

Route 66

Joel: Rend Your Heart

Part 29 – February 7, 2010

The book of Joel's prophecy is only *three* chapters long. And his name is only mentioned once in the entire Old Testament:

The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel. – *Joel 1:1 NIV*

This is all we know about the man. And yet, he's responsible for prophesying the greatest New Testament coming next to Jesus.

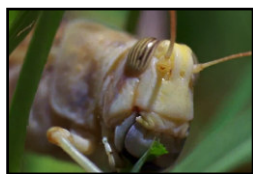


Joel most likely lived *after* the destruction of Israel (northern kingdom) in 722^{BC} by the Assyrians but *before* the destruction of Judah (southern kingdom) in 586^{BC} by the Babylonians. And based on the early enemy nations that Joel lists and the later enemies that he doesn't, he probably ministered during the reign of Joash.

As the book of Joel opens, it appears that a devastating double-plague of locust has ravaged the southern kingdom of Judah.

What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. – *Joel 1:4 NAS*

First, the “gnawing locust” hatches. Then when they get wings they become “swarming locust”. Their eggs hatch into more “creeping locust” until *they* grow wings and become “stripping locust”. Throughout chapter one, Joel describes the horror and suffering brought about by the locusts and their attempts to stop them.



This is the desert locust. Every few decades, an enormous desert shower will cause *massive* groups of locust eggs (underground for up to 20 years) to hatch. The young are called *hoppers* because they can't fly. And frantic farmers have less than four weeks to corral as many hoppers as possible into pits of fire before the locusts get their wings.

As vegetation runs out, the adults release pheromones which tell the others that its time to move on. And when groups merge, they form swarms. And when swarms merge, they can form gigantic plagues several *billions* strong. One massive swarm in 1889 crossed the 200-mile-wide Red Sea and covered 2,000 square miles (that's the same size as all of Skagit County). An adult locust will eat its entire body weight *every day!* And a whole swarm can consume hundreds of tons of vegetation. They will rapidly devour every edible thing that lies in their path and leave the land and its inhabitants devastated.

Now, not only had the locust done their worst, but the attempts of the farmers to burn the critters out apparently got way out of hand, and it all seems to have happened during a drought!



To you, O Lord, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures. – *Joel 1:19-20 NIV*

Joel sees this as a message from God for the ongoing, unashamed disobedience of His people, and he calls them to repentance.

Moses had warned his people that this would happen if they strayed:



You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. – *Deuteronomy 28:38 NIV*

Joel's countrymen saw this as a *judgment*, but Joel saw it as something far more terrifying ... he saw it as a *warning*.

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 NIV*

Until Joel's teaching, the "day of the Lord" had been eagerly anticipated as a day when God would judge their *enemies*; but, Joel declares that the day of the Lord is coming to judge *them*! And, in chapter two he sees the locust morphing into an army:



They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. ... each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. ... The LORD thunders at the head of his army ... – *Joel 2:7-8; 11a NIV*

Their gods of fertility couldn't protect the land. And now their "God of war" is promising to commandeer an army *against* them. From *their* perspective God has switched sides; but, from *God's* perspective they're the ones who've switched sides!

Believers will sometimes knowingly live outside of God's clear boundaries and when bad things result from their disobedience they wonder why God seems to be working against them. The Lord never switches sides, only *we* do. We must always focus on *God's* agenda. But, we're so corrupted by sin that we often see this as giving something up; whereas, in reality His agenda *always* leads to the greatest joy and peace.

It's interesting that the four phases of the locust perfectly parallel the four phases of the destruction of Judah.

1. Instead of the “gnawing locust” they had the first exile of the nobles, including Daniel, Shadrach Meshach and Abednego.
2. Instead of the “swarming locust” the Babylonian army returned and exiled 10,000 Jews, including Ezekiel.
3. Instead of the “creeping locust” Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, leaving only the old and weak to tend the fields.
4. Instead of the “stripping locust” some zealous Jews murdered their new governor and forced the last to flee to Egypt.

A hundred years before Joel’s plague of locust, King Solomon had sensed the inevitability of judgment coming upon his people, and he’d even prayed for the Lord to have mercy in that day:



When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers ... Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart ... - 1 Kings 8:37-40 NIV condensed

It’s all about the heart. It’s *always* about the heart!

Joel sees them ripping their clothes in a religious effort to appease God with a demonstration of grief and suffering, but that’s *not* what God wants.

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. - Joel 2:13 NIV

This is the message of Joel: “Rend your heart and not your garments”

Don’t just go through the motions of what you think will pacify and placate God. We must identify our guilt, and recognize it as an insult and offense to the holiness and Lordship of our Savior and King.

There are six stages to rending your heart:



1. Recognition of sin (*no longer hiding or denying it*)
2. Remorse for sin (*realizing how it separates God and me*)
3. Returning to Him (*reestablishing the broken relationship*)
4. Receiving grace (*allowing His holiness to cover me*)
5. Re-surrendering (*giving up all the controls to Him*)
6. Re-devoting myself (*to live for Him, point forward*)

And this is impossible without His Spirit to help me to see past my corruption and experience deep heartfelt remorse for my sin. But, thanks to Jesus' sacrifice and the Day of Pentecost, His Spirit dwells within us! Listen to what Peter said to the crowd:

Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days ..." - Acts 2:14b-18a NIV (Joel 2:28-29)

Joel may be an obscure, minor prophet, but the Lord used him to announce in advance the coming of His Holy Spirit *in* Jerusalem. Destruction isn't the final word in Joel. He saw the return from Babylon, the judging of Judah's enemies, and a final, future regathering of all Jews from among the Gentile nations.

For Joel the Holy Spirit was a future promise, but for us He's a present reality! If you're a Christian, you have God's Spirit. Peter goes on to explain the process for receiving it:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. - Acts 2:38 NIV

As a Charismatic church, we believe that God's Spirit is a basic component of salvation - not something separate from it. But, if you've been "baptized in the Spirit" as an independent event (as I was), it's not invalidated, maybe just *mislabeled*.

We should re-surrender to God's Spirit *every day* to be freshly cleansed and filled and attuned for service. In Luke 11:11-13 Jesus compares God giving us His Holy Spirit to a father giving his child bread, a fish, or an egg when they ask; and those are all daily nourishment needs. So, I don't think there's much point in any believer wasting time wondering whether or not they've *received* God's Spirit.

Q: No, the real question is: Do you *rely* on Him?

- Do you daily reaffirm His profound, indwelling presence?
- Do you daily re-surrender your self-sufficiency?
- Do you daily reorient yourself to His will and His ways?
- Do you daily request His truth and empowerment?
- Do you daily respond to His direction and prompting?

This is how we switch from a self-serving agenda to an unbroken, intimate, relationship with the Father through the Son. Because God has poured out His Spirit (as Joel prophesied) we can live in continuous connection and radical responsiveness.