

JOEL - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. If Joel were missing from the Bible would it affect your picture of God in any way? What is the main message of Joel? (See Joel 1:4,15; 2:1,2,10,11,13,17,27,28,31; 3:1-2,12,14,17) When do you think Joel prophesied? To whom?

“The name Joel means ‘YAHWEH is God.’ The first syllable is an abbreviation of the name YAHWEH, and the second syllable is ‘el, the general Hebrew word for God. Concerning the prophet’s personal life, we know only that which appears in this book. It states that he was the son of Pethuel (1:1). Although the name Joel appears frequently in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Chr. 4:35; 6:33; 11:38; 15:7, 11, 17; Ezra 10:43; Neh. 11:9), [The author is one of 14 men in the Old Testament who shared this name] no reason appears for linking this prophet with other usages of the name. Joel had intimate knowledge of the service and personnel of the temple, but he does not appear to have been a priest. He was apparently a native of Jerusalem and a man of deep spiritual insight. Because he was inspired, he was able to see what the average man could not see. He could see eternal principles in temporal processes. Thus, Joel saw in the coming of the drought and the devastating locust swarms characteristics of the great and notable day of YAHWEH. In the rain upon the parched earth he saw the outpouring of the Spirit, which would satisfy and renew the parched souls of spiritually thirsty men in the coming days (2:28, 29).” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“Scholars have offered various dates for the writing of the Book of Joel, from early preexilic times to as late as 350 B.C. Some believe that internal evidence in the Book of Joel indicates that the book was written during the reign of Joash king of Judah (835–796 B.C.), and in the time of the high priest Jehoiada. This view is based on the following considerations: (1) The location of the book between Hosea and Amos in the Hebrew canon suggests a preexilic date of writing. (2) The allusion to the neighboring nations as Judah’s foes rather than Assyria, Babylon, or Persia points to an early date for the book. (3) The book does not mention any reigning king, which may suggest a time when the responsibility for ruling rested upon the priests and elders—as was the case during the early reign of young king Joash (see 2 Kin. 11:4–12:21).

“Others believe that the Book of Joel is so close in tone and idea to the Book of Zephaniah that it is likely that the two prophets were contemporaries. The primary evidence for this is the fact that both books prominently feature the concept of the impending “day of the Lord” (compare 2:2 with Zeph. 1:14–16). Since Zephaniah’s book dates from around 627 B.C., a number of scholars assign a date of about 600 B.C. for the Book of Joel.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“The date of the writing of the Book of Joel and the time of the prophetic activity of the man himself are difficult to determine. The years following 835 B.C. mark the traditional date for the book. This was when Joash was placed upon the throne at the age of seven and

Jehoiada the priest functioned as the real ruler (2 Kin. 11; 12). This time period seems to fit Joel, since there is no awareness of the influence of a king or royal government in the book. Furthermore, the influence of the priesthood appears to be strong throughout. Also favoring a ninth-century date are the foreign nations to which he refers. Because Joel mentions the Greeks (3:6), some believe the lack of reference to a king points to a postexilic date. It is to be noted that Joel and Amos have similar material (cf. Joel 2:2 and Amos 5:18; Joel 3:16 and Amos 2:2; and Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13). Some believe that Joel borrowed from Amos, but it is more likely that Amos (c. 760 B.C.), under the inspiration of God, either preached from Joel or simply prophesied the same truths in his day that Joel did in his." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

Others feel that "Joel was a contemporary of both Hosea and Amos, though he ministered to the southern kingdom while they ministered to the northern kingdom." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

"Joel writes as God's crisis management expert. Something terrible is in the process of happening to Judah. Her land stands devastated by what the prophet calls 'locusts.' Destruction reigns everywhere, and drought threatens. Into this moment of crisis steps Joel with warnings and answers. The prophet tells us what happened. He proclaims what the immediate response of God's people should be. He explains what Judahites should feel in their hearts. Most importantly, Joel talks about the future and hope. The terrible situation now is not the end. God's final answer then involves restoration and blessing. Any human facing crisis today can learn from these ancient words of wisdom." (*Joel - The Bible Amplifier Series*)

"THEME: Repentance and the Day of the Lord:

