

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

BOOK OF JOEL

Of the prophet Joel we know nothing beyond what is told us in 1:1. He was the son of Pethuel; but who Pethuel was, or where he dwelt, is unknown. Several persons of the name of Joel are mentioned in the Bible, but of few of them is less information given than of this prophet.

From internal evidence mainly it is inferred that he was a native of Judah. His message is addressed to Judah. It is equally uncertain when he prophesied, or where he died. It is believed by some commentators that Amos 1:2 is a quotation from Joel 3:16, and if so, then he must have preceded Amos. As this prophet lived during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel, the ministry of Joel must have been anterior to that time. The absence of any reference to the Assyrians or Babylonians in the prophecy affords some corroborative proof. Altogether, the date B. C. 800 may approximately be fixed as that of Joel's ministry.

The first verse of the first chapter, as usual, is the inspired endorsement of the whole prophecy, the seal of its authenticity, "**The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.**"

It is not easy to give a satisfactory analysis of this prophecy, for the book is a compact unit. The following is offered more as a suggestion than as an analysis.

Part I, Devastation of the land by armies of locusts, and by drought, announced, chaps, 1-2:2.

Part II, Exhortation to repentance urged by many gracious promises, chap, 2:12-32.

Part III, Prediction of the day of the Lord, the judgment of the nations, and the glorious state of peace and prosperity to be enjoyed in the times of the Messiah, chap. 3.

These parts, however, are very closely bound together in the prophecy. For out of the prediction of the impending scourge springs naturally the call to repentance; and penitence is urged by weighty motives and promises, such as the removal of the scourge and plentiful rainfall. Nor is it less natural for the prophet to pass from the material blessings, held, out to the spiritual, an abundant effusion of the Spirit upon the repentant people. And just as naturally he passes from these to the days of Messiah, the days of judgment, favor, blessing.

Unity and progress characterize the book of Joel.

The occasion of the prophecy was the invasion of the land by successive swarms of locusts, and excessive drought, which threatened the country with destruction. But that Joel's message extends beyond his own times, and is not exhausted in them, we shall presently see.

1. Invasion and desolation of the land by locusts, 1:2-16.

The plague is described in a very terse way in verse four. The four insects there mentioned are not so many species, as our English words would indicate, but locusts, either in their varieties, or more probably in the devastation they effect. Henderson paraphrases the verse thus: "That which the gnawing locust hath left, the swarming locust hath devoured; and that which the swarming locust hath left, the licking locust hath devoured; and that which the licking locust hath left, the consuming locust hath devoured."

In Palestine the destructive work of these insects is often incalculable. Note, God does not need to summon the great forces of nature, as the earthquake, the lightning or the storm, to make effective His judgments against His rebellious creature, man; He can make the most insignificant instruments to fulfill His purposes.

The prophet then calls upon various classes to mourn:

- The drunkards, because their wine ceases, vss. 5-7;
- The people, because their fields, crops and trees are destroyed, vss. 8-12;
- The priests, because the meat offering and the drink offering "**is withholden**," vs. 13.
- The priests also are exhorted to proclaim a fast, vs. 14.

2. A drought succeeds the invasion of the locusts, or accompanies them, vss. 17-20.

3. The prophet urges the people to fasting and humiliation because of the terrible affliction which has befallen the land, chap, 2:1-17.

In the first part of the second chapter he returns to the invasion of the locusts, and describes it with imagery the most forcible and graphic. The warlike armies of the devouring insects, their battle-march, onset and victory, their spreading themselves with irresistible might over the land—is drawn with a masterly hand.

4. The call to repentance is enforced by promises, 2:18-27.

The pity of the Lord is one great motive held out to the people to secure their penitence, vs. 18. The promise of the removal of the scourge is another, vs. 20; of plentiful rain, and crops another, vs. 23; and the out-pouring of the Spirit is another, vss. 19-32.

Such is the "historical setting," as men name it, of the prophecy of Joel. But is this all there is in the book? Joel's prophecy is telesmatic. It relates to the end, the day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord, and the mighty events which are associated with it.

