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## The Book of Joel, an Introduction

### Devastation of Natural Disaster

The morning of November 1, 1755 in Lisbon, Portugal began the same way as other mornings. But at 9:40 a.m. one of the greatest and certainly the more devastating earthquakes of modern times struck Lisbon. The epicenter was located several miles off the Portuguese coast, in the Atlantic. Accordingly tremendous tidal waves struck the city and contributed to the damage. The quake lasted for six minutes. During this time 12,000 dwellings were demolished and over 60,000 people died.

To make matters worse the earthquake occurred on *Sunday, November 1; All Saints Day!* This meant that at the very hour when most every Christian in the town was worshipping God in Lisbon, the earthquake hit and most everyone died as their churches collapsed on their heads.

How did Christians at the time respond? They did what most do in our land when a natural disaster takes place: they argued that it was a reflection of the judgment of God against sinners and sinful nations! In England many argued that the tragedy in Lisbon was a dramatic display of

God's judgment against the Catholic Church as Lisbon was Roman Catholic. In Rome the Catholic Church argued that the tragedy in Lisbon was a dramatic display of God's judgment against the Protestants that were allowed to live alongside the Catholics in Lisbon. As a result every surviving protestant in the city was executed. (Boice, 2006, pp. Vol 1, 99-100)

This theme has been repeated even in our lifetime. This is what we heard in some quarters of the church after 9/11, Katrina, and Haiti! Is a natural disaster a sign of God's displeasure with a specific sin? A people? A nation?

After hurricane Katrina hit, was it proper to blame the disaster on the moral decline of America? The book of Joel answers these questions, because it was inspired on account of a disaster of apocalyptic proportions. The Prophet Joel uses this disaster to instruct the people of God as to how they ought to think and live as a result.

As we begin our study of the Prophetic writings, we turn to this great book, Joel! As we approach it, I want first to introduce the book.

Now, let me give a word of encouragement when it comes to the introduction of this book. As I've stated before, my goal is to familiarize us with the Old Testament prophetic corpus so that we will feel at home in them. As such, as the introductions of each of the prophetic works are unique, to learn them is to become that much more familiar with the writing.

### **The Prophet, The Date, The Religious Setting**

Joel 1:1, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel."

More often than not, the name of someone or something in the Bible is significant because it proclaims a message. And this is the case with Joel. The name, Joel, means "Yahweh is God" and refers to at least thirteen men in the Old Testament. It is thus a polemical name, confessing that Yahweh, and not another party, is God alone! It is akin to New Testament expression, "Jesus is Lord!"

The Joel of this prophecy is mentioned only once in the New Testament (Acts 2:16-21). He identifies himself here only as "Joel, the son of Pethuel" who is not mentioned in the rest of Scripture. Although Joel displayed a profound zeal for the temple sacrifices (Joel 1:9; 2:13-16), his familiarity with Judean pastoral and agricultural life and his separation from the priests (Joel 1:13, 14; 2:17) suggest he was not a Levite, but a farmer who was born and raised in the environs of Judah, most likely the capital city itself, Jerusalem.

Now, extra biblical tradition records that he was from the tribe of Reuben, from the town of Bethom or Bethharam, located northeast of the Dead Sea on the border of Reuben and Gad.

With each of the prophets we examine, we are going to spend a little time on the dating of the book which in the case of Joel is rather difficult. For when it comes to the dating of a prophecy, the elements used to set the time of the writing comes from the individual book. For example, in some

cases, the prophet is going to mention the king(s) seated on the throne at the time of the writing, as in Isaiah 1:1 or Hosea 1:1. In other cases, we are left to consider how the prophet writes and what he writes. For example, while we do not know for certain who and when the book of Hebrews was written, we are on good grounds in supposing that it was written before 70 A.D. Why is that? We know that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Now, because Hebrews makes so much use of the sacrificial system in its teachings on Christ, we conclude that the book would not have been written following the destruction of the temple. Such a message would not have made sense if the temple no longer was there.

