

God's Twelve Voices that Shaped His People: Joel **Adult Bible Class**

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Introduction

What are the living messages of the OT prophets?

Background of text, social setting, and prophet provides parallels in our day

Points of interest

Joel, "Jehovah (Yahweh) is God"

This writing prophet Joel is probably not to be identified with any of the other 11 men in the Bible who have this name.

Historical setting

The prophet cannot be dated with certainty.

The majority opinion of recent studies places Joel among the later books of "The Twelve".

The occasion is a locust plague of unparalleled magnitude which the prophet sees as having religious significance. Those adversely affected are called to repentance, since the locusts are seen as harbinger for the approaching Day of the Lord. [See special study below.]

Textual considerations

The 73 verses are divided into four chapters in the Hebrew Bible, but are only three chapters in other versions, including English. (This variation occurs by the combining of chapters 2 and 3 into one—chapter 2 in our Bibles is actually two chapters in the Hebrew text.)

The book has three major sections. (1) The locust plague and drought call to repentance (1:1-2:27); (2) the Day of the Lord is heralded by the outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-3:16); and (3) the glorious future of Judah and Jerusalem (3:17-21). Each section moves toward the ultimate theme: God will judge his enemies and bless/save his people.

Special Study: Day of the Lord

Amos (5:18) is first writing prophet to use the phrase. Seems to reflect popular expectation that all enemies would be overcome and God, and thus Israel, would be exalted. The prophets generally reinterpreted the phrase as a day within history rather than a day at the end of history (cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1; Obad. 15). The phrase is used five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14). For the Day of the Lord in the other prophets, see Amos 5:18ff; Isa. 2:12; 13:6,9f; Zeph. 1:14f; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:2f; Obad. 15; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5.

Joel announces the Day of the Lord as a day of destruction (2:11, 31). Peter uses the second of these references in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost to describe the events of Acts 2.

The Day of the Lord for the nations is described in chapter 3. Called together into an unknown location, the valley of Jehoshaphat (a pun, for the word means "Yahweh judges"), the nations are judged for their wickedness, and for having persecuted, sold, and scattered the people of God (3:2-13).

The “valley of decision” is a further pun on Jehoshaphat, with desolation promised to Egypt and Edom, but blessing and a glorious future for Judah as the Lord dwells in Zion (3:19-21).

Contemporary lessons

Our lessons/principles

- a. The Day of the Lord. The day of the Lord apparently refers in Scripture to those days when God is visible and acts. Many OT references are to days when nations receive their just punishment for sin. The day of the Lord can also be a day of blessing and worship.
- b. The repentance God seeks is genuine sorrow for sin which rends hearts and not only garments (2:12-13).
- c. The Day of the Lord is at times a day of blessing, as Peter shows in his inspired interpretation of 2:28-32 (see Acts 2:17-21).
- d. Decision is necessary, and if we do not decide, God will decide/judge.

Questions

- a. Are events in our world today an indication of God’s judgment and displeasure? Why or why not? Are events in our world today an indication of God’s blessing?
- b. How would you describe genuine repentance? What are some of the “false signals” people today may think of as showing repentance?
- c. In the context of Joel, does the valley of decision passage serve as a “hell fire and brimstone” sermon, or should one see the passage differently? How do you understand this text?
- d. What is a valid application of Joel 2:28-32? What are some false applications that are made today?
- e. Discuss what can be definitely known from Peter’s application of Joel 2:28-32.