

III. Joel in Biblical Perspective
A Minor Prophet with a Major Message
“The Day of the Lord and the Trumpet of the Lord”
Joel 2
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Let's turn to the prophecy of Joel. Joel means God is the Lord or Yahweh is our God. I'd like to start by reading from Numbers which is the background for the first section of Joel 2. As the Lord set up worship, He set up an instrument of worship. The instrument of worship that was to be used was trumpets and not just one but two trumpets. It provides a background for the burden of Joel 2. Numbers 10:1-9 says [1] *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [2] “Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp. [3] And when both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. [4] But if they blow only one, then the chiefs, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall gather themselves to you. [5] When you blow an alarm, the camps that are on the east side shall set out. [6] And when you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that are on the south side shall set out. An alarm is to be blown whenever they are to set out. [7] But when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow a long blast, but you shall not sound an alarm. [8] And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets. The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations. [9] And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.”*

Now let's look at Joel 2:1-2 says [1] *Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, [2] a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.* Here something that would have been familiar to the people of God that is commanded is a long blast from the trumpet. In fact in this chapter two trumpets are to be blown that form a very important part of this message in Joel 2.

This message from this prophet is to God's people. This morning we were in Nahum and that is a message to Gentile nations which God has blessed and what God does with them if they oppose Him unless He sends another awakening upon them. In this study we'll look at that instrument God uses to bring back spiritual awakenings to nations whereby the people of God are called out of those nations into the royal Kingdom of God and whereby the people of God in His royal Kingdom manifested in the colony of His Kingdom which is the church of Jesus Christ are to be equipped to serve and follow their King. That is what is so valuable about this prophecy.

The burden of Joel is very clearly this; here are a people whom God has blessed and now they have forgotten Him. This is not like that Gentile nation that now opposes Him. These are His people who have forgotten Him. The blessings have become more important than the One who blessed them. The gifts are more important than the Giver. They have become self-reliant on the gifts and the blessings and no longer seek the Lord. We have learned that God has now brought a Day upon them and it was a day of extraordinary plagues. He gave seven unfolding

statements of those plagues, making use of the nine different words in the Hebrew language for the word locust.

Locusts were an extremely feared plague that could come upon a people. One locust in a nine month period could produce 18 million more locusts. When the plagues would come the whole sky would be obliterated. The sun would be obliterated. They would destroy everything in their presence and that is what has happened but that plague of locust actually became according to Joel 4 a four-fold plague for when the locust came that soon led to a drought that soon led to a famine and that soon led to uncontrollable fires that devoured the Promised Land. Joel says that this four-fold plague is from the Lord to tell you of the awful day of the Lord. That there is coming a day of the Lord that is inevitable and it is a day of judgment. In the next study we'll see that it is called the day of the valley of decision and it's not people's decisions but it's God's decision in that valley. In that day the judgment of God will fall upon those who do not know Him. It is a day of the Lord that brings inevitable, inflexible, irrevocable and final justice.

One of the things we learned in the first two studies is that day of the Lord becomes a two-fold day, because the day of the Lord when He comes in judgment was preceded by a day of the Lord when He came and bore our judgment at the cross. The day of the Lord as it unfolds in the Old Testament is unfolded as a single day of God's judgment but as it makes its progress and now we come to the New Testament we find out that it is actually kind of like the day of Lord is like riding up to a mountain range. As you get closer to this mountain range you all of a sudden realize there is not just one mountain but there are more behind it in the silhouette of the other. That was the day of the Lord when Jesus Christ went to the cross, when He came not to bring judgment but to bear our judgment that we might be saved by His grace. That day of the Lord was a redeeming day where He took our judgment and the judgment came from the hand of the Father upon Him to set us free from our sins.

