

# Bible Studies

## Joel and the Locust

Almost nothing is known about Joel. We do not even know for sure when he prophesied. His ministry was in the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The most likely dates are during the reign of Joash, 2 Chron 24, (835-796BC) or the reign of Uzziah, 2 Chron 26, (792-740BC). Both were good kings, both provided stability and prosperity.



### Read Joel 1v1-12

#### What has just happened?

There is no doubt that Joel is describing an actual event. Locust are normally no problem, they look like a grasshopper and are up to 10cm long, they are solitary creatures who do little damage. But under certain conditions, (warm and moist) a 'large hatch' can occur. The locust change physically and in their behaviour. They swarm and migrate. Where ever they land they eat everything, even the bark from the trees. They leave a waste land behind them. As the insects die they bring disease. Plagues follow the locust.

*In 1889 a swarm was observed which it is estimated covered 3000 km<sup>2</sup>.*

*Swarms have been seen 2000km off the coast of Africa.*

*There are up to 120,000,000 insects per square mile.*

Even today unless a swarm is controlled as in hatches, there is nothing that can be done. Locust swarms are still deadly across Africa and have occasionally threatened Europe.

#### What effect would such a plague have had on Judah?



**Why were the drunkards wailing?** v5

**Why were the sacrifices stopped?** v9



**What did the priests do?** v9b

**What did the farmers do?** v11

At a time like this people looked to prophets like Joel to explain why this was happening and what they should do.

#### What does Joel say they should do? v13-14

It is hard to overestimate the dire situation Judah was in. It must have seemed as if the world had come to an end. It must have been very hard for them to see any future for themselves.

#### When catastrophe strikes how should we respond?

#### What ways do we often respond?

We should humble ourselves before God, seek Him and trust Him. Instead too often we get angry and bitter with God, doubt and even backslide, "this is too much for me".

*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. Habakkuk 3:17-18*

Joel's explanation of the problem has two parts, he examines the current problem, but then he looks at as a metaphor for future events.

*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. Joel 1:5*





This seems like a strange verse. The Prophets follow a fairly predictable pattern.

*“This is what you have done wrong, this is what God is going to do about it, unless you repent.”* Joel strongly advocates the need to repent, 2v13, but he never specifies what they have done. It seems strange to pick on the drunkards. Maybe it means more than you would think. Remember the two most likely times that Joel wrote, were under good kings, but both of them have something in common.

**What is it?** 2 Chron 24v18-19 & 2 Chron 26v16

I think the problem was that the people got too complacent, times were good, what did they need Jehovah for? Moses warned against just such a situation.

*Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Deuteronomy 8:12-14*

When we seek to understand books like we have to be very careful it is easy to make fundamental mistakes. Chapter 2 continues with the description of this invading army of Locust.

**Who sent them, whose army are they?** 1v15, 2v11

It comes hard to learn that the locust were not Satan’s army, they were God’s Judgment on His complacent, self satisfied, faithless people.

*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, Amos 6:1 KJV (NIV. Complacent in Zion)*

**What does this verse mean?**

**How does it apply to us?**

Watch out for the Locusts. 1 Peter 4v17.



The second way that Joel looks at this locust invasion, heralds the future.

**What is the phrase common to the last verse we looked up?** 1v15, 2v11

Joel likens the locust plague to the Day of the Lord. (Joel uses the ‘Day of the Lord’ more frequently than any other author, 5 times in 3 chapters. He uses what was happening then to describe what was yet to happen and to warn the people.

We will study this more next week.



**Read Joel 2v1-11**

The description is again of a locust swarm but this time it is clear that the army is real. (It comes from the north 2v20, locust come from the south). The synopsis is similar to that of Habakkuk. When Habakkuk complained that God was doing nothing about the sins of Judah, God says he will send the Babylonians to invade.

*They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour.*

*Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence.*

*Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. Habakkuk 1:7-9*

Historically it could be the same army. Although in light of the rest of the book these are also future events.



**The call to repent Read Joel 2v12-17 .**

**What does it mean, ‘return to me with all your heart’?** v12

**What does ‘rend your hearts’ mean?** v13

**What is the effect of repentance?** v13b

**What are the implications of God being slow to anger?**

Verse 16 describes who must repent, it includes those who were normally exempt from ceremonial observances.

# Bible Studies

## Joel and the Restoration.

### Read Joel 2v18-26

In the previous part of the chapter the people of Judah have repented before the Lord for their compliancy.

