

IV. Joel in Biblical Perspective
A Minor Prophet with a Major Message
“The Three-fold Deliverance in God’s Salvation”
Joel 2:18-32
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July 20, 2014, Evening Sermon

This is our fourth study in Joel and here is what we’ve learned. Joel is not a well-known prophet. The name Jo-el means Yahweh is God. Yahweh is God he now is proclaiming to His covenant people. In Nahum we are looking at what God does with nations that He has blessed and in Joel we are looking at His covenant people, the nation of Israel which is the precursor to the church of Jesus Christ, the true Israel, the full Israel is drawn from all the nations, circumcised not in the flesh but circumcised in the heart. What happens when God’s covenant people whom He has blessed forget Him? What does He do and how does He deal with Him?

One of the things God does is He disciplines Him. That is what Joel is teaching us. The discipline that had fallen upon Israel is that they had been in a time of great prosperity and then the hand of God’s disciplining love came upon them in a four-fold plague. Its number one essential were locusts. One locust in their brief nine to ten months lifetime can produce 18 million offspring. So you can see how locusts can rapidly become a plague. There were no pesticides around back then. After you had planted and done your work all of a sudden a cloud that darkens the sky comes and this was so overwhelming to the people of Israel that they even had nine words they could call upon to describe the locusts. Joel has emphasized this for us with a series of phrases like hopping locusts, cutting locusts, devouring locusts and he has informed us of how they had descended. Along with it came a famine, then a drought and then fire. The result was that the land had been devastated for some length of time.

Joel is now telling them that this is a day from the Lord to teach you of the day of the Lord. This is a day from the Lord of judgment and discipline upon the people calling them to repentance and it’s pointing to the day of the Lord. What is not known in this constant phrase that is repeated most of all in this prophecy but also in the other minor prophets is that the Day of the Lord in a sense is actually two days of the Lord that would be yet to come. There would be a day of the Lord that Joel is speaking of and that is the day when God brings everything to consummation – the day of the Lord when He comes to bring judgment and to bring His people into the new heavens and the new earth, the day when the trumpet will sound. Before that day there is also another day of the Lord and that day was when God would send His Son in the first advent and that day was a day in which He would not come to bring judgment but to bear our judgment so that we could be delivered and set free from our sins and the rightful outpouring of God’s wrath upon us. Jesus Christ took our place on that day and the wrath of God came down upon that place of Calvary and there we were set free from our sins.

There is the day of the Lord that is yet to come in which He comes to bring judgment upon all who have not found their hope in Jesus Christ, the One who takes away the sins of His people for all eternity. So these days from the Lord have purpose in the lives of His people. Now the days in which contain adversity and judgment upon the world are not necessarily there for their well-being. It is there to warn them of the judgment to come but for God’s people whenever He brings His disciplining hand is not a condemning judgment, it is a disciplining judgment. Those whom He loves He disciplines and so that discipline has come through the locust ending up with famine, fire and drought. The result is not only that their life sustenance

has been removed but even more and in a sense worse – the very things that they would need to worship God, the grain offering and the fruit of the vine, were no longer there. They could not worship God. So Joel calls them to repentance in Joel 2.

He is calling them to blow the two trumpets designed by God in the Old Testament in the book of Numbers, it was the trumpet that sounded the warning calling the people to repentance and then the trumpet that called the people together in gladness and worship. So those two trumpets are given to us that we studied in the last study in the first part of Joel 2. The trumpet sounded to call them to repentance but their repentance was not true. Here is what we found out in the last study. They had a worldly sorrow not a Godly repentance. Worldly sorrow is described by Paul in II Corinthians 10 as a sorrow over the consequences of sin, not the fact of sin nor the sinfulness of sin. A Godly repentance is when we are convicted of sin and it's fact and when we're convicted of the sinfulness of sin against God.