So it will be when we attempt to fix the date of certain prophecies. What they say or don't say will help to determine a date. When we come to Joel we are left with the latter as an option when it comes to fixing the date, for Joel does not reference the name of a king. Thus what we have in Joel that is crucial in dating the prophecy is three things:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As to the following, note... Because there were many famines in the land of Judah AND because the Land of Judah was the military highway of the Near East, many abandon the first two as time factors. As such we are left with the language of the prophecy which some scholars note is similar to the language of Zephaniah 1:14-16 (cf. Joel. 2:2). As that is the case AND since Zephaniah clearly was written around 640-622 BC, many fix the date of Joel to this time. Yet there is a problem with this thinking. (1) The drought/pestilence mentioned in the opening verses of this book clearly was apocalyptic (1:1-3). Yes there were many droughts/pestilences in the ancient world, but very, very few of this magnitude. Accordingly we would expect that such a famine would be recorded in Scripture. How could the history as recorded in 1 Kings not reflect this devastating natural disaster? (2) Furthermore, as this drought is used to speak of an impending judgment upon the people of God in the form of warfare, if Joel was writing during the era of the Great Powers (Assyria, Babylon, Persia) there is no doubt that he would have mentioned the invading nation (as did Habakkuk in 1:6). Yet no such reference is given.

Accordingly we conclude that the invasion was not on the magnitude of the sorties experienced by God's people in the latter part of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. (3) And finally when we consider the language comparison between Joel and Zephaniah. However there are also many parallels in other Old Testament books with Joel: Isaiah 13 & Ezekiel 30:2-3- cf. Joel 1:15; Is. 51:3 & Ezekiel 36:35- cf. Joel 2:3; Nahum 2:1- cf. Joel 2:6; Psalm 79:10- cf. Joel 2:17; Is. 45:5-6, 18 & Ezekiel 36:11- cf. Joel 2:27; Ezekiel 39:29- cf. Joel 2:28; Malachi 4:5- cf. Joel 2:31; Obadiah 17- cf. Joel 2:32; Obadiah 15- cf. Joel 3:4; Is. 2:4 & Micah 4:3- cf. Joel 3:10; Isaiah 13:13 & Amos 1:2- cf. Joel 3:16; Ezekiel 36:11- cf. Joel 3:17; Amos 9:13- cf. Joel 3:18. From all of this it should be obvious that it is arbitrary to choose Zephaniah as the closest parallel when 7 other Old Testament works can be discerned as either coming from Joel or being copied by Joel.

In light all of this we ask, "Was there a natural disaster in the latter part of the 9th century or the early part of the 8th century in Judah such that food was scarce?" And we discover that there was a significant famine during the reign of King Jehoram (2 Kings 8:1-6) which began 852 B.C. and lasted no less than 7 years! And in light of this we note that (1) There was an invasion of Judah in 841 B.C. by Aram which impacted many of God's people (2 Kings 8:12). Note: The invasion alluded to in Joel 2 was yet future while the locust plague clearly was past (Joel 1). Accordingly, this is an example of dual fulfillment where Joel is describing a human invasion using the words of the most recent pestilence. Yet as we'll see later in this study, this also is an example of telescoping where God has in mind the many judgments which His people would suffer under throughout history, climaxing in the war at the end of the Messianic age. And (2) During this era, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, and Egypt continued to molest God's people and so are mentioned by name in Joel 3:2ff. History also records that during this time, the three Palestinian nations mentioned here in fact sold Jewish slaves to the Greeks. Later these nations are not a factor in the national issues facing God's people. In the words of Theodore Laetsch, "We know that the Edomites had revolted against Judah under Joram (2 Kings 8:20-22), and the Philistines and Arabians had invaded and plundered Judah. Cf. 2 Chronicles 21:16, 17; 22:1 with Joel 3:4-6. The relations between Egypt and Judah were hostile only in the earlier period after the spiration of the two kingdoms (1 Kings 14:25, 26), and the hostilities on the part of Tyre and Sidon against Judah can hardly have commenced prior to the dethronement of Athaliah. Cf. 1 Kings 16:31; 2 Kings 8:18; 10:1... From this it is evident that Joel is not one of the later prophets, but very likely one of the earliest of this group." (Boice, 2006, p. 112)

- The mention of a famine, Joel 1:2-20.
- The threat or mentioning of warfare, Joel 2:1-3 & 3:4.
- The language of the prophet himself.

Does redemptive history reflect a time slot in which Joel would fit as a prophecy? And indeed it does. Consider, as to the famine referenced in Joel; in and around 852 B.C., during the reign of Jehoram, King of Judah, Canaan was hit with a severe famine, so much so that it is referenced in 2 Kings:

2 Kings 8:1, "Now Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, 'Arise and go with your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the Lord has called for a famine, and it shall even come on the land for seven years.'"