### How does the Lord respond?

*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. Joel 2:13*

### Do you think God holds grudges?

It is an amazing truth that God forgives freely and totally. Once He forgives, He forgets, it is never mentioned again.

When we forgive, often, when it suites us, we strategically remind the person of their failings, it gives us control over them.

### Do you think this is true forgiveness?

### What would you say are the important things about God's forgiveness and the way He forgives?

I love to tell the story of the prodigal son, just as the people are relaxing in a well known and comforting parable, I change the script. Instead of responding the way God did in the story, I respond the way we would. "*Too right you've sinned against me. Things are going to be different... your going to repay... and if you ever pull a stunt like this again...*" It is so hard for us to accept that God's forgiveness is for real.

### What things are mentioned in this passages that result from God's forgiveness?

Are these blessing spiritual or physical? *Blessing, joy, release from fear, restoration, praise, deliverance etc.*

### There are two verses in this passage that are well known;



*Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. Joel 2:23*

The NIV has a footnote commenting that 'rains in righteousness' could be teacher for righteousness. (Teacher is the more common meaning, but the context implies rain.)

### Who do you think this refers to?

### How did he teach us righteousness?

The Summer in Israel is totally dry, no rain falls whatsoever. At the feast of tabernacles (Sept/Oct), the Jews start to pray for rain. It rains throughout the winter, but the rainfall is concentrated in two periods; Oct/Nov, the autumn rains and March/April, the spring rains.

The KJV calls these the former & latter rains. These rains were vitally important for the crops. In Jewish culture rain is a blessing. They really were, *showers of blessing*. Ezekiel 34:26

*Then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. Deuteronomy 11:14*

*Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. Zechariah 10:1*

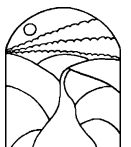
### Why do you think we are told to ask for rain?

### What do you think Joel & Zechariah meant by rain is in this verse?

Firstly they obviously meant rain, the kind that makes you wet.

### What other kinds of rain do you think we should ask for?

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## Read Joel 2v28-32

This is the heart of the book, this is Joel's latter rain. Throughout the OT, God poured out His Spirit on individuals, temporarily and for specific reasons. But in the Last days, He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. (More of this next week). Just as the latter rains are much heavier than the former, so this outpouring would be much greater.

*So Ask of rain in the time of the latter rain.*

2

*'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten— the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm — my great army that I sent among you.*  
*Joel 2:25*

The contrast here is with Joel 1v4

*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. Joel 1:4*

It is not possible to identify the different types of locust referred to, nor is the meaning of the passage tied up in differentiating the breed of locust or their habits. The totality of the destruction is what Joel wants to emphasize. Cf. Jer 15v3, Ezek 14:21.

**What is God promising here?**

**How could this promise apply to us?**

**Can you think of any biblical accounts that illustrate this?**

Perhaps Job is the best example, but what about Joseph or the women of the scriptures who were barren, but became fruitful.

It is very easy to look back and over lost years with despair. But such things are not lost on God. He will find a way to restore the years. This is a great retroactive promise. *As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you. Zechariah 9:11-12*

**How do the following verses apply to this promise?**

*Romans 8:28*

*Psalms 92:14*

*Psalms 126:5*

*2 Corinthians 4:17*

God is a God of restoration, God is a God of the second chance. God is the God who always has a plan for our future. The locust will not destroy it.

Sometimes we fail so badly that we cannot believe there is a future for us. That God can take us, restore us and use us again. We have just gone too far.

**Can you think of any Bible characters who seriously failed but whom God subsequently forgave and restored and used?**

A better question is can you think of any who didn't! The leader of the whole Christian Church for the first 10 years, actually denied that he had ever met Jesus. And he did it in Jesus greatest hour of need. This puts our failures into perspective.

**If you were Jesus what would you have said to Peter?**

**Does this mean we can avoid the consequences of our sin?**

No I don't believe it always does, sometimes the effects of the things we do live on with us. But it does mean there is always a way back to God's blessing and His will. There always a way to God's forgiveness, there is always a future.

*Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; Jeremiah 15:19*

*Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:3*

# Bible Studies

## Joel & the day of the Lord.

*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand— Joel 2:1*

As we have already commented Joel speaks much of the day of the Lord. So what is the day of the Lord? For that matter when is the day of the Lord? What will it be like and what should we expect?

There are only rare references to the ‘day of the Lord’ in the prophets, (16) but phrases like ‘in that day’ occur frequently.