"Joel stressed repentance. In Hebrew, as in Greek, to repent is essentially 'to turn around.' Joel proclaims that without deep and sincere repentance the children of Israel have no hope of restoration. If they do not alter their course and return to their God, only suffering and the shame of exile appear in their future. Because of who God is, physical disaster accompanies moral disintegration. Joel noted the spiritual implications of contemporary events and saw eschatological harbingers in the plague of locusts. The locusts were precursors of 'the day of the LORD' (2:1). There have been several days of the Lord in history, all of which serve as God's warning of *the* day of the Lord in the end times. The day of the Lord is first and primarily a message of judgment and secondarily, as a result of judgment, a message of future restoration and hope. The message of Joel was initially for his day. He boldly censured the sins of the people and pointed to their dire need to repent. Then, after speaking to the issues and problems of his day, under divine guidance Joel turned his face toward the future. In 2:28ff. he predicts the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon 'all flesh' (cf. Acts 2:1-21). Peter quotes this passage from Joel and applies it to what transpired on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Peter's first words, by way of application and explanation, are 'But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel' (Acts 2:16). 'This' denotes the miracle of speaking in foreign languages which Jerusalem had just witnessed. 'What' points back to the prediction which Joel had made concerning some of the details and processes of the miracle of Pentecost. Peter does not claim that all of Joel 2:28ff. found fulfillment. He asserts that it was an example of Joel's prediction that the 'great and awesome day of the LORD' may yet be ahead and rapidly drawing near. In dealing with

judgment Joel uses a destructive locust plague and lengthy dry spell to portray the disasters which would come if the children of Israel did not repent. He further stresses in chapter 1 the urgency of repentance in view of the possible apocalyptic 'day of the LORD.' Not all of Joel's prophecy saw fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost; some of it is yet to come. The great signs and wonders in the heavens and the earth, along with the restoration of the captives of Judah, are events beyond the immediate scope of Pentecost." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

"The Book of Joel has had an important place in the life of the church. The New Testament indicates that Jesus and His followers were familiar with the writings of Joel. The book's influence is most evident in the New Testament passages that speak of the end times. They use Joel's vivid images 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 quotes at Pentecost, claiming they have reached their fulfillment in the event of Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21). Paul in Rom. 10:13 also refers to the prophecy; he uses Joel 2:32 to show that 'there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.' Salvation is offered to all peoples. As Joel had said: 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' (2:32).

"The church has continued to find the teaching in the Book of Joel 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 about the ultimate blessing, protection, and vindication of the Lord's covenant community to be consoling and inspiring. At the same time, Joel's graphic 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." (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

Joel: 1) comes from the southern kingdom of Judah, 2) is a good writer, and 3) is familiar with the temple and its services. He may have been one of the special prophets that were at times apparently directly connected to the work of the temple.

2. What were the locusts mentioned especially in Joel 1:1-6? Many Bible students believe the plague of locusts to be referring to literal locusts. Others argue that the locusts are only a symbol of a military invasion. Which of these views is correct?

"Interpreters throughout the ages have been faced with the question of whether to interpret the locusts in the Book of Joel literally or figuratively. Historically, the majority of interpreters have understood the locusts as symbols of future enemies (e.g., one manuscript of the Septuagint [Greek Old Testament] understood the four kinds of locusts to symbolize the Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans). But present-day interpreters see these creatures, at least in ch. 1, as actual locusts. Joel indeed moves quickly from an accurate description of a real devastation by locusts in ch. 1 to a description of the dreadful locust-like army of the Lord that blends the literal and figurative in ch. 2. It seems then that the destruction by locusts that Joel had seen became the vehicle for his prophecy proclaiming the need to repent in view of the coming day of the Lord." (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

"As an illustration of a severe locust plague in Palestine, the report of an eyewitness, H. Schneller, director of the Syrian orphanage in Jerusalem, is here presented: 'We had a famine in the 2d year of the war [1915] such as we had not experienced in 50 years. The sky was darkened by the gigantic swarms of locusts which covered the whole country, and

neither sun nor moon could be seen. All of Palestine was transformed into a desert within a few days. All trees, from their tops to the ground, including the bark, were eaten up clean; our vegetable gardens, cultivated with so much labor, disappeared as by magic. The following spring there crept forth from hundreds of billions of eggs the new brood, which consumed the little that had been left. The result was a terrific famine” (*Evangelisches Sonntagsblatt für Bonn*, April 26, 1925). (Quoted in *SDA Bible Dictionary*)

“The specific descriptions of the locusts are quite detailed. Joel knew what locusts really were like. Joel 1:4 uses four different terms for locusts out of nine possible Old Testament words. The exact meanings of these words are not known, and English translations vary in how they translate the words. Some have suggested that the words represent four stages of the locust life cycle (Watts, 16). If this is so, the first stage is the larva, or grub, stage. Following the grub stage would be a nymph stage, where no flying is done, but the locust is a crawling devourer. The third stage is the swarming stage in which the locusts develop wings and prepare to fly to new areas in search of food. The last stage is the mature insect. The process of this development can take as much as three years.