So Joel says not to come in a perfunctory manner, rending your garments for they were coming in ritual repentance, half-hearted. He said to rend your heart for you need a heart-felt repentance. I believe that while they did not respond to the first call of repentance with Godly repentance but they responded to the second call with Godly repentance. Why do I think this? It is because of what I'm about to read in the book of Joel. Joel has just said to the priest, the people and the families that they are to prioritize their repentance and not their half-hearted ritualistic rending of garments but the rending of their hearts.

Joel 2:18-19 says [18] *Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. [19] The LORD answered and said to his people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.* In other words, something occurred so that now the Lord is removing His hand of discipline, restoring His people, reconciling His people to Himself, restoring their fortune of blessing that He brings from His sovereign hand, restoring the grain and the fruit of the vine, those things that would sustain them and that they needed to worship Him and He was about to restore all of those things to them. Why? Then He had pity upon them, in other words, they now had repented. So now God has become jealous for their restoration. God becomes gracious and merciful to them for the gift of repentance had been manifested by them and now they were responding to Him.

The first thing I want you to see is the Divine promise. With their repentance and returning to the Lord and confessing their sins with a true sense of sin and a conviction of it, no longer being halfhearted or ritual or worldly sorrow, now in Joel 2:18-20 is the Divine promise of two things. God will restore them and God will reconcile them. Joel 2:19 says [19] *The LORD answered (their repentance) and said to his people, "Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.* The emptiness of their idolatry was now being replaced by the presence of God and fullness and satisfaction. The fact that they were a reproach to God they now are becoming a witness to God that God will do that for them.

How will He do that for them? This is where he now takes us through a process. Secondly is the Divine process He will use to fulfill His promise. That Divine process is broken down into three acts of God's salvation and deliverance. Let's look at the first one in Joel 2:20 which says [20] *I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea, and his rear guard into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.* This means that there has been great destruction that has taken place and great are His numbers.

Many times the Minor Prophets are pointing to something that is happening immediately while setting the stage for what God will do with something that is going to happen later. What army has besieged Israel in this plague? He has described it as an army in Joel 1. It is the locust. God is telling them that He is about to remove this army from them but then He puts in an interesting word. The interesting word is 'I will remove the army of the **northerner**.' I don't want to overly rely on the geography and the examination of the affairs of the locust in life but the locust in the land would come from the east, the west, sometimes from the south but there is no record of them ever coming from the north. They would be blown in with the wind of the Mediterranean or the Sirocco wind coming from the south and swirling around from the east to the west but there is no account from the north. He may just be referring to the locust and I think He is referring to the locust and He will bring death to the locust. He doesn't need pesticides for He can handle this. Great is His power and He is going to do it in a complete way.

When He talks about the eastern sea He is referring to the Dead Sea and the western sea is referring to the Mediterranean Sea. That is where God will drive out the locusts out to and what will be left on the beaches is a stench. The very effects of sin and even its judgment leaves a stench. I want you to remember that because the stench is about to be replaced with the sweetness of the blossom of the vine when God restores them. Not only does sin bring a stench but the discipline of sin leaves a stench that is there from the locust. There is evidence of their presence in a parched and destroyed land and there's a continued evidence from a previous presence even after they have been destroyed because of the stench that they leave.

I think He is also preparing them for what He will yet do for the northern tribes will be captive with an army that will come from the north. It will be the Assyrians. Then a hundred plus years later the two southern tribes will be captured from the armies that come from the north which will be Babylon which was used by God to destroy Assyria. What God is doing with the army of the locust where He plants the word 'northerner' in there so that when they know when those armies come they will know those armies of the Babylonians and the Assyrians have come as discipline as well. Some think He is just merely referring to the locusts but I think the word northerner is preparing them for what He is going to do with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity of those armies and that eventually after they have served the purpose of God of refining and disciplining His people, He will destroy them as well. That is what His promise is.