That then tells us that the final day of the Lord is coming – the day of judgment when all stand before the judgment seat of God (bema) and there in that day there will be a division in those who know Him and those who do not know Him. We are warned of that day and one of the ways that God sends us to the day of the Lord where He bore our judgment are days from the Lord. They are days of adversity that He sends into this world. They are days from the Lord that are pointing to the day of the Lord where He bears our judgment and the Day of the Lord where He brings judgment. Those days from the Lord Israel had encountered with this unbelievable locust plague that led to famine, drought and fire and we saw it unfolded step by step in amazing detail in Joel 1.

Now we have come to Joel 2. Now the people of God, in light of these days from the Lord that are pointing to the day of the Lord, are told to blow a trumpet. I'd like to do a little bit of an overview of these opening verses in Joel 2 and then I'll take a little closer view of these chapters. Let's start by looking back at Joel 2:1 which says *[1] Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near.* I want to make this clear. Days from the Lord to His people are not condemning judgment but they are disciplining judgment, so that these who are forgetting the Lord might be alarmed to come back to the Lord. So this day comes warning them of the day.

Joel 2:2-3 says *[2] a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. [3] Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before*

them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. In other words, he now moves from a detailed, factual using a number of words to speak of the cutting, hopping and devouring locusts to a more picturesque language of this plague of the locusts. He is not going to the fire, famine and drought that come but he goes to that which initiated all, the locust themselves.

Unmistakably some of you when you think of locust you think of darkness, gloom, death and something should be ringing in your mind. Has God ever brought such a day before? It was called the ten plagues. What were the last three plagues that God brought upon Egypt in order to bring an alarm to His people and the warning of the day of judgment to those who were not His people? The eighth plague was locust. The ninth plague was darkness and the tenth was death. So Joel is not only picking back on those two trumpets in order to tell us how days from the Lord become a sounding alarm to the people of God but he is also going back to the plagues that had come and like in those days he says this locust is such that the whole earth is dark with their presence as these locusts who have come upon us have multiplied so much. They bring darkness, gloom and death which will result in famine, fire and death.

Let's see how he continues to describe these days from the Lord of this locust plague. Joel 2:3 says [3] *Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them.* Everything seemed to be going well in the land and then all of a sudden these locusts come in and there is nothing now but desolation, while a garden of Eden had been expected.

Joel 2:4-11 says [4] *Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. [5] As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. [6] Before them peoples are in anguish; all faces grow pale. [7] Like warriors they charge; like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way; they do not swerve from their paths. [8] They do not jostle one another; each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. [9] They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls, they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. [10] The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. [11] The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?*

God Himself has commanded them. These locusts, fire, drought and famine are not the chance collision of circumstances. They have been sent and designed by the hand of God, just as they had in the days of Egypt. Unlike the days of Egypt where it was a condemning judgment, this is a disciplining judgment for it is on His people for they have forgotten Him. It even says they had forgotten Him in the first chapter of Joel. The first chapter did not detail all of the sins of God's people whom He had blessed and forgotten Him but He compared His people with the drunkard and the wine. What happens to the drunkard with their wine? Two things happen. They are intoxicated and addicted. They had become drunk with their sin and their intoxication and they had become addicted to their sin and they would not hear the Word of the Lord. They would not respond to the Word of the Lord nor the name of the Lord nor the glory of the Lord nor the call of the Lord nor the worship of the Lord. They may nod their head to ritual but their heart was far from the Lord. So now God calls forth the trumpet.

There are two instruments I love for marshal array. One is the trumpet and the other is the bagpipes. Just let me hear 'Scotland the brave!' and I'm ready to go! Send the ramparts

once more into the breach my brothers. They didn't have bagpipes yet because the other holy land had not been invented yet which would be Scotland, but from this Holy Land we get the trumpet. The trumpet arises and blows.