“Even if these different words do not clearly depict the life cycle of locusts, it would seem strange to use so many different technical words for locusts if they were only a general symbol for something else. Even the passage that talks of God’s restoration of Israel from the effects of these locusts uses a number of different specific terms to describe them (2:25).

“We should not leave the subject of locusts without trying to sense how horrible a plague of locusts can be. It is obvious that what happened in this plague greatly impressed Joel. Nothing like this, he believes, has happened in the lifetime of the elders of Israel or in the days of their forefathers (1:2). Israelite children are to be told of it, and they are, in turn, to pass the word on to their children who will tell the next generation. This is big news.

“Nowadays locust outbreaks can be prevented in many cases. Careful monitoring can spot incipient locust swarms, and they can be destroyed by pesticides. In earlier times such things were not available.

“When locusts enter their gregarious swarming stages, they can migrate great distances. They have been observed 1,200 miles out at sea. The total size of the swarm can be huge, containing up to 120 million insects per square mile! In 1889, a swarm across the Red Sea covered 2,000 square miles (McComisky, 256). To prevent an outbreak of locusts in Cyprus in 1881, egg cases totaling a net weight of 1,300 tons were dug up by hand.

“Not having experienced such a phenomenon, we can only faintly sense the horror of having a swarming, hopping, sun-darkening, chewing mass descend on your land. In 1915, journalist John D. Whiting stood almost where Joel stood in Jerusalem and recorded the following words: ‘Sudden darkening of the bright sunshine... clouds . . . so dense as to appear quite black. . . in an inconceivably short time every leaf is consumed, leaving bare and barked twigs only. . . It seemed as if the entire surface of the ground moved, producing a most curious effect upon one’s vision and causing dizziness... . Up and up the city walls and the castle they climbed to their very heights’ (Brodsky, 34). The horror of the actual locust invasion would be repeated by its sober after effects. For agricultural people, locusts

were disaster. Crops and animal feed were destroyed. Those lacking adequate stores or money to buy food could easily starve. Is it any wonder Joel was concerned? (*Bible Amplifier Series - Joel*)

3. What is the meaning of “the day of the Lord?” (Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14) What events are connected with the “great and terrible day of the Lord?” (Joel 2:11,31) Is the day of the Lord the day of His triumphant return? The day of His judgment? A time when everyone will recognize God as the Lord? How long a time is included in “the **day** of the Lord?” (Compare 2 Peter 3:8) Could an individual or a particular nation have their own “day of the Lord” or is there just one final “day of the Lord?” Will the final day of the Lord be a day of terror for everybody or just for the wicked? (Isaiah 25:9; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Acts 2:20,21; **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**; Peter 3:10)

The Day of the Lord

“One of the central themes of the Book of Joel is ‘the day of the Lord’ (1:15; 2:1). This language describes a period of time in which God ‘comes down’ in a dramatic way to bring wrath and judgment on the wicked and salvation to the righteous. God is Lord of time. There is no period that is not ‘the day of the Lord’ in a general sense. But at times God enters the space-time arena to assert in bold, dramatic ways that He is in control.

“The day of the Lord is a major theme of Old Testament prophecy. Thirteen of the sixteen prophets address this subject. The concept of the day of the Lord probably originated with the conquest of Canaan—a conquest which was in fact the Lord’s war (see Deut. 1:30; 3:22; Josh. 5:13–15; 6:2); that is, a day of judgment for the wicked Canaanites (see Lev. 18:25; Deut. 9:4, 5).

“The day of the Lord is not an isolated phenomenon or a single event in human history. Periods in Israel’s early history and latter history, the coming of Jesus, and His second advent are all called ‘the day of the Lord’ in Scripture. The predictions of a coming day of the Lord can be fulfilled in a number of different events. The invasion of locusts in the historic events of the life of Joel was the day of the Lord (ch. 2). But the day of wrath and deliverance that soon fell on Judah in the Babylonian invasion was also the day of the Lord.