The day of the Lord is an eschatological term, it is connected with the events of the end of the age. We know from the NT that it is the wonderful day of Jesus second coming. 2 Pet 3:10 In it’s broadest use it means any day when God steps into human history in a significant way. God’s Judgement on Judah, executed by the Locust was a “day of the Lord”.

**How does Amos describe the day of the Lord? Amos 5:18**

*See, the day of the LORD is coming —a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger— to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. Isaiah 13:9*

There is a tension here in these verses. People were longing for the day of the Lord, but Amos warns that it will be a terrible day.

**How can the day of the Lord be both wonderful and terrible at the same time?**

The same day brings Judgement for the wicked and deliverance for the righteous.

**Read Joel 2v28-32**

**When was this passage fulfilled ?**

**Read Acts 2v16**

**To what was Peter referring?**

**Read Acts 2v1-12**

Peter says that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. To be more precise it was the start of the fulfillment, for Peter himself goes on to note: *The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:39* It’s fulfillment continues to this day.

**Who was filled with the Holy Spirit in the OT?**

Exodus 31v3	Who	Why
Numbers 27:18	Who	Why
Judges 6:34	Who	Why
1 Samuel 10:6	Who	Why
2 Chronicles 24:20	Who	Why
Ezekiel 2:2	Who	Why

**According to Joel who would be filled with the Spirit in the NT?**

**What is the contrast between the Two?**

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was given to select individuals, Kings, Prophets, Priests. Important people. In the New, the Spirit is given to everyone, even servants! In the Old, the Spirit was given for specific jobs and often only for a limited time. In the New, the Spirit is given to empower our whole Christian walk, what is more the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is intended to be a life long growing experience.

It is unlikely that Joel is distinguishing between gifts, old men dream, young have visions. He is describing diversity of those filled and the breadth of the experience. As we noted last week the OT experience of the Holy Spirit is the autumn rain Joel referred to and the NT out pouring is the spring rain.



## **What do you think v30-31 refer to? Mark 13v24-26**

Prophecy often puts things together that are in fact separated by time, but connected in other ways. These cataclysmic event mark the end of what the Spirit's outpouring began. This period, sometimes call the 'time of mercy' is characterised by verse 32 *And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; Joel 2:32*

### **What does this mean?**

Now is the time when God offers free salvation to all.

### **What ends this period?**

Joel is a book of restoration. As we have seen the former and latter rains, refer to outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments. But there also seems to be a parallel in the Church.

If you look at the history of Christianity, you find that the first 3 centuries were very dynamic. The Church spread like wildfire and was strongly spiritual. From then on large parts of the Church began to stagnate, the Church still continued to spread through Europe, but it had become institutionalised and obsessed temporal power. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Church was in a fairly sorry state and had been for many centuries. Then God started His work of renewal. Someone put it like this:

*17<sup>th</sup> Century saw the restoration of Salvation by faith (Luther)*  
*18<sup>th</sup> Century saw the restoration of Missions (Carrey)*  
*19<sup>th</sup> Century saw the restoration of Holiness Doctrine*  
*20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the restoration of the Fullness of the Spirit.*

There is a sense that the latter rain is again falling. We live in a great period of restoration.

## **Into the Future**

*'In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, Joel 3:1*

Chapter 3 goes further into the future. The above verse has found fulfillment in the recreation of Israel within living memory. Joel goes on to state that God will Judge the nations that have oppressed His people Israel.

*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:3*

(Verse 9 on probably describes the much heralded battle of Armageddon.)

Just as God judged Judah for her sins so he will judge the World.

There will be a day of the Lord with a destruction like that of the Locust. We call this the time of tribulation. It is the time of the Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets and Seven Bowls of which Revelation (6,8 &16) speaks. God is doing again to the earth what He did to Judah through the locust.

These passages in Revelation are reminiscent of Joel 2v1-11

### **What is His Goal in doing this? Rev 9v20-21**

This is mankind's last chance to repent before the return of Christ. Can you see the symmetry in Joel? What happened in a local way at the start of the book, becomes global and eschatological at the end of the book.

*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. Joel 3:14*

### **What do you think Joel means by the Valley of Decision?**

#### **Are People in the Valley of Decision apathetic?**

I think this verse spells out loud and clear our end time commission. As the end draws closer and these prophecies quicken in their fulfillment. People need to make a choice, they need to chose God. We need to help them make that choice.