

Session 12 The Forerunner Message in Joel 2-3

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The primary theme of the book of Joel is the “*day of the Lord*,” which is mentioned five times (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14).
- B. The phrase, “day of the Lord,” or similar phrases that refer to that same time such as “the day” or “the great day,” are found in Scripture nearly 100 times (nearly 80 times in the Old Testament).
- C. Outline of Joel 1-3
 - 1:1-20** A natural disaster (agricultural and economic)
 - 2:1-9** A military crisis in Jerusalem
 - 2:10-11** All creation will be impacted by the Lord’s day
 - 2:12-17** The response that God wants in a crisis
 - 2:18-27** God’s zeal to release blessing
 - 2:28-32** The end-time outpouring of the Spirit
 - 3:1-8** The end-time judgment on Israel’s enemies
 - 3:9-17** The Lord’s victory at Armageddon
 - 3:18-20** Israel’s blessing and victory over her enemy
- D. The dating of the book of Joel is debated. The most convincing view is that it was written a few decades *prior* to Babylon’s destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC (2:1-9).

II. THE DAY OF THE LORD

- A. The twofold nature of the day of the Lord—it is great in blessing for the redeemed (2:28-32; 3:17-21) and very terrible in judgment for the rebellious (3:1-16).
 - 1. ***Great day***: The redeemed will experience the greatest manifestations of God’s power.
 - 2. ***Terrible day***: The rebellious will experience the most severe judgments in history.
- B. There are two expressions of the day of the Lord in history—global and local
 - 1. ***Global and final day***: This day occurs only once and is related to Jesus’ return (2:18-3:21).
 - 2. ***Local and lesser day***: The day occurs various times through history (1:1-2:11).
- C. There are three “days of the Lord” in Joel—an agricultural crisis (1:15), a military invasion of Israel (2:1, 11), and the deliverance of Israel with judgment on the Antichrist (2:31; 3:14).
- D. There are two dimensions to the final and global day of the Lord—a narrow day and a broad day.
 - 1. ***Narrow day of the Lord***: This refers to the 24-hour day when Jesus enters Jerusalem as King.
 - 2. ***Broad day of the Lord***: This continues from the Tribulation to the end of the Millennium.

III. THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CAUSES OF A NATIONAL CRISIS

- A. The *day of the Lord* judgments are sent by God. He called the wicked army of Babylon (2:11) and the locust invasion (2:25), “His army,” because both were God’s instruments to discipline Israel.
- B. Secondary causes for a national crisis include things like military invasion, terrorist activity, the unrighteous policies of governments, a financial crisis, terrible storms, etc. We need to focus on the primary cause. If we focus only on secondary causes, we only receive secondary solutions.
- C. The crisis in Joel’s generation and soon after became progressively worse. The agricultural crisis (1:1-19) was followed by a military crisis (2:1-9). This agricultural devastation brought Israel to the brink of starvation as four waves of locusts over several years destroyed their food (2:25).
- D. The locust crisis lasted a few years; the Babylonian crisis lasted 70 years (Jer. 25:9-14; 29:10). The Babylonian invasion came in three waves of attacks in 606, 597, 586 BC, over 20 years. That “day” was a 20-year military crisis in which God judged Israel’s persistent rebellion.
- E. One of the most offensive truths to our natural mind is that God raises up evil leaders and nations.

IV. A MILITARY CRISIS IN JERUSALEM (JOEL 2:1-9)

- A. The military invasion against Israel prophesied in 2:1-9 will find its complete fulfillment in the end times as prophesied in Zechariah 12-14. It will be the most severe attack in Israel’s history. This was partially fulfilled by Babylon’s attack on Jerusalem in 586 BC.
- B. Joel prophesied a terrifying military invasion of Judah and Jerusalem (2:1-2).
¹Blow the trumpet in Zion [Jerusalem], and sound an alarm...Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming...²a day of darkness and gloominess...a people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them... (Joel 2:1-2)
 - 1. ***Blow the trumpet***: Joel was to sound an alarm to the people that a great crisis was coming.
 - 2. ***Great and strong***: He described the army that would attack Jerusalem as great and mighty. In the end times, all nations will attack Jerusalem (Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3; 14:2; Zeph. 3:8; cf. Ezek. 38:4; Rev. 16:13-14; 19:17-21).
 - 3. ***Like of whom has never been***: This army will be greater than any army in history (2:2).
- C. Joel prophesied that fires would rage before and after the army that invades Jerusalem (2:3-6). This happened in the Babylonian and Roman invasions, and it will happen at the end of the age.
³A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness... (Joel 2:3)
- D. The army attacking Jerusalem would be zealous and well-ordered (2:7-9).