At a time and place where famine, sickness, pestilence and disease were common place, it would take a famine of apocalyptic proportions to be recorded in the Scriptures. Accordingly we conclude that the famine of 852 B.C. was of epic proportions, in fact one that fits the description of Joel!

As to the warfare mentioned in Joel 2:1-3 & 3:4, a famine hit God's people in 852 B.C. The question we then ask is, "Was there a war soon after which would fit the description of a future attack in Joel 2:1-3?"

Those of you who have begun study Joel might be uncomfortable with me referencing Joel 2 as a military attack as opposed to a continuation of a description of the Locus plague of Joel 1. Yet it clearly is not a continuation of the description of the pestilence of Joel 1, for Joel 2 speaks of a future attack, not one of the past.

As such we conclude, as is typical when a metaphor is being used, that Joel 2 is referencing a future military attack using the plague-language of chapter 1. So was there a war in the regency of Jehoram which would fit the description of Joel 2? Indeed there was.

2 Kings 8:12, "And Hazael [the Aramean] said [to Elisha], 'Why does my lord weep?' Then he answered, 'Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up.'"

This is in fact what happened. In short order Hazael would take up arms against Judah, attacking it and carrying many away as slaves.

What about the nations mentioned in Joel 3:4, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia? Up and throughout the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. these nations continued to be a thorn in the side of Judah. After this era, they largely slink into the background as Judah is confronted by the threat of Assyria, Babylon, and then Persia (occasionally we'll still read about Egypt, but that is about all).

As to the language of the prophecy itself, notice that Joel is quoted by quite a few other prophets suggesting that it was written prior to each of them.

- Isaiah 13; Ezekiel 30:2-3 points to Joel 1:15.

- Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35 points to Joel 2:3.
- Nahum 2:1 points to Joel 2:6.
- Psalm 79:10 points to Joel 2:17.
- Isaiah 45:5-6, 18; Ezekiel 36:11 points to Joel 2:27.
- Ezekiel 39:29 points to Joel 2:28.
- Malachi 4:5 points to Joel 2:31.
- Obadiah 17 points to Joel 2:32.
- Obadiah 15 points to Joel 3:4.
- Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3 points to Joel 3:10.
- Isaiah 13:13; Amos 1:2 points to Joel 3:16.
- Ezekiel 36:11 points to Joel 3:17.
- Amos 9:13 points to Joel 3:18.
- Zephaniah 1:14-15 points to Joel 2:2.

In light of all of this, we place the book of Joel in the reign of Jehoram at approximately 845 B.C. Now if you in your study arrive at a different conclusion, which is O.K. The message of the book will still be heard and felt quite deeply. However for the purposes of this study and the learning of this prophetic work,<sup>2</sup> I again am going to assume that Joel was written in 845 B.C. And that brings us to the religious setting.

With the assumed dating of 845 B.C., we note that the era of Joel was a time of serious compromise when it came to the service and worship of God. Recall:

2 Kings 8:16-19, “Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then the king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah became king. He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.”

What a dreadful decision on the part of Jehoshaphat to allow his son, Jehoram, to marry the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah (evidently he thought too highly of his son’s godliness). He did it for political expediency. Yet the result, much like in the case of Solomon, was the corruption of his son.

Recall that under Jehoshaphat’s righteous rule, Judah flourished in many ways. In fact, the many sons of Jehoshaphat were given governorships with which to extend the righteous rule of their dad (2 Chronicles 21:2-3). Since Jehoram was Jehoshaphat’s first born son, he was the heir to his throne. Accordingly, two years prior to his death, Jehoshaphat installed Jehoram as co-regent.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that our understanding of the text of Joel is not dependent upon the dating of the book. Accordingly, most scholars plead ignorance at this point of which I am partial. However, while our understanding of the book is not dependent upon the date of the prophecy, nevertheless the date of the prophecy will aid us when it comes to learning the contents of the book. Accordingly, I have chosen with what I believe to be good cause to date the book of Joel to 845 B.C. Yet this is for didactic purposes.

Amazingly, it didn't take long for Jehoram to exert his power over the land; a power whose spirit was one and the same as the service of Athaliah's parents, Ahab and Jezebel! And Jehoram's first major act as king following the death of his father was the extermination of every existing threat to his throne, his brothers.