The Divine process is what takes place as God in past grace defeats and destroys His enemies. He defeats the locusts and then destroys the locusts. Whenever God saves His people He must defeat His enemies and theirs. In this case, He will defeat the locusts and therefore He will restore and reconcile His people. At the cross He will defeat Satan, sin, death and hell but He won't yet destroy it but there is coming a day that He is destroying it. He defeats the locusts and destroys them into the eastern and western sea. At the cross Jesus defeats our enemies but He has not destroyed them. When He comes again at the Day of the Lord He will destroy them. On that Day Satan, sin, the grave and death will be cast into the lake of fire and utterly destroyed forever. When He saves His people in past grace will defeat them and ultimately in future grace will destroy all of the enemies of His people. That is what He does in past grace.

What does He do in present grace? This is what He does in present grace. Joel 2:21-23 says [21] *"Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!* [22] *Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and vine give their full yield.* [23] *"Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.* Because He defeats the enemies

that He had used to discipline them and He destroys them, now come the blessing of His grace in their life.

When God's blessings come it overflows all around us. It not only comes to us and in us but it comes through us for even the land is blessed. When God's people love the Lord watch what they do in stewardship of the land. I know many of you listen to the "Green movement", global warming or climate change but when I was growing up it was called weather. I'm fully aware that there is a recoil among God's people and I understand that because insipient in the movement in an outright pantheism. If I hear one more time 'my mother earth' I'm going to go crazy. Nature is not my father and the earth is not my mother. I have a father and mother who are with the Lord now and I have a heavenly Father who has mothered me in the womb of grace so I have all the fathers and mothers I need. There is an incipient pantheism and we recoil from that but there is a Biblical basis of Christian stewardship of the land. He said to us, 'this is your home and I want you to be fruitful and multiply. I want you to tend and defend the land and the garden. I want you to rule over the creatures and the creations. I have made this for you to enjoy to My glory and I have put you in it to tend it and defend it.' When God's people are right with Him Christian stewardship extends to the land, even beyond the land.

It says 'O beasts of the field' for there is even the charity of the Christian heart toward those animals He has put in place there to feed us and clothe us, to enjoy and to domesticate, to rule over the creatures, to name them, to develop them and to work with them. So when God's people are blessed they don't worship animals or the creation but they tend the creation and all of its creatures. There is an overflow of blessing that takes place in that situation but ultimately what happens to God's people? In Joel 2:23 He tells them to be glad because the Lord has now sent the rain. He has not only destroyed the locusts but He now has sent the rain, fire, famine and drought and they will be gone as well. It also says in the text that He sends the early and the latter rain. To have a harvest, you needed not only the locust to be destroyed but you needed the early rain that nurtured the crop and then the later rain that matured the crop. He also said He would give abundant rain. I will overflow in my blessing to you, why? It is because you have been taught now not to worship the gift but the Giver of the gift.

Now I can give you things that are not idolatrous. Whether it is a marriage, a job, children, a promotion or any of those things, there are many times we are praying for God to give us those things and He doesn't give us those things because they are not things we want to use for Him but they are things that we think we can't love Him unless He gives them to us and that's idolatry. Anything I have to have to be satisfied in the Lord beyond the Lord is idolatry. That does not mean there are not things that are within me that God has given me a desire to have and use but once it moves beyond having and using them for Him and I think they're crucial for me to enjoy the Lord now the Lord begins to deal with me because He is not going to give me idols in my life. So now He can pour abundant rain because they have been removed from worshipping the wine, the grain and the blessings from the harvest for now they'll use the harvest to bear witness and they'll use it to worship Him.

Notice that it also banishes fear. Notice how it says multiple times to fear not and it puts in place, be ye glad. God now ministers to our emotional being for Him that we are glad in the Lord and our fears can now be banished from life. In this Divine process He not only has past grace and present grace but there is the anticipation of future grace. Let's look at the next few verse in Joel 2.

Joel 2:24-25 says [24] *"The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. [25] I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the*

hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. Notice the changing of the tense where we are looking to the future.

