

Major Messages from the Minor Prophets The Prophet Joel

Intro: In our lesson tonight we come to the second minor prophet in our study series—Joel. We know nothing about him outside the words of his prophecy; thus, the date of the prophecy is uncertain. The best clue is the reference to the enemies of Israel (the Phoenicians, Philistines, Edomites, Egypt). Thus, many conservative scholars have placed Joel among the earliest of the prophets (830 BC).

However, knowing its date is not important to appreciating its message, which could have been given at any time during the time of Israel's existence in the land of Palestine. The oracle of Joel was prompted by the devastation of the land of Israel by drought and locusts. (A guided reading of Joel)

The prophet's description of devastation

It's uniqueness--Joel addresses old and young. What he describes had not happened in their time or their parent's. It was something that should be told to the next generation (1:2-3).

It's nature--A drought accompanied by a devastating locust invasion (1:4).

1:4-7

2:2b-11

The prophet's words are poetic and powerful and intended to give the greatest impression to his hearers of the devastation that has come.

It's results--The devastating of land

1:8-13

1:16-20

Streams were dried up. Fires were breaking out over the land.

Animals roamed about panting for water.

The vineyards and the fruit trees had dried up without fruit.

Grain fields were not producing. The grain that had been sown had shriveled in the ground; no food for the present; no stores for the future.

There were spiritual consequences: There is no grain to offer on the altar of the Lord (1:9).

What vegetation that had remained has now been stripped by locusts from the distressed plants.

The prophet's interpretation of these calamities

What was the spiritual significance of these events? For the prophet they were not random acts of misfortune for the Jews. For he remembered the language of the covenant Israel had made with God.

"And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.

"The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give

rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (Deuteronomy 28:11-12)

“You shall bring out much seed to the field but you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. (Deuteronomy 28:38)

Such things would never come to those who faithfully kept the covenant. In fact, as he read the Scripture this was only the harbinger of worse things to come—the day of the Lord (1:15; 2:1-2). Israel was ripe for God’s judgment and His agent of punishment would be enemy armies who came to do his bidding.

Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. (Joel 1:15)

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand— (Joel 2:1)

The prophet’s call to repentance

It is a call to national heart-felt repentance

1:13-14

2:15-17

2:12-13

What God sought was fasting, prayer, weeping, genuine repentance not mere symbolic gestures

The prophet’s hope of deliverance

The prophet’s hope resided not in the merit of Israel, but in the nature of Israel’s God.

God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding lovingkindness and relenting of evil (2:13-14)

The priests are urged to appeal to God’s desire to protect His Name from blasphemy among the nations. God would not want the nations around Israel to think that He had failed to be with the people He had chosen and that their reliance upon false gods had secured better conditions for them than for Israel.

Thus Joel gives a preview of what was possible if only Israel would repent--the restoration of the covenant blessings (2:18-20).

The prophet’s assurance that Israel’s material prosperity would be restored.

Here there a definite break in the book. A period of time seems to pass. The prophet comes with a new oracle. God has heard the prayers of His people. He has relented and purposed new things for His people.

The prophet now comes with words of hope. Their material blessings will be restored and they will know that God is among them again! (2:21-27)

The prophet’s prediction of a spiritual blessing

But more importantly there will be a spiritual counterpart—an outpouring of God’s Spirit that will result in deliverance for those who call upon the name of the Lord when the day of the Lord comes to judge the nations (2:28-32).

The blood of God’s people would at last be avenged as those who had afflicted the people of God would be recompensed for their wickedness, while Israel would be assured a lasting dwelling place in Zion (3:1-21).

Important Lessons From Joel’s Prophecy

In Joel we see God’s covenant faithfulness.

He keeps His covenant—bringing both the blessings and punishments He has promised.

We see the nature of repentance.

We see that God seeks from His people genuine repentance that grows out of deep heart-felt regret over sin and not mere symbolic gestures.

We see the promise of Pentecost.

The day of the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh has come (Ac 2:13). The abundant coming of the Spirit upon both Jews and Gentiles brings the blessings of salvation to those who would hear the Spirit’s message.

We see the only hope of deliverance at judgment day.

There is hope for deliverance for those who “call upon the name of the Lord” (Rom. 10:13). It is Joel’s prophecy that is the basis for the statement of Paul that salvation is possible for all who turn to the Lord.

We see the ultimate defeat of God’s enemies and the victory of His people over them in the eternal kingdom, the new Jerusalem.

Perhaps many of the OT statements concerning the victory of God’s people over their enemies and ideal provisions of will not find their ultimate fulfillment until the end of time when God judges the nations once and for all and grants His people entrance in the eternal kingdom where all is perfect in every way.

Conclusion: Joel’s prophecy helps us understand the principles by which God deals with His people—the demands of faithfulness, the need for repentance, the need to trust in God’s grace, and to put our hope in His blessing.