

## THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Session 02: God's Use of Natural Disasters in the Day of the Lord (Joel Chapter 1)

---

### GOD'S USE OF NATURAL DISASTERS IN THE DAY OF THE LORD (JOEL CHAPTER 1)

The book of Joel can be divided into three broad sections: Locust plague (1:1-19), Babylonian military invasions (2:1-27) and End-Time military invasion (2:28-3:21); all of which are centered around the nation of Israel.

#### I. AN INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF JOEL 1:1-2:17

In this session we're going to look at Joel chapter 1. It's important to understand the broader context to understand the chapter. The "big picture" is essential. Joel 1:1-2:17 should be read and understood as one unified unit. It had a historical fulfillment but will have a greater expression of fulfillment at the end of the age.

|         |                                      |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 1:1-12  | <b>Judgment:</b> Natural Disaster    |
| 1:13-14 | <b>Response:</b> Solemn Assemblies   |
| 1:15-18 | <b>Judgment:</b> Natural Disaster    |
| 1:19-20 | <b>Response:</b> Joel's Intercession |
| 2:1-11  | <b>Judgment:</b> Military Invasions  |
| 2:12-17 | <b>Response:</b> Solemn Assemblies   |

Joel prophesied in three different sections about three different expressions of God's judgment escalating from locust invasion to military conflict. After each section of describing the judgment in vivid detail Joel instructs the leadership of the nation and the general population in how they are to respond.

In Joel 2:18-3:21 the focus changes from the locust plague and Babylonian military invasion of history to the end of the age war over the city of Jerusalem that will involve all nations.

#### II. THE CRISIS OF JOEL'S DAY - 'NATURAL' DISASTER

- A. Joel ministered in between two crisis: locust invasion in the past (1:3-20) and military invasion in the future (2:1-9; 3:1-16); both of which God took full responsibility for declaring them to be acts of judgment (Joel 1:15).
- B. The impact of the locust invasion was drought, fire, famine and economic disaster. This was no trivial event. We in the 21st century read about these "locusts" almost entirely detached from the fear that would have gripped the nation in Joel's day. This was a crisis of epic proportions.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Session 02: God's Use of Natural Disasters in the Day of the Lord (Joel Chapter 1)

---

- C. Look at the different commands in Joel 1 in light of the crisis:
1. Hear - v. 2
  2. Give ear - v. 2
  3. Tell your children - v. 3
  4. Awake, weep and wail - v. 5
  5. Lament - v. 8
  6. Be ashamed - v. 11
  7. Lament, wail, pass the night in sackcloth - v. 13
  8. Consecrate, call and gather to cry out - v. 14

### III. GOD'S USE OF LOCUST PLAGUES & MILITARY INVASIONS IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

In Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 the Lord spoke through Moses about what is called the "quarrel of the covenant" or the "vengeance of the covenant" (Deut. 26:25-26). The quarrel or vengeance of the covenant refers to the divine controversy that God has with Israel concerning their covenantal disobedience to God. These chapters are often said to explain the "Blessings and the curses of the covenant;" blessings for obedience and curses for infidelity.

**38 You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes.....41 You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity. 42 The locust shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground..... 45 "All these curses [locust plague and military invasion] shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.....48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away.....52 "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you. 53 And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you. ....in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. ....in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns. 58 "If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, 59 then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions... (Deuteronomy 28:38-59)**

## THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Session 02: God's Use of Natural Disasters in the Day of the Lord (Joel Chapter 1)

---

The progression from locust invasion to military conflict was clearly established before Israel even entered the land to inherit it. Joel's generation would have been very familiar with these prophecies and would've understood and embraced the continuity of the vengeance of the covenant throughout the centuries. The theology and prophecy contained in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 has not been superseded, annulled or made obsolete in the New Covenant; they are still relevant and binding. In fact its at the end of the age that we will witness the full execution of these prophecies giving them their greatest expression and fulfillment.

### IV. THE THEOLOGY OF NATURAL DISASTERS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

- A. Paul said that "creation groans" because of the divine curse of judgment pronounced as a result of Adam's rebellion in the Garden.

***Creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now ... (Rom. 8:21-22)***

- B. Natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts and floods are all the consequence of God's judgment pronounced in the Garden; they all have their source and origin there. While we may be uncomfortable with the idea that an earthquake or a cyclone is an act of divine judgement, its hard to escape the reality that history is a continuum of creation's agonizing groanings as it longs for liberation from the curse. Every crisis the earth produces should cause us to contemplate the magnitude of what happened in the Garden and the seriousness of Adam's sin.

- C. It is an unbiblical concept to divorce God from creation when crisis comes. There are two kinds of natural disasters in Scripture:

1. The groanings of creation that are directly orchestrated by God as an explicit act of judgment - the flood of Noah, the drought of Elijah, the locusts of Joel, etc. These are the events that have a clearly communicated origin in God's heart as an act of judgment. The vast majority of these in Scripture were executed upon national Israel.