V. PREACHING THAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO TREMBLE

- A. *Day of the Lord* preaching is meant to alarm God's people and cause their hearts to tremble. In this context, *to alarm* means to cause their hearts to be alerted and engaged in the fear of God.

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand. (Joel 2:1)

- B. The body of Christ needs preaching that causes their heart to tremble or be deeply concerned. The Lord is raising up "*day of the Lord* prophetic messengers" like Joel, with the anointing that causes alarm and trembling in the hearts of people.

VI. ALL CREATION WILL BE IMPACTED BY THE LORD'S DAY (JOEL 2:10-11).

- A. The shaking of the earth and sky precedes *and* follows the Antichrist's attack on Israel (2:10-11).

¹⁰The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. ¹¹The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it? (Joel 2:10-11)

- B. ***Sun, moon, and stars***: The message is that the Lord is in control of the events that are occurring. He has power over the Antichrist's army. God gives a display of His power in the hour that the Antichrist's army tramples Israel and the nations to show that his army is as nothing to the Lord who has power over the sun (Acts 2:19-20, Rev. 6:12; cf. Mt. 24:29; Mk. 13:24; Lk. 21:25).

- C. ***His army or camp is very great***: "His" army referred to the Babylonian army. The camp of Israel's evil enemy was very great—this is only true as long as God is using them for His purposes.

- D. ***Who can endure it***: Who can thrive in the pressures of that day? Those who embrace 2:12-17.

VII. THE RESPONSE THAT GOD WANTS IN A CRISIS (JOEL 2:12-17)

- A. The Lord is looking for a specific response from His people to receive His mercy (2:12-17).

- B. The Lord wants His people to turn to Him with all of their heart (2:12-13).

¹²"Therefore...turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting...and with mourning." ¹³So rend your heart and not your garments; return to the LORD...for He is gracious... (Joel 2:12-13)

1. ***Turn to God***: To turn to God means to repent by coming into agreement with God and breaking our agreement with sin and lies. God is after our heart. The Spirit is calling God's people to make the first commandment first in their lives—to turn to Him in relationship.
2. ***Fasting with mourning***: Wholehearted turning to God involves fasting and repenting with sorrow for our sin. Fasting positions our hearts to receive grace to repent.
3. ***Rend your heart***: To rend means to tear something forcibly. Tearing our heart is personal and painful. Some want the Spirit to free them from their sinful patterns and relationships without making the choices that tear their heart. Jesus spoke of "plucking out our eye" (Mt. 5:29).

- C. God's people can repent and return to the Lord with confidence in His kindness (2:14). Joel summoned the people to return to the Lord, giving *five reasons* why this is doable and wise.

¹³Return to the Lord...for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; He relents from doing harm. ¹⁴Who knows if He will...relent, and leave a blessing behind Him? (Joel 2:13-14)

1. ***Gracious***: He is gracious in that He evaluates us differently than others evaluate us.
2. ***Merciful***: There is no one like our God who delights in showing mercy (Mic. 7:18).
3. ***Slow to anger***: Jesus is not easily provoked by our weakness (Rev. 2:21).
4. ***Great kindness***: When we believe in His kindness, we have confidence to repent fully.
5. ***Relents***: He relents from doing harm. He desires to cancel the judgment a nation deserves instead of issuing it. The Lord's judgment decrees are *decided on* in God's court and later the decree is *issued* as God releases angels to execute the judgment. A decree can be canceled.

***¹Gather yourselves...²before the decree is issued...before the Lord's fierce anger comes...
³Seek the Lord...it may be [perhaps] that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger. (Zeph. 2:1-3)***

- D. The Lord has given His people clarity on how they must respond in a time of crisis (2:15-17).

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes...

¹⁷Let the priests who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, "Spare Your people...and do not give Your heritage to reproach..." (Joel 2:15-17)

VIII. GOD'S ZEAL TO RELEASE BLESSING (JOEL 2:18-27)

- A. The first half of the book of Joel is about crisis and the need to respond in wholeheartedness. The second half of the book gives details about God's blessing for those who return to Him (2:12).
- B. The Lord's zeal will be manifested in healing the land and giving Israel victory over her enemies (2:18-20). The second half of the book begins with one small word—"then" (2:18). When God's people gather in solemn assemblies to pray, "then" He will be zealous.

¹⁸Then the LORD will be zealous for His land and pity [have compassion on] His people.