“While most references speak of future events, five biblical texts describe the day of the Lord in terms of past judgments (see Is. 22:1–14; Jer. 46:2–12; Lam. 1:1–2:22; Ezek. 13:1–9). These texts reflect circumstances of military defeat, tragedy, and judgment. Such events may have stimulated the development of the prophetic concept of a future ‘day’ or time of judgment for the disobedient of Israel and all of the nations (see Joel 1:15; Is. 13:6, 9; Zeph. 1:14–18).

“However, the day of the Lord is not just a day of wrath and judgment on the disobedient. In some contexts, it also includes deliverance and restoration for the righteous. The day of the Lord speaks not only of future judgment, but of future hope, prosperity, and blessing (see Is. 4:2–6; Hos. 2:18–23; Amos 9:11–15; Mic. 4:6–8). Joel reveals that this day is to be heralded by heavenly phenomena (2:30, 31) which will bring sudden darkness and gloom on the earth (2:2). It will be a day of divine destruction (1:15) on the nations that have persecuted Israel (3:12–14) and on the rebellious and disobedient

of Israel (Amos 5:18–20). Yet it will also be a time of deliverance and unprecedented blessing for God’s people (Joel 2:32; 3:16, 18–21; 1 Thess. 5:2–5).” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“Natural disasters—from rising flood waters to violent earthquakes—provoke fear and dread. With all their ingenuity, people still cannot control these powerful and destructive forces. They can only watch in awe. Joel begins his book with a description of such a natural disaster—a plague of ravenous locusts. In the prophet’s hands, the destructiveness of this plague becomes a vivid warning of the power of God’s coming judgment and a clear appeal to run to the Lord for mercy.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

It seems quite clear that Joel had at least two “days of the Lord” in mind in his book. One was the immediate time of the coming of the locusts. The other “day of the Lord” comes later, as a time of judgment for the wicked and a reward for the righteous. Compare Zephaniah who also talks a lot about the “day of the Lord”.

“Day of the Lord. [Heb. *yom Yahweh*; Gr. *he hemera tou Kuriou*]. Consistently in both the Old and New Testaments this and similar expressions denote the time when God intervenes in human affairs to execute judgment upon evildoers or to deliver His people from the hands of their oppressors, or both. The day of divine visitation upon ancient Egypt (Jeremiah 46:10) and Babylon (Isaiah 13:6,9) is spoken of as ‘the day of the Lord’ upon these nations, but it is also a day when God promises to restore Israel (Isaiah 14:1,2; Jer 46:27,28). ‘The day of the Lord’ was also to be a day of judgment upon His own people because of their evil ways (Joel 1:15; 2:1), the Babylonian captivity in particular being thus spoken of (Zep 1:7, 14, 18; 2:2). The expression also came to refer to the great final day when God would subdue the heathen nations of earth and establish His own people in their rightful dominion (Isaiah 2:2, 12; 34:8; Joel 3:14; Obadiah 15, 17; Zec 14:1; Mal 4:5). As a day of judgment upon evildoers it is called a ‘day of darkness’ (Joel 2:1, 2; Amos 5:18–20), dark because of divine wrath (Eze 7:19).

“NT writers likewise picture the day of the Lord as a ‘day of wrath’ (Rom 2:5, 6) and a ‘day of judgment’ (Mt 10:15; 2 Pe 3:7). They refer to it as ‘the day of the Lord Jesus’ (2 Cor 1:14), ‘the day of Jesus Christ’ (Philippians 1:6), or simply as ‘the day of Christ’ (v 10). In view of the fact that the affairs of earth would all come to a halt at that time—it was to be the last day of this present world—it is variously called ‘the great day’ (Jude 6), ‘that day’ (Mt 7:22; 1 Th 5:4), or simply as ‘the day’ (1 Cor 3:13). ‘The day of the Lord’ is preeminently the day when the Lord Jesus Christ appears to summon the righteous from their graves (Jn 6:39), to purge the earth with fire (2 Pe 3:7–12), and to establish His everlasting kingdom of righteousness (Matt 25:31, 34; cf. 2 Peter 3:13, 14).” (*SDA Bible Dictionary*)

“The day of the Lord (Joel 1:15) is an important term in Scripture, but many Bible readers find it confusing because different authors seem to use it to refer to different things. In fact, ‘the day of the Lord’ appears to have three different meanings in Joel:

(1) a coming day of judgment for Israel (1:15; 2:1–11).