2 Chronicles 21:4, "Now when Jehoram had taken over the kingdom of his father and made himself secure, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and some of the rulers of Israel also."

This reflected wickedness on par with the reign and rule of Ahab/Jezebel. Amazing! Jehoshaphat in his life provided for the peace of Judah through an alliance with Israel via the marriage of his son with Ahab's daughter. The result was that Judah plunged into a wickedness which it hadn't seen before.

2 Chronicles 21:5-6, 11, "*Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did (for Ahab's daughter was his wife), and he did evil in the sight of the Lord... Moreover, he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.*"

From this description we understand that during the reign of Jehoram, the worship of God was severely compromised. Baalism was readily adopted as was the religious practices of Canaan. In fact we see elements of this in Joel.

If you will notice Joel 1:5, 11, 13, you will see a call to "drunkards," "farmers," and "priests." There clearly is more to these designations than meets the eye. For example, drinking to excess in the context of worship was a religious crime that more than once drew prophetic ire (Hosea 4:11; 9:2; Amos 1:9). Why the allure toward drunkenness in worship? In Canaanite religion, the loss of control of one's faculties was the vehicle to communion with the divine.

For the farmers of Joel, "shame and wailing" have replaced joy and gladness. Don't miss it. The farming industry of Palestine was vulnerable to Canaanite fertility practices. Their threshing floors and wine vats (Amos 2:24; Hos. 9:1-2) were the prime areas for the exercise of ancient fertility rites. For the crops to fail and the wine to dry up, meant a discontinuation of the worship of the Asherim; the Canaanite fertility goddesses which dotted the countryside at the time.

The mentioning of the Priests wailing on account of the cessation of two offerings; the grain offering and the libation offering, is significant. Both offerings not only were a prime means of support. Speaking of the priests at this time:

Hosea 4:8, "They feed on the sin of My people, and direct their desire toward their iniquity."

But both offerings in the context of Canaanite worship involved physical relations between the worshiper and temple virgins. Such was the religious environment of God's people at the time of the writing of Joel. Jehoram introduced Judah to the religious perversions of Canaan such that the genuine worship of God was compromised, taking the form of the perverse practices of Baal and the

Asherah! : David Allan Hubbard wrote<sup>3</sup> this:

Their cult had become as corrupt as it was crucial. Its activities continued at full pelt, but its focus had been badly blurred. Hence, the locusts, commissioned by an offended Sovereign. Hence, the call to return, uttered by an aggrieved prophet. Hence, the cries of penitence... If this reconstruction of Joel's setting is reasonably accurate, the purpose of his book becomes plain. He saw in the locust-plague God's means of correcting, of purifying, the cult and, beyond that, of preparing the way for the full blessing of Yahweh on the people through the gift of his spirit, the defeat of his enemies, and the permanent prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem.

## The Day of the Lord

One of the main features of the book of Joel is "the day of the Lord" it permeates all parts of Joel's message, making this prophecy the most sustained treatment in the Old Testament on the "Day of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> For example:

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

Joel 2:1-2a, "Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness..."

Joel 2:11b, "The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?"

It goes on and on like this throughout the book. Truly these passages speak of a day in the future in which the inhabitants of the world would be filled with terror on account of the revelation of the glory of God's awesome character. And yet it is not just Joel. The Bible literally is full of allusions and references to this day. In fact the phrase is employed twenty-two times by eight different Old Testament authors and three New Testament writers.<sup>5</sup> For example Eliphaz spoke of the day, speaking of the sinner,

Job 15:23b-25, "...He knows that a day of darkness is at hand. Distress and anguish terrify him, they overpower him like a king ready for the attack, because he has stretched out his hand against God, and conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty."

Isaiah 13:6-9, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. And they will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will

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<sup>3</sup> *Joel and Amos*, Tyndale, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14.

<sup>5</sup> Is. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 [2x], 20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14 [2x]; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; 1 Thes. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Pet. 3:10; and Revelation.

exterminate its sinners from it.” (cf. also Isaiah 2:12; 22:5; 34:8)

Jeremiah 46:10, “For that day belongs to the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, so as to avenge Himself on His foes; and the sword will devour and be satiated and drink its fill of their blood; for there will be a slaughter for the Lord God of hosts, in the land of the north by the river Euphrates.”