Why does the trumpet blow? The trumpet blows for three reasons that were already enunciated for you in Numbers 10. The trumpet is a wakeup call. It awakes us from our slumber. The trumpet in the army is called revelry. It is a wakeup call that calls you out and brings you forth. Wake up from your intoxication! Wake up from your addictions! Wake up from the slumber of your sin! Then the trumpet is not only a wake up but a form up. It forms up the people of God. It puts them in regimentation. Let the trumpet blow. Let the priests come. Let the people come. Let them form up in front of the tent of meeting. Let them congregate together. It's not only a wake up and a form up but it's also a move out. It sends us out to the battle. The trumpet blast sends the people when they hear that trumpet.

I can give you all my John Wayne movies where he is in command of the cavalry and there will be one moment in those movies where that trumpet call is given and they will charge whatever is in front of them as the horse cavalry moves forward. The trumpet would send the people of Israel out from the north and the south and the east, from the camp onto the march out into the battle. The trumpet would first wake them up, then form them up and then it would send them out into the battle. So Joel has said to sound the trumpet to wake us up from our sin to form us up before the Lord and the tent of meeting where His presence dwells and move us out to serve the Lord.

The plague has been given a picture now. It has been depicted as an army, sent by God in order to bring us to attention. It has echoed the ten plagues. This plague does two things. First it reveals to us the reality of the day of the Lord and this plague is also those days from the Lord to wake us up. It is God's trumpet call to us to wake up from our sin, to form up under the eye of God and to move out for the glory of God. Now let's take a closer look at this.

He gives this picture of the locust plague that produces fire, darkness, drought, famine and brings death and God has arranged it, sent it and it's under My command. This isn't a chance occurrence that God is now going to use to make an object lesson. This is something that He has sovereignly designed, not for condemnation upon My people but for discipline upon My people to wake them up, form them up and to send them out, no longer to the pursuit of idolatry, carelessness and sin but now for My glory, My Name, and My Word. He has now framed them up and called them to do this but how does Joel picture that disciplining hand of the locust? It is relentless and can't be stopped. He says that you put up your obstacles and they go over them. The locusts climb up your walls. Everywhere you try to shut them out, you can't shut them out. They keep coming and they are unstoppable. They blot out the sun, moon and stars. They bring darkness and gloom.

As I think of this passage I think of our dalliances with sexual immorality and while we rightly go to medicine to ameliorate the consequences we actually think there is a pill or shot or serum that will overcome the law of God and there is not. We keep trying to make sin safe and you cannot do that. The wages of sin is death. It is relentless. It is pervasive. It is unstoppable. It continually moves. There is only one answer to sin and it is not in the ingenuity of humanity to obliterate the consequences of sin. The only answer to sin is the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ but they have not turned to that answer. What did they do?

Joel 2:12-14 says [12] *"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; [13] and rend your hearts and not your garments."* Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and

abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. [14] Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? What had they done?

The trumpet had sounded but they did not repent. They had done what Paul identifies in II Corinthians 10. They had become sorrowful for what they had done and the hand of God's disciplining judgment but it was a worldly sorrow. Their sorrow was over the consequences of their sin and not over the fact of their sin nor the sinfulness of their sin. So clearly Joel is telling us they had responded to the trumpet for they had shown up for the ritual. They had torn their garments because that is what you're supposed to do. They had a worldly sorrow over the consequences of their sin but not a Godly repentance over the sinfulness of sin and the reality of sin. That was their initial response.

I knew it when I was a kid. Didn't you know it? My dad never read the books about giving a kid a time-out for he only had one response. He gave his warning and after that then came the corporal punishment. He would say 'go and get my belt son.' My dad had two belts. One was a very thin one and I could just about eat it. The other one was a thick leather one. Do you know the trauma when you have to go select which one of those you have to bring to your punishment? If I brought the thin one he would march right back and get the other one and then he would be upset with me further for what I had done but if I were to bring the leather one it was like signing your own death warrant. Why don't you go ahead and put your own noose together? It was so difficult to even think my way through that. I would say "Dad, I didn't mean too, I'm sorry." I was not sorry for what I had done. I was sorry that I got caught. I was sorry for the consequences of discipline that were about to come but I was not sorry for what I had done. In other words, I had a worldly sorrow over the consequences of my disobedience but I did not have a Godly sorrow over the conviction of the sin and its sinfulness.