(2) a coming day of restoration for Israel (2:28–32).

(3) a coming day of judgment for the nations (3:1–21).” (*Word in Life Study Bible*)

4. What will it be like to come face-to-face with God? He knows everything about the universe and about you. He knows every sin that you have committed. He could destroy you with one word. Could He possibly ever get irritated or upset by something that you do? There is no

way to hide anything from Him? Do you think you could live at peace with Someone like that for eternity? Is there any way to settle this problem from the Bible? Is it more convincing to look at a statement (a claim) or to look at lots of examples of how God treats his erring children (sinners)? Why do you think angels veil their faces in His presence? (See Isaiah 6:1-3)

Think of all the examples we have in the Bible of how God treats sinners—even those He knows are not going to repent and come back to Him. Think of the stories of Jacob, Joseph's brothers, Rahab, Samson, Saul, David, Solomon, Manasseh, and how long He was patient with the descendants of Abraham. Look at Mary Magdalene (the woman taken in adultery), the scribes and Pharisees who brought the woman, Simon, the leper, Zacchaeus, the tax collector, Judas, Peter and the other disciples, even Paul who persecuted the church for years! The best saints in the Bible were often also some of the worst sinners! (1 Timothy 1:15) Why do you think that is?

Are we safe in the judgment because Jesus has "covered our sins with His blood" or because of the way God treats all of His children even those who don't come back to Him? How will God treat His erring children? What or who kills sinners in the end?

Ezekiel 33:11. "Tell them that as surely as I, the Sovereign Lord, am the living God, **I do not enjoy seeing a sinner die.** I would rather see him stop sinning and live. Israel, stop the evil you are doing. Why do you want to die?" (GNB)

Luke 9:54-55. 54 "When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them? [Footnote: *Some manuscripts add as Elijah did.*]' 55 Jesus turned and rebuked them. [*Some manuscripts add and said, 'You don't know what kind of a Spirit you belong to; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy human lives, but to save them.'*]" (GNB)

John 3:17. "For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior." (GNB)

Hebrews 2:14. "Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. He did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death, and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of the fear of death." (GNB)

1 John 3:8. "Whoever continues to sin belongs to the Devil, because the Devil has sinned from the very beginning. The Son of God appeared for this very reason, to destroy what the Devil had done." (GNB)

"God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Everyone who stifles the admonitions of conscience is sowing the seeds of unbelief, and these will produce a sure harvest." *Christ's Object Lessons* 84 (1900); compare *ST* June 5, 1884; *RH* February 17, 1891; October 24, 1912; *YI*, November 30, 1893; *FLB* 155; *OHC* 26; see also *5T* 120; and #70; contrast #52

"Thus the arch-fiend clothes with his own attributes the Creator and Benefactor of mankind. Cruelty is Satanic. God is love; and all that he created was pure, holy, and lovely, until sin was brought in by the first great rebel. Satan himself is the enemy

who tempts man to sin, and then **destroys him if he can**; and when he has made sure of his victim, then he exults in the ruin he has wrought. **If permitted, he would sweep the entire race into his net. Were it not for the interposition of divine power, not one son or daughter of Adam would escape.**" *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 354 (1884); *Great Controversy* 534 (1888)

"No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. 'Man turns from God, not God from him.' Our heavenly Father follows us with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests with the sinner. **By resisting the Spirit of God today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power. Thus he passes on from one stage of resistance to another, until at last the light will fail to impress, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God.**" *Mount of Blessing* 93 (1896); compare DA 322,323

"To sin, wherever found, 'our God is a consuming fire.' Hebrews 12:29. In all who submit to His power **the Spirit of God will consume sin.** But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then **the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them.** Jacob, after his night of wrestling with the Angel, exclaimed, 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.' Genesis 32:30. Jacob had been guilty of a great sin in his conduct toward Esau; but he had repented. **His transgression had been forgiven, and his sin purged; therefore he could endure the revelation of God's presence.** But wherever men came before God while willfully cherishing evil, they were destroyed. **At the second advent of Christ the wicked shall be consumed 'with the Spirit of His mouth,' and destroyed 'with the brightness of His coming.'** 2 Thessalonians 2:8. **The light of the glory of God, which imparts life to the righteous, will slay the wicked."** *Desire of Ages* 107-108 (1898); 3SG 294,295; 1SP 260,261; ST June 10, 1880; May 6, 1886; PP 339; Mar 40; LDE 279; FLB 176

It is not God who destroys the wicked, but sin. God will save everyone who can be admitted safely to the heavenly kingdom. But sin and rebellion must come to an end. So finally God has to allow each of us to reap what we have sown. (See Galatians 6:7) God will weep as the wicked perish. This doesn't prevent them from dying because He is not the One killing them. Sin is a deadly poison. If we persist in associating with it and allowing it to rule in our lives, ignoring God's remedies, He will have to finally give us up. This is what the Bible describes of the ultimate and final "day of the Lord".