¹⁹The LORD will answer and say, "...I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

²⁰But I will remove far from you the northern army [of the Antichrist] and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land...his stench will come up...he has done monstrous things." (Joel 2:18-20)

1. ***Remove the northern army***: A partial fulfillment of this occurred when Babylon attacked Israel from the north in 586 BC. The end-time fulfillment of this will occur when the Antichrist's armies from the north attack Israel (Ezek. 38:15; 39:2).
2. ***His stench and foul odor will rise***: The stench and foul odor will arise from the rotting bodies of the slain army of the Antichrist and will pollute the land (2:20; cf. Isa. 34:2-3). It will take Israel seven months to bury the soldiers who come against them (Ezek. 39:12).

- C. The call to rejoice and to resist fear (2:21-24): Joel called the land (2:21) and the animals not to fear (2:22), then called God's people to be glad (2:23) because He would release rain on land.

²¹Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done marvelous things...²³Be glad then, you children of Zion...He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you-- the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. (Joel 2:21-23)

1. ***The LORD has done marvelous things***: Under Jesus' leadership, the people, the land, the agriculture and the livestock will be greatly blessed and renewed in an unprecedented way.
2. ***Former and latter rain***: The former rains are the autumn rains that come in October and November to prepare the ground for plowing and sowing. The latter rains or spring rains fall more lightly in March and April just before the harvest to bring the crop to maturity.

- D. The Lord's blessing leads His people to know Him (2:25-27).

²⁵“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you.” (Joel 2:25)

IX. THE END-TIME OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT (JOEL 2:28-32)

- A. The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on all nations (2:28-29).

***²⁸“It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.
²⁹And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” (Joel 2:28-29)***

1. ***Afterwards***: After God's people return to the Lord with fasting and prayer (2:12-17), the Lord will pour out His Spirit. This promise happens *before* the Lord returns (2:31).
2. The “Joel 2:12-15 pattern” of seeking the Lord corporately in a wholehearted way with prayer and fasting has been followed throughout church history, resulting in various revivals.

- B. The Lord will confirm His prophetic purposes with signs in sky and on earth (2:30-31).

***³⁰“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
³¹The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.” (Joel 2:30-31)***

- C. The Lord will deliver the remnant of Israel who calls on His name (2:32).

³²...whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:32)

X. END-TIME JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL'S ENEMIES (JOEL 3:1-8)

- A. Joel 3 describes the greatest *deliverance of Israel* and the greatest *destruction of her enemies*.
- B. Joel 3 is a continuation from Joel 2; there is no break in Joel's thought.
- C. The Lord will bring back the captive of Judah and Jerusalem (3:1). Zechariah prophesied that half the city of Jerusalem will be taken into captivity (Zech. 14:2).

¹***"In those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem..."***
(Joel 3:1)

²***"I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken...half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant...shall not be cut off from the city."*** (Zech. 14:2)

- D. The Lord will first gather all the nations together for judgment (3:2).
- ²***"I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; I will enter into judgment with them there on account of...My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land."*** (Joel 3:2)

1. ***Scattering Israel:*** The nations still seek to scatter the people of Israel from their land.
2. ***Dividing up the land:*** God charges the Gentile nations for dividing His land.
3. ***Enslaving the Israelites:*** God is angry with the nations for selling the Jewish people.

- E. The Lord's challenge to the nations (3:4-8): Tyre and Sidon speak of modern-day Lebanon, just north of Israel; Philistia was an area in the southwest of Israel (it is modern-day Gaza).

⁴***"Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against Me? ... ⁶*the people of Jerusalem you have sold ..."**** (Joel 3:4-6)

XI. THE LORD'S VICTORY AT ARMAGEDDON (JOEL 3:9-17)

- A. The Gentile nations will prepare for war against God (3:9-10).
- ⁹***Proclaim this among the nations: "Prepare for war! wake up the mighty men...let them come up."*** ¹⁰***Beat your plowshares into swords...let the weak say, 'I am strong.'"*** (Joel 3:9-10)
- B. All the nations will be gathered for judgment (3:11-13). The winepress speaks of God's judgment.

¹¹***Assemble and come, all you nations...Cause Your mighty ones [angels] to go down there, O LORD.*** ¹²***Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.*** ¹³***Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great.*** (Joel 3:11-13)

- C. The valley of decision and signs in the heavens (3:15-17)

¹⁴***Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*** ¹⁵***The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness.***

¹⁶***The Lord will roar from Zion [Jerusalem]...the heavens and earth will shake...*** (Joel 3:14-16)