That's what the people of God in Joel had. They had gone to the ritual, the baptisms and whatever offering they could put together but not much was really available because of the locusts. You are supposed to rend your garments and they had done that too. Joel says "No, rend your heart, not just your garments." Repentance is a heart issue, not a ritual. Repentance is something that springs from your heart. It is something that bubbles up from the conviction of sin and its sinfulness. Their repentance was ritual, heartless, and perfunctory. They checked the boxes. Joel says what we need is not ritual but conviction. What we long for is not heartless but a broken heart and a contrite spirit. What we need is not perfunctory of checking the boxes but we need the passion of seeking the Lord whom we have offended and then calling upon Him for His grace. Notice what Joel says.

Joel 2:14 says *[14] Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?* Track with me on this for this is hard to make clear. Who knows upon your repentance if He will not be gracious to you. Perchance He will be gracious. The truly repentant heart does not come back to God with the expectation of forgiveness as a personal entitlement. Let me go on the other side of this. We are in the New Covenant and we know that our forgiveness has been secured but we don't come with repentance even though we know there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We don't come back with the frivolity of the entitlements of expectation.

Please note the prodigal is brought up many times where he comes home but he doesn't come home with an entitlement mentality. He comes home and says "Father, I'm willing and desirous of just being a slave." The broken heart does not come with presumption or entitlement

even though we know that all of our sins are paid for, there is no condemnation and we are forgiven. Here they were anticipating the day of the Lord that would purchase that forgiveness. We are on the other side of that day but still in our hearts is a confidence that God's sacrifice is sufficient but no entitlement, just simply the humility. O God be gracious to me, the sinner and who knows if the Lord might not restore us. Why does He restore us? It is that He might give us a grain offering and a drink offering.

The discipline of the Lord with the locusts had brought a drought and famine yet the biggest consequence of the famine was that now they had no grain offering and no drink offering to bring in worship. Who knows if God will restore you and for what purpose? It is that you might worship Him. That is why He restores you. It is to restore to you the ability and the passion not to pursue sin or to be careless about our lives and forget Him but to pursue Him and when He has restored us He has given us both reason and resources now to worship Him. Joel is bringing before us that glorious promise that what we do is turn and pursue the Lord.

Notice again that the repentance is not turn from our sin to do better but it is to turn from our sin to pursue the Lord. Now the result will be doing things differently but it's not here is what I was doing, I'm convicted of my sin, now God I'm going to do better. It is not a wakeup call to further self-reliance. You can be self-absorbed with idolatry and we can be self-absorbed in our self-reliance. It is not turn from our sin to our righteousness but turn from our sin to His grace and to Him and His righteousness that will clothe us. That's where He calls us to. You turn from sin in repentance from the heart with passion and you do it to Him. It is heart-felt repentance that rends the heart and not just the garment.

Now there is a second trumpet. Joel 2:15-17 says *[15] Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; [16] gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. [17] Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"*

God restore us for what? It is that we together, His people, will worship and be a witness to the world. So that the world will say 'there is their God' and that God who is there among us is our worship and is being exalted. Now that God has restored His people with repentance they have both and reason and a passion as well as the resources to worship Him. So who comes in worship? It is everybody. The whole congregation is assembled – the old, young, male, female, the great and small. In fact, he is basically saying 'I don't care if you're on your honeymoon. Leave it to worship.'

Now we just were confronted on our priorities. How many priorities do we have ahead of worship? We go way beyond honeymoons, don't we? Vacations become vacations from worship. I love getting emails from people who say 'we're going to be away on vacation, can you tell us some good churches for us to worship in while we're away and here is where we're going to be.' I understand providential hindrances. If you have a fever of 103 then stay home and bless the Lord. There is no higher privilege and there is nothing else in the Bible that God says He seeks but the gathered worship of His people. The Father seeks true worshippers. That feeds our witness to the world so the world will not say 'where is their God' but they will say 'there is their God in their midst.' It is not because of the abundance of our resources but because of our passion for Him and His presence with us.