5. In the scriptures what usually happens when someone suddenly gets a revelation of God? What does God immediately do and say? Ezekiel 1:28-2:2,6; 44:4; Daniel 8:17, 18; 10:4-12; Revelation 1:17; 19:10; Compare Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 9:7-21; Hebrews 12:21; John 15:15; Daniel 2:46. What does this suggest about the kind of relationship He wants to have with us? Could God ever actually be our Friend?

Ezekiel 1:28-2:2: "...This was the dazzling light that shows the presence of the LORD. When I saw this, I fell face downwards on the ground. Then I heard a voice

^{2:1} saying, "Mortal man, stand up. I want to talk to you." ²While the voice was speaking, God's spirit entered me and raised me to my feet, and I heard the voice continue,..." (GNB)

Please note that virtually always when prophets fall at the feet of an angel or God Himself who comes to speak with the prophet, God's instructions are to stand up because God

wants to talk to them like a friend. God doesn't even want us to "grovel" in the dust! What God wants from each of us is a measure of understanding friendship.

"We need to educate and train the mind so that we shall have an intelligent faith, and have an understanding friendship with Jesus. Unless we continually cherish friendship between God and our souls, we shall separate from him, and walk apart from him. We shall make friends of those around us, and place our trust in humanity, and our affections will be diverted from the true object of worship." *Youth's Instructor*, July 19, 1894 par. 5; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 27.4

6. "The day of the Lord" is always described as very near. (Joel 1:15; 2:1,2; 3:14; Zephaniah 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 1 John 2:18; Romans 13:11,12; 1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15,17; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8,9; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 22:6,7 contrast 2 Thessalonians 2:1-6; Revelation 7:1-3) Do you feel that God has been misleading us by these statements? What does "near" mean to you? To God? What did it mean to the people in Joel's day?

See # 3 above. "The Bible presents the day of the Lord as an imminent reality. It is not something that we are gradually moving toward; rather, it is ever ready to burst in on us. At any moment, the day that is 'near' may become present." (*Nelson Study Bible*)

1 John 2:18: Children, this is the last hour. You heard that the enemy of Christ would appear at this time, and many of Christ's enemies have already appeared. So we know that the last hour is here. *The Contemporary English Version*

"The repetitions of "near," arranged so closely together, (Zephaniah 1:14) stress the nearness of the event. So terrible is this day that even the mighty men (i.e., warriors) shriek in horror. The Christian should be careful not to adopt a complacent or cynical attitude regarding the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:3, 4), but instead should adopt an attitude of expectancy, because the event is sure and ever present on the horizon (2 Pet. 3:12)." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

"The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. [See Romans 13:11,12; 1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15,17; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:8,9; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 22:6,7.] **Thus it has always been presented to me.** It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. **Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.**" *Evangelism* 695.1; *LDE* 38.3; *Mar* 61.1; *1SM* 67.8

Since "the day of the Lord" has different means in different contexts there must also be different understandings of what is "near". Certain disasters were described in Scripture as "near" and they came. Even the end of one's own life should always be considered "near". We never know from one day to the next what might happen to us. Since we believe that the dead are "sleeping" and that God will come to "awaken" them at the day of final judgment, for them there is no passage of time. The very next thing they will experience is "the day of the Lord". So it should be apparent that each one of us is no more than a few heartbeats from "the day of the Lord".

7. **Is the day of the Lord going to be a day of brightness for everybody?** (Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Matthew 7:22,23; Revelation 6:16) What was the quality of worship of those who were mistakenly looking forward to the “day of the Lord?” (Amos 5:20-24)

Unfortunately, not everyone who thinks about “the day of the Lord” sees it as a reason to reform their lives. In Amos’ day (and on many other occasions in Scripture) the people in Jerusalem (they were often the ones who got the messages directed at them) felt quite certain that the “evils” of “the day of the Lord” would not affect them. They believed they were God’s chosen people, “God’s remnant church”. But God has not promised any of us that we are exempt from the terrors of “the day of the Lord”. Even the righteous at the end of time will pass through a time of real suffering and persecution. So even the thought of “the day of the Lord” should keep us aware of what is coming. This does not mean that we need to be constantly trying to frighten people with threats about what will happen to them if they don’t “straighten up”.

