

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets

A Holy and Just God (Joel)

Lesson #3 for April 20, 2013

Scriptures: Joel 1; 2:28,29; 2:31,32; Acts 2:1-21; Romans 10:13; Matthew 10:28-31.

1. In this short book of Joel, we discover that a natural disaster in the form of a plague of locusts apparently consumed almost everything in the land of Palestine. (Joel 1:1-7) Joel suggested that the plague had come because the people had turned away from God.
2. The book of Joel is difficult to accurately date. Some scholars suggest it may have been written during the short reign of Joash in the 9th century B.C. Others have suggested that it must have happened during the reign of Josiah in the 7th century B.C. Ancient Jewish scholars writing in the *Babylonian Talmud* believed that Joel was written after the Babylonian captivity by one of the great scribes of the Great Assembly following the days of Ezra. (*Babylonian Talmud*, tract *Baba Bathra*) The 7th century B.C. date is most likely. Josiah came to power soon after the disastrous reign of Manasseh.
3. The book of Joel was clearly known and respected by Jesus and the apostles in their day. (Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Revelation 6:9; 9:2; Acts 2:15-21; Romans 10:13) Usually, it is quoted in the context of speaking about the days of God's judgment or "the day of the Lord" and usually is referring to the events at the end of this world's history.

When disaster strikes, understanding of God is at risk. Unexpected illness or death, national catastrophe, social disruption, personal loss, plague or epidemic, devastation by flood or drought, turn men and women who haven't given God a thought in years into instant theologians. Rumors fly: "God is absent"... "God is angry"... "God is playing favorites, and I am not the favorite"... "God is ineffectual" ... "God is holding a grudge from a long time ago, and now we're paying for it"... (Introduction to Joel - *The Message*)

4. In our day, it is interesting to notice that liberal, even atheistic, news media call for prayers when there is a natural or national disaster! To whom are they planning to pray? But, times of disaster make people want to turn to some supernatural source of help. Who else is available except God! Sometimes, God has to take action to prevent a real disaster!
5. As you read the book of Joel, especially 1:1-6, does it seem like God is the One who sent the plague of locusts? How does this relate to Deuteronomy 28:38? Do these things depend on our behavior? Both Joel and Amos talk about natural disasters that occurred in their day. In Joel's day, it was locusts; in Amos' day, it was an earthquake. (Amos 1:1) Why is it that when something like that happens, peoples' thoughts turn to God? Isn't it true that everything that happens is either caused by God or allowed by God? What is the difference?
6. Does God send natural disasters? Did God send the plagues on Egypt? (Exodus 12:12) Will He send the seven last plagues? Will God protect His people during those last plagues?
7. What do we know about the locusts mentioned in Joel 1:1-6? Were they real locusts? Or, was that a symbolic statement referring to a military invasion of some kind? Notice the following comments about what happens when desert locusts in modern times attacked an area in the Middle East or northern Africa.

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 2nd 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*)

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 out-break 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*)

8. In the days of Moses near the end of their wanderings in the desert, the people were attacked by snakes. (Numbers 21:6) But, notice the explanation that Moses gave in Deuteronomy 8:15. Does God actually send such natural disasters? Or, in the setting of the great controversy is it that when His people are unfaithful to Him, He cannot prevent disasters from coming without being accused by Satan? Whenever something like this happens, is it appropriate for us to turn to God and ask questions? It is a well-known phenomenon that when people go through changes in their life situation or their routine is upset in one way or another, that is a time when it is much easier to make a change in their thinking or their lifestyle. Is that what Joel was trying to do? Is this a “9/11-type” story?
9. The “day of the Lord” is mentioned frequently in Joel. (Joel 1:15; 2:1,2,11,31; 3:14) We usually think of the second coming. How are we supposed to understand this “great and terrible day of the Lord”? And how long a period of time is included in the day 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 day of the Lord be a day of terror or judgment for everyone? 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; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 6:16,17)

One of the central themes of the Book of Joel is “the day of the Lord” (Joel

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 (Joel 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 Isa. 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; Isa. 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 Isa. 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 (Joel 2:30,31) which will bring sudden darkness and gloom on the earth (Joel 2:2). It will be a day of divine destruction (Joel 1:15) on the nations that have persecuted Israel (Joel 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*)

(See also “The Day of the Lord” in the *SDA Bible Dictionary*)

10. Read Joel 2:28,29 and Acts 2:1-21. Apparently, the apostle Peter believed that what happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2. Two thousand years later, we are hoping that the day of the Lord will happen in our day. Do we have evidence that there are prophecies and dreams that might fulfill Joel’s prophecy occurring in our day? What happened in Joel’s day was a “type” of the greater event to happen at the end.

In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit. Joel 2:28. This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but **it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the**

gospel.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 11.

11. In New Testament times, this partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel was accompanied by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Should we expect that to happen again?
12. The final outpouring of the Holy Spirit prior to the second coming is often referred to as the latter rain. It will be associated with a shaking time as well. While many will be convinced and converted to the truth, others who have no solid foundation for their faith will be shaken out from among God's people.
13. Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that we as a church have "the spirit of prophecy." After reading Joel 2:28-31, does it seem like the writings of one prophet are a fulfillment of that prophecy? Or, should we expect other prophets in our day? First Corinthians 12 suggests that each one of us has spiritual gifts. Do we know what our spiritual gifts are? Are we using them to minister for God? Should our whole church be acting like "prophets"?
14. Read Joel 2:31,32. What do you think Joel was looking forward to when he spoke of the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood before the great and awful day of the Lord? As a church, we have often pointed to the dark day and the moon appearing like blood on May 19, 1780 as a sign of the approaching time of the end. Does 1780 seem like a long time ago? Do you think there might be future times when the sun will be darkened and the moon turned to blood?
15. Will the day of the Lord be a terrible day for everyone? If the day of the Lord is a reference to the second coming, Isaiah 25:9 suggests that the righteous will look up and praise God that He is coming back while the wicked are described in Revelation 6:16,17 as crying for the rocks and hills to fall upon them. Those are very different reactions to His coming!
16. What does it mean to "call on the name of the Lord"? (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13) Thus, the day of the Lord is not just a day of terror and destruction for the wicked but a day of deliverance for the righteous.
17. Why is it necessary to have a time of terrible distress when the righteous are persecuted and threatened before they can inherit eternal life?

We must know our real condition, or we shall not feel our need of Christ's help. We must understand our danger, or we shall not flee to the refuge. We must feel the pain of our wounds, or we should not desire healing.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 158.

18. So, what kind of a relationship do you personally have with God? Are you sure that the day of the Lord will be a day of rejoicing for you? Or, will it be a day of terror?
19. Long ago, Ellen White suggested that we should have been in the kingdom of heaven before 1883. (*Evangelism* 695.3-696.2) Does it seem to you like the evidence is mounting for a soon appearing of our Lord in the clouds? Or, does it still seem a long time away?
20. Adventists used to refer to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the dark day of 1780, and the falling of the stars in 1833 as evidence that the day of the Lord is upon us. But, the latest of those events is almost 200 years old now! Have we been calling, "Wolf, wolf" too long?
21. In light of the prophecies in the book of Joel, would it be appropriate for us to call for repentance and reformation whenever there is a natural disaster?
22. What do you personally think about the prophecies in the book of Joel?

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