That is what He calls us to as we blow that second trumpet that with humility we come to Him in repentance. We come to Him with personal passion. As a congregation we gather around Him. It is that our resources and our restoration have been so that we worship. Blow the trumpet, the trumpet to wake up, form up and send out. Then blow the second trumpet to gather together and praise the Lord. Then disassemble for this witness of the Lord into this world.

So here is the takeaway. It is a little lengthy. The judgment of God upon His people (not the lost) is a disciplining judgment and it is designed to bring us to heart-felt repentance so that we acknowledge not only our sin but the sinfulness of our sin and then we manifest our desire to return, not to doing better, but to the Lord and the praise of His Name. That is what the disciplining hand of the Lord is there for among His people who have forgotten Him. This plague are days from the Lord, prefiguring a day of the Lord and now we who have been delivered from the day of the Lord, now take this day from the Lord and it brings us to a heart-felt repentance where we acknowledge not only our sin but the sinfulness of our sin. He is faithful as we come to Him in humility to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why? It is so that now our desire is not to be drunk with our sin and intoxicated by it but to praise His Name and bear witness to this world of the glory of our God.

When the days of the Lord come upon the unconverted they will not repent and in the midst of God's people I want you to know that there are those who come into the midst of God's people that are false professors. They may profess faith but they don't possess faith. In the days of adversity they will respond in one of two ways – burning anger against the Lord with 'how dare You discipline me, instead of brokenness or drowning in the self-absorption of self-pity. They don't know that those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.

What will those who not only profess faith but possess faith, do? They will turn with heart-felt repentance. The word in the Greek for repentance is *metanoia* and it means to make a radical change. I'll never forget the first time I preached from II Corinthians 10 on Godly repentance and used the Greek word *metanoia* which meant radical change, man. I didn't give it a lot of thought and slept in too many geometry classes growing up. So as I was preaching I said "Repentance is a Godly sorrow for sin and a radical change. God is calling us to make a 360 degree turn!" I was wrong to say 360 degrees.

God is just asking for a 180 degree turn. It's where we turn from our sin, carelessness and our forgetting of God to the Lord. It is a change of heart, mind and direction. It is a change of perspective. It is not all about me. It's a change of purpose where it's all about Him and it's a change of passion. His preeminence increasingly becomes our desire. It is from the intoxication of self and sin to the liberation of passion for the preeminence of Christ. Blow a trumpet! Wake up! Form up! Move out! Blow another trumpet and gather together to praise His Name. Now scatter and bear witness to the preeminence of His Name. The Lord is gracious. Isn't that amazing? We have had two studies and both of them quoted Exodus 34 – the Lord is gracious and slow to anger. He is not petulant. When He brings His hand of discipline upon His people it is to manifest His people by bringing them back to Himself and out of not only the guilt of sin, but the dominion of sin. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege of going to these rich texts of Scripture and thank You Father for the way that You minister to us and in us. Lord, we are prone to wander, prone to forget You, prone to embrace the gift and not praise the Giver and we are prone to the intoxication of sin and it's not with any drastic sins that

we begin with but just those thoughtless moments and careless steps. Father, help us to hate sin and become assassins of sin because You have assassinated the guilt of our sin and the power of our sin so we will now increasingly by Your grace exalt Your glory instead of falling short of Your glory. God, may the world not only hear the sound of our worship but may they see the presence of our God in us, Your people and may they leave the world, sin and Satan and be drawn to Him who redeems, keeps and refines sinners and even when sinners saved by grace will wander, the glorious tethers of grace will reconcile us and restore us back to Him, the Lord of glorious grace for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.