“The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be.” (*Review and Herald* Aug. 2, 1881) *1RH 273:1:6; That I May Know Him* p. 320

8. What do you think is the connection between the pouring out of God’s Spirit, and the signs in the sun, moon, and stars? (Joel 2:28-32; 3:14-17; Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 2:17-21)

“Joel 2:28 “All flesh” means, among other things, the coming of the Spirit upon God’s people democratically. **There is no discrimination. The old, the young, the women, the servant class, and all those in that culture least expected to receive divine favor will be recipients of this blessing.** The only condition throughout Joel’s prophecies is true repentance to the Lord, which involves turning from sin on the one hand and trusting by faith (with all one’s heart) on the other. The O.T. emphasizes repentance (turning) and the N.T. emphasizes faith (trusting). They are two sides of the same coin. Repentance and faith are not synonymous but they are inseparable. One cannot be turning without trusting, nor trusting without turning. That is why repentance resulted in turning to the Lord with all one’s heart. True repentance is not just superficial emotionalism.

“Joel 2:30,31: These cosmic disturbances predicted among celestial bodies did not occur at Pentecost (Acts 2). Luke recorded Joel’s prediction chiefly because it laid the groundwork for the speaking in foreign languages, which did reach adequate fulfillment in Acts 2:1–47; 10:46; 19:6. Pentecost was God’s merciful and evangelistic preparation for “the great and awesome day of the LORD” which is yet to come. It is like an *eschaton* (Gk., meaning “last”) within the *eschaton* implied in Heb. 1:1, 2. The latter days began with the birth of Jesus; no matter how long they may last, there will be one great, terrible, final “day of the LORD.” The precise nature of these cosmic disturbances is not certain. What is evident is that the heavenly bodies which give and reflect light will undergo cataclysmic upheavals associated with the intervention of God in the affairs of men.” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“Joel 2:28–32 After describing the physical blessings that would come upon his generation if they would repent, Joel describes the spiritual blessings that God would bestow upon His people in the future. This passage was quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17–21) to explain the miracle of speaking in tongues. There are three main viewpoints regarding how Joel’s prophecy was used by Peter in Acts 2:17–21: (1) Some interpreters see a complete fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy in the experience of the first believers on the Day of Pentecost. The outpouring of the Spirit ushered in the kingdom age. The wonders in the skies were fulfilled at the crucifixion, when darkness covered the land. (2) Some interpreters believe that Peter was simply using Joel’s prophecy as an illustration of what was happening. In effect, Peter was saying, “This is that same Holy Spirit which was spoken of by Joel.” According to this view, the prophecy will be fulfilled in the future when the remnant of Israel believes. (3) Some suggest that Joel’s prophecy was partially fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit was given, but the signs mentioned in vv. 30–32 will be fulfilled later in connection with the return of Christ in great glory.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“Joel 2:28,29: After judgment, God’s Spirit would be poured out on *all* His people, regardless of age, sex, or social class. Twice Joel stated that the outpouring of the Spirit would include women. Paul reinforced this principle of equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28). This outpouring differed from the OT pattern, in which God poured out His Spirit on an individual for a particular task. This prophecy declared that God’s Spirit would be given to all believers. Peter quoted this passage at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21) to explain the manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon believers. Jesus anticipated this same outpouring of the Spirit upon His followers (John 14:15–17; 16:7–15).

“Cosmic cataclysm announced the “day of the LORD.” The progression is from the locusts (whether in Egypt or in Joel’s time) to the invading army, to any time of judgment, to the final judgment. Every calamity is a reminder of the great and final judgment.” (*Woman’s Study Bible*)

God has great plans for His children. But He understands that there must be a testing time first. People from every class of society will participate in these final events. These events will mark primarily the end of the great controversy. This will necessitate the removal of the influence of the Devil. But God will not bring this great day upon us without giving some warning. And what kind of warning will God give? It must be some warning that is not misunderstood to be the act of some human group. God wants all peoples to recognize that He is acting. Thus, before God proceeds with the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is necessary for our preparation for what is coming, He warns us with signs in the sun, moon, and stars which are definitely beyond human and probably Satanic influence and thus cannot be counterfeited.