Zephaniah 1:14-18, “Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the Lord! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry, against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men, so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord’s wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.”

Ezekiel 30:1-3, “The word of the Lord came again to me saying, ‘Son of man, prophesy and say, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Wail, “Alas for the day!” For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time *of doom* for the nations.’””

Obadiah 15, “For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.”

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” (cf. also 1 Corinthians 5:5)

What does this expression mean? It does NOT have reference to a chronological time period, BUT to a general period of wrath and judgment uniquely belonging to the Lord. It references that time when God vindicates His name by unveiling His character and so terrifying His enemies. Truly, on this earth Satan has had his day. The non-believer has had his day. Evil and cruel men and women have had their day.

Yet the day is coming when God will have HIS day, and all who have rebelled against Him will be judged! It is at this time that the promise of Genesis 2:17 will be met out in its entirety!

Now when we consider the prophecy of Joel and His statements concerning “the Day of the Lord” we note two things. First the Day of the Lord referenced a TEMPORAL TRIAL/STRUGGLE in which there was much suffering. For example in Joel, clearly there had been a famine which was caused by a locust invasion, a famine which from 2 Kings 8 is believed to have lasted seven years! There would be an invasion of the land in short order under Jehoram (2 Kings 8:12). There had been constant struggle and strife on account of Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, and Egypt (Joel 3:4).



This is consistent with other descriptions of the Day of the Lord throughout Scripture in which it is associated with:

- Seismic disturbances (e.g., Joel 2:1-11; 2:31; 3:16).
- Violent weather (Ezekiel 13:5ff.).
- Clouds and thick darkness (e.g., Ezekiel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:7ff.).
- Cosmic upheaval (Zephaniah 2:3, 30).
- Wars, rumors of war, hardship, trial, and oppression.

So the Day of the Lord can be associated with temporal trial and struggle. However, the Day of the Lord ultimately references the CLIMATIC DAY OF JUDGMENT surrounding the Christ-event which, unbeknownst to Joel, involved two separate and distinct comings. Hence in the context of “the Day of the Lord” Joel references both:

- Pentecost, Joel 2:28-32.
- The Last Judgment after which time God’s people never again would be a reproach (Joel 2:18-19, 25-27; 3:18-21).

At this point it is appropriate to discuss the prophetic tool we call telescoping. In a telescope there are two lenses, right? Both individually are important and powerful, but by themselves they are worthless in seeing distant things. Ah, but when we attempt to see through both of the lenses at once, and then we truly see.

So it is in the prophetic corpus. God will announce a judgment with a dual fulfillment. In the case of Joel, there would be trial and tribulation that would come upon God’s people in short order in the form of warfare (this is detailed in Joel 2 in which again “the plague” is viewed as a future reality). Yet there clearly is reference to an epochal conflict and trial at the end of days in which God’s people once again would suffer and yet be finally and fully delivered! To take the one without the other is to see with clouded vision. We must look through the first event at the second event. Truly both events must be seen for us to understand the significance of the prediction- the significance of the current struggle!! Now we are going to return again to this theme in short order for it has grave implications for us as we live in this state of sin and misery!

From all of this hopefully you have a fair understanding of what is meant in Joel by “the day of the Lord.” Yet we are not yet finished, for as dark and bleak as may be the “day of the Lord” in Joel, nevertheless on account of Christ’s salvific work, the “Day of the Lord” is also understood to be a day of vindication for God’s people! For example in Philippians 1:6, 10, under the nomenclature of the “day of Christ,” it speaks of the time when at the end of the age God’s people stand before the Lord and receive the reward that has been promised to them!

Thus as dark and bleak as may be “the day of the Lord” in Scripture, nevertheless from the perspective of the Christian and God’s Kingdom, it is a great and glorious day! Notice in it:

- Believers will have the fullness of salvation conferred upon them. Speaking of a future day of

the Lord, Joel wrote:

Joel 2:30-32, “And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered [this references the once and for all deliverance that believers in Christ will enjoy on that day], for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the Lord has said, ‘Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.’”

From the perspective of the wicked and rebellious, I can’t think of a more horrifying time than the Day of the Lord. But from the perspective of the child of God, don’t miss it: it is a day of deliverance and so joy! Carrying on with the description of that day, Joel wrote this:

Joel 3:13-17, “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. And the Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble. // But the Lord is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel. Then [in and on that day] you will know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, and strangers will pass through it no more.”