I'm going to try and illustrate this from my own life. There are many times in my life that I wished I had been walking closer with the Lord but from the time that I was 13 until I was 21 that I utterly abhor everything about that time in my rebellion and blasphemy and insurrection against the Lord. I look back on it and realize all the things I wasted in all those years. The locusts ate so much. I will tell you that the Lord used that in my life to teach me a lot of things. He restored the years that the locusts ate. I believe He does that with you as well but the reason it gets restored is not because of entitlement but because when you look back to the years the locust ate, because of the disciplining hand of the Lord and because of our rebellion and carelessness against the Lord, those years don't get restored (the years the locust ate) unless we learn why the locusts were there eating.

Why were they there? You have to go back and say 'the locust ate in my life because this is what I had done' and when you confess and learn from that then the Lord restores the years that the locust ate. That's the restoration for you have learned from the disciplining hand of the Lord. It's not just grin and bear these five years that the locusts are eating for then it will get better. No, the locusts are there for a reason. It is because of the loving discipline of the Lord. Now find the reason that God had to bring that discipline and then kill it. Then turn to Him, not to do better but to Him to be satisfied in Him, for then the years the locusts ate will be restored. You don't profit from sin and its judgment. You profit from conviction, confession, repentance and the restoring hand of God's grace whereby we learn in those moments. So that's what it means when He talks about replacing the years in our life.

Let me go back to my illustration. I would give anything in the world to go back to age 13 and not make the decisions I made at Piedmont Junior High School on to the second year at East Carolina University. I would give anything to undo that because of the effects of those sins upon my life and the lives of others and all that I wasted in those years. On the other hand I'm glad I can't do anything to undo it because I have learned a lot from it and God has been gracious to teach me from it. So do I want to go back and undo it or do I want to learn from it? My answer is yes. I'd give anything to undo it but I'd give anything to still have learned what I learned because of what God did in His disciplining hand in my life and what He taught me, what He has developed in my life and how He has restored those years that the locusts has eaten.

So the Lord has restored them so what is the restoration? Joel 2:26-27 says [26] *"You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. [27] You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.* In the restoration of what the locust has eaten, what becomes the great joy? God is now with us. Praise the Lord for the vine, the grain and for all of that but the glorious thing now is that God is with us.

I want to try and say something with a little word-smithing. Our greatest witness to the world is the obvious fact of God's with-ness of us. We have to learn that repentance is not formality but intentionality and when repentance comes the great blessing of forgiveness is the restoration of God with us. Don't you love how Jesus ends the Great Commission? After He commands us to go and witness to the world He says I am with you. Go up to the Upper Room and I'll send the Holy Spirit and when He comes upon you and with you then you'll be My witnesses in power. It is the with-ness of God that creates us as a witness for God.

So instead of a reproach we actually become two things. Notice what the text says. We become worshippers. It is because our first thought when the harvest comes in and the vine starts bearing its grapes but instead of thinking I now have something to go in my cupboard, it is now have something to bring to God for worship – the grain offering and the drink offering. The first fruits of it are that now I can worship the Lord who is with me for as the text says you'll praise the name of the Lord your God. These become instruments of worship that had been removed in God's judgment and now are there not only to sustain you but also with which to praise His holy name. [27] *You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. You now have those idols no longer. And my people shall never again be put to shame.*

In conclusion let's look at the anticipation of the Divine prologue to all of this. What surrounds this teaching, redeeming, refining, restoring, reconciling work of God in the life of His covenant people? He says there is an even bigger lesson that I want you to see. All that is happening now is pointing to something. Joel 2:28-29 says [28] *“And 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, and your young men shall see visions. [29] Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*

Now let's look at Acts 2. Jesus has risen and has ascended. The Holy Spirit has fallen among His people and that sign and wonder of His presence. This is not necessarily a normative experience but it is the experience to tell people that God has done something significant in the calendar of His redeeming work. Acts 2:14-21 says [14] *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. [15] For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. [16] But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: [17] “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; [18] even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. [19] And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; [20] the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. [21] And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

He is quoting what I just read. Joel 2:30-32 says [30] *“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. [31] The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. [32] And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.* He is saying there is something else here. All these days from the Lord are pointing to the day of the Lord. The first installment of the day of the Lord will be the day of His redeeming work at the cross, His resurrection and His ascension and then I will pour out My Spirit.

