, *God's* punishment for sin is overwhelming, dreadful, and unavoidable. When it comes, there will be no food, no water, no protection, and no escape. The day for settling accounts with *God* for how we have lived is fast approaching.

IMPORTANCE: *God* is the one with whom we all must reckon—not nature, the economy, or a foreign invader. We can't ignore or offend *God* forever. We must pay attention to his message now, or we will face his anger later.

Forgiveness

EXPLANATION: *God* stood ready to forgive and restore all those who would come to him and turn away from sin. *God* wanted to shower his people with his love and restore them to a proper relationship with him.

IMPORTANCE: Forgiveness comes by turning from sin and turning toward God. It is not too late to receive God's forgiveness. God's greatest desire is for you to come to him.

Promise of the Holy Spirit

EXPLANATION: Joel predicts the time when God will pour out his Holy Spirit on all people. It will be the beginning of new and fresh worship of God by those who believe in him, as well as the beginning of judgment on all who reject him.

IMPORTANCE: God is in control. Justice and restoration are in his hands. The Holy Spirit confirms God's love for us just as he did for the first Christians (Acts 2). We must be faithful to God and place our life under the guidance and power of his Holy Spirit.

Christ in Joel:

The book of Joel has had an important place in the life of the Church. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus and his followers were familiar with the writings of Joel, and its influence is most evident in the New Testament passages that speak of the latter days. These passages pick up on the graphic images used by Joel to describe the day of the Lord and the plague of locusts (e.g., Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Rev. 6:9; 9:2). Also important are the promises in Joel 2:28-32, which Peter quoted and claimed to have been inaugurated during the event at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). Paul also referred to this prophecy in Romans 10:13, where he used Joel 2:32 to substantiate his argument that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile" (Rom. 10:12). Salvation is for all; as the prophet Joel stated: "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32).

The Church has continued to find Joel's teaching on the day of the Lord to be an important source of hope and comfort on the one hand and a word of warning on the other. In times of distress and trouble, Christians have found the promises regarding the ultimate blessing, protection and vindication of the Lord's covenant community to be consoling and inspiring. At the same time Joel's vivid depiction of the dreadful aspects of the day of the Lord has served as a reminder of God's holiness and judgment and as a continuing call to wholehearted repentance and holiness of life. Ultimately, the great day of the Lord is the day of Christ's return, the day when he will judge the whole world, casting his enemies into hell and blessing believers with an eternal inheritance in the new heavens and new earth.