This is amazing! It is true that no eye has seen nor ear has heard what horrors the Lord has in store for those who hate God. But the converse is also true. No eye has seen nor ear has heard the glories that the Lord has in store for those who love God. **AND IT IS THE DAY OF THE LORD THAT WILL REVEAL IT!**

- Our lives will be “revealed with Christ in glory,” Colossians 3:4. Speaking of that day, Paul wrote this:

Colossians 3:4, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Don’t miss it. The salvation we hold dear is invisible to the non-Christian. That is why our world mocks God and the Christian. But according to Colossians 3, the salvation which you and I hold as our most glorious possession someday will be visible; no longer will we be a laughing stock and so the brunt of jokes amongst the worldling. Truly the day of the Lord is a day of vindication! Believers will live as described in John where Christ told His disciples this:

John 16:22, “...but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.”

We see this reflected throughout Joel as he speaks about a day where God’s people.

- Know the forgiveness of God, Joel 2:13.
- Are blessed to the utmost, Joel 2:14.
- Receive pity from the Lord, Joel 2:18.
- Will be satisfied forever, Joel 2:19a.
- Never again suffer reproach from the nations, Joel 2:19b.
- Rejoice and are glad forever, Joel 2:21, 23.
- Live in plenty and know no want, Joel. 2:26.
- Will live in a land that yields it produce quickly and generously, Joel 3:18.
- In light of this, it is natural for the child of God to long for this day...

After describing the “day of the Lord” Peter asks and answers the question of what sort of people we ought to be in light of this awesome day, we ought to be ones who are:

2 Peter 3:10, 12, “...looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”

For the believer, this is our day of vindication. It is a day of consummation when the salvation we have in Christ will be enjoyed in its fullness! Yet it also is a brutal day, and we know it. When John was charged to take up the scroll of prophesy which detailed the specifics of the day of the Lord, he was given a warning which came true

Revelation 10:9-10, “And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, ‘Take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.’ And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.”

When you and I think of the Day of the Lord as referenced in Joel, we must not think of gloom and darkness, but glory, honor, co-reigning, seeing our Lord and Savior, the vindication of His name, and so much more. Accordingly, we do not lament this day nor are we frightened by it. But then, when we consider the end of the non-Christian and the reality that on that day of victory, they will suffer under the full, unmitigated wrath of an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God, today there naturally is going to be bitterness in our belly. And so with John (Revelation 22:17) we usher forth the word of hope, proclaiming it that all might come to the knowledge of the truth!

Yet until then God in His grace grants the people of this earth foretastes and so foreshadows of this day. According to the telescoping nature of proclaiming of these “days of the Lord,” we cannot interpret a bitter providence correctly without seeing it in relation to its ultimate reference, the final judgment. Consider this:

Luke 13:1-5, “Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans [Galilean Jews!!!], whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. [IOW, some of the Jews present reported to Christ about this horrible tragedy when God allowed Pilate to kill these Jewish worshippers when they were being the most devout. The

implied question, “If God is love, why the hardship and difficulty of this present life? Notice Christ’s response...] And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered this *fate*? [This would have been the generic answer give by most Jews, “They suffered because of their sin!”] I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’”

Do you understand the profound significance of Christ’s teaching in this passage? When bad things happen to a people; when mini-days of the Lord are experienced in the form of tragedy and bitter providences, we ought not to question God’s love nor assign guilt. Rather we must see through the tragedy to THE Day of the Lord that has yet to come upon the earth. In the words of Christ:

Matthew 16:3b, “Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot *discern* the signs of the times?”

James Boice wrote this:

This brings us to the bottom line, which is the point of Joel’s prophecy. Both the delays in God’s judgment (the periods of grace) and the previews of judgment in such catastrophic events as locust plagues and earthquakes are for our good, that we might repent. (Boice, 2006, pp. Vol 1, 105)

Wrath is coming. And it will be far more devastating than Katrina or the earth quake in Haiti. For in these natural disasters, only the flesh was touched. In the Day of the Lord, God will “destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28)! As we live in and through these foretastes of the day of the Lord, let us:

- Be sober- for unless there is repentance, all someday will likewise perish!
- Be vigilant to engage the culture in which we live.
- In and through all things rejoice- for our salvation “draweth nigh!”

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 5, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.