The book deals in general terms with the characteristic features of that day, and with the blessedness that is to be brought to the earth at that time. The proof for these statements is found in the book itself.

I. The prediction of the out-pouring of the Spirit, 2:28-32.

By the words, “**And it shall come to pass afterward,**” the prophet intimates that the promise of the Spirit was not to be expected nor fulfilled immediately. A period of time would elapse before its realization. The day of Pentecost witnessed its partial fulfillment, Acts 2. The apostle Peter interprets it as having reference to the times of the Messiah, “**And it shall come to pass in the last days,**” Acts 2:17, an expression which invariably designates Messiah’s days, Isaiah 2:2; Hebrews 1:2.

The accomplishment of the promise began on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:16-21. Peter does not say that Joel’s prophecy was exhausted then, but, “**This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.**”

We have the earnest of the Spirit, II Corinthians 1:22. Every believer is indwelt by the Spirit, and the Church has the Spirit, and He is in the world applying redemption to all those who are called and chosen of God unto salvation; but it can hardly be said that He is now poured out on all flesh, that He is given to all mankind. There will come a time when Messiah’s “**days**” will be fully inaugurated, and then the Spirit will be poured out on all. So Isaiah predicts, “**And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,**” 40:5.

2. “The day of the Lord.”

Five times this expression is used in Joel, 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14.

“**The day of the Lord**” is a phrase of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament, and always refers, we think, to the execution of judgment on the earth. It sometimes means God’s judicial interpositions when He is not actually present; but in its full sense it implies the judgment of the great day, the last day. This is its almost exclusive use in the New Testament.

No doubt the judgments announced in Joel had partial fulfillment in the scourge of locusts, and much more in the destruction of Jerusalem and dispersion of the Jews, forty years after Pentecost. But his descriptions of the day of the Lord were not exhausted by those events, terrible as the second of these was. Take 3:2:14-16.

Unquestionably the prophet here looks forward to the final day. The proof is at hand, and is conclusive. Zechariah, who prophesied some three centuries after Joel, announced the gathering of hostile armies at Jerusalem, the day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord, and the awful judgments that shall be visited upon the ungodly, Zechariah 14. 11-7.

That the two prophets predict the same events, a comparison will show.

Let anyone confront Joel 3 with Zechariah 14 and any doubt about it will disappear.

- Both speak of the time of the end, the day of the Lord.
- Both announce the gathering of armies against Jerusalem, and of the miseries and suffering attending a siege.
- Both speak of the coming of the Lord, and of deliverance through His mighty intervention in the behalf of His afflicted people; both, of the destruction of the enemies.
- Both predict the peace, prosperity, and blessedness that ensue.

3. **“The harvest”** in *Joel 3:13*.

The judgments predicted in this chapter do not run parallel with the history of the nations on whom they are visited, but are those which shall fall in the last days, when Judah’s grievances are made the Lord’s own, and are treated as done against Himself.

The nations are summoned to quit their peaceful occupations, to get ready their arms, and come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of decision. There the great question between them and God is settled; there the “harvest” is reaped. The harvest of Joel undoubtedly corresponds with the harvest of the parable of the wheat and tares, Matthew 13:37-42; and with the harvest of Revelation 14:18-20. The figures in all these passages are double; i. e., there is both a harvest of grain and of the vintage, exactly what is found in Joel; and the harvest is the end of the age.

4. *Judah’s restoration*, 3:1.

It is most extraordinary that prophet after prophet announces it, as if the Spirit of God would make assurance doubly sure. It was fulfilled in the return from Babylon; it will be more abundantly realized when the chosen people, now dispersed among the nations of the earth, shall be brought back to their own land and to God.

From all this and much more, it appears that God had far more in mind than to address words of warning and of promise to His people in the days of His servant Joel. He spoke to His people through the prophet at Pentecost and at the destruction of Jerusalem; and will speak to them when the last restoration time comes, and when the last days arrive.

~ **end of chapter 31** ~

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