When that Spirit of God was poured out upon them and they walked out, they began to speak in languages. This was not babbling. It was a language that the speaker did not know but people out there understood. These are Galileans so how could they be speaking in our language? He says to them that this has been done to tell you that what Joel prophesied has now come upon you. Now you see it here. It's in all these languages because the Gospel is going to

all the nations. It is being declared to you that God has poured out His Spirit and no longer will there be ceremonial distinctions between men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile. He pours out His Spirit among all of His people. As He pours out among them they all prophesy.

Now back up into the Old Testament. What God was doing in the New Testament was already in the Old Testament in seed form. They were saved by the presence of the Holy Spirit but they didn't have the understanding of it for the understanding of it is being unfolded progressively as God is moving progressively to go to all the nations. When it goes to all the nations you now look back and say 'O that is what God was doing.' That is why David said 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' He understood that but as it is now being unfolded now we understand something significant and in the New Covenant what we clearly know now was that in the Old Covenant the people would sit around and pray 'God, send us a prophet, send us a prophet.' God has sent prophets and now He has sent The Prophet. The Holy Spirit has been sent from The Prophet and we are all prophets.

That doesn't mean there isn't a place for a preacher but it does mean you're not depending on God sending a prophet for the prophets have been sent. The Prophet has come and He has given you His Word. No longer are we dependent upon visions, dreams, prophets and prophecies. Now we have the finished, sufficient, inerrant Word of God and you have the Holy Spirit to understand it and we can all speak it from the least of us to the greatest of us. God has done that work at Pentecost and there was the day of the Red Moon at the Passover. There were the cataclysmic visions in the sky as the darkness descended at Calvary and the earthquake that ripped the temple. Yet that was just a preliminary for He is coming again and those very events tells us will reoccur again as He shakes the world when He comes again but this time to destroy the enemies He has defeated and to bring to consummation all of His glory.

How can I be ready on that day? Joel tells you – call upon the name of the Lord. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Call upon the name of the Lord who has come and by His name you must be saved. Call upon Him but Him alone for your salvation. I want to ask you something. There may be some of you reading this that don't know Jesus. You have to call upon Him to be saved. You have to believe in Him to call upon Him. You have to hear Him. I pray that today in His Word He has spoken to your heart, you believe in Him and you will call upon Him that name that is above every name and that at the name of Jesus I bow and at Your Name I must be saved. You put your trust in Him alone. Call upon Him. If you would not call upon Him I would love for you to contact me and tell me what name of what person or what thing will keep you from calling upon the name of the Lord. What would you put in His place? Who would you put in His place?

For all of you who have called upon the name of the Lord would you join me as we gather on the Lord's Day for worship and as we scatter Monday through Saturday that in worship we'll call out the name of the Lord in praise until the world will call out His Name that through Him sinners might be brought to our Savior and be saved unto glory. Call upon the name of the Lord. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for its joy, love, depth and the love of Christ that is proclaimed for even the discipline of the Lord is His loving hand. Those whom He loves He disciplines. Thank You for His restoring and redeeming work in the lives of His people. Father, when His people forget Him He doesn't forget us but He comes to us, sometimes with the locusts to bring us to repentance, many times

with patience leading us to repentance, but all the time to bring us back to Him that He might dwell within us, not simply positionally but intimately for the Lord is with us. Now Father, we'll give You praise for what You do in the lives of Your people, in Jesus' Name, Amen.