9. What is the “valley of decision?” What is taking place there? (Joel 3:2,14)

“Joel 3:14 The ‘multitudes in the valley of decision’ are sometimes seen as the innumerable host deciding whether to cast their lot with the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, or with Satan and the enemies of Israel. Joel does repeat the plural ‘multitudes’ here and thereby emphasizes the number as exceedingly large. Also conveyed by the term is a murmuring and tumultuous assembly like the gathering of Israel’s enemies

(as in Is. 17:12). Thus the Valley of Jehoshaphat ('YAHWEH judges') receives one more symbolic name: 'the valley of decision' (or of 'verdict'). So this is a day of judgment and sentence. These 'multitudes' are awaiting their condemnation, whether or not they realize it." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

"The valley of decision (v. 14) is synonymous with the valley of Jehoshaphat (v. 2). The scene is not one where the multitudes are in the midst of making a decision in favor of the Lord and repenting of their sin. Rather, the decision is made by God, a decision to judge the multitudes for their treatment of Judah and Jerusalem! This judgment will be meted out against them in the day of the Lord that takes place in the Great Tribulation." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

"The valley of decision (which may be the same as the Valley of Jehoshaphat) refers to the verdict of the Lord as He carried out His divine judgment on the nations. The time for decisions by individuals is past—now God would judge and decree punishment. One of the saddest features in these verses is the reference to 'multitudes,' suggesting innumerable people. The certainty of final judgment must prompt believers to commit themselves to God and to call unbelievers to repentance." (*Woman's Study Bible*)

"The Gentiles are told to 'Prepare for war!', for the Lord will fight with them in the valley of decision. In the Valley of Jehoshaphat the Lord will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. **The sovereign God is currently testing all men and nations, as unfashionable as that concept may be to today's worldly thinkers.** Stevenson remarks:

"Men dismiss the Biblical teaching concerning judgment to come, for individuals and nations, as a now-outmoded concept. But the people of God have held fast through all the generations to the assurance that, in the 'day of the Lord,' the Judge of all the earth will do right. That is our confidence, based upon the rock of Holy Scripture." Herbert F. Stevenson, *Three Prophetic Voices. Studies in Joel, Amos and Hosea*, p. 40." (*Believer's Bible Commentary*)

There are several things to note about this passage. First of all, this is not a passage about humans making up their minds about God. It is a passage about God passing His final judgment about humans. **To the typical person of the twentieth century or later in the western world, such an idea was done away with by the Scope's trial and the theory of evolution. Our world does not think they need God any more and they are certainly not planning for any time when He will come to judge them!** Our world now believes that they have explained the origin of our universe and they are working on what will happen to it in the "end". But that "end" certainly does not include anything that might disrupt their current plans. It is thought that the sun might burn out some billions of years from now. But God states unequivocally that He will return, and He will bring an end to sin and rebellion.

10. What does it mean when it says that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night?" (1 Thessalonians 5:2) Who is being referred to as "you, brothers" in 1 Thessalonians 5:4? Is the day of the Lord supposed to be a surprise?

Jesus suggests that people will be busy about all of their normal activities when they will be completely surprised by the events leading up to the second coming.

Matthew 24:36: ³⁶“No one knows, however, when that day and hour will come—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son; the Father alone knows. The coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the time of Noah. ³⁸In the days before the flood people ate and drank, men and women married, up to the very day Noah went into the boat; yet they did not realize what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes. ⁴⁰At that time two men will be working in a field: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind. ⁴¹Two women will be at a mill grinding meal: one will be taken away, the other will be left behind. ⁴²“Be on your guard, then, because you do not know what day your Lord will come.” (*GNB*)

But those who have been studying Scripture shouldn't be surprised by these events. God has been predicting them for millennia.

1 Thessalonians 5:4: ⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness, and the Day should not take you by surprise like a thief. ⁵All of you are people who belong to the light, who belong to the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶So then, we should not be sleeping like the others; we should be awake and sober.” (*GNB*)

God has spelled out for us the conditions that will prevail before the final judgment day. (See 2 Timothy 3:1-5) And we have been told so many times that we are to be prepared at all times. That is one of the main messages of Joel, Zephaniah, and other prophets as we have seen. If “the day of the Lord” takes us by surprise it is certainly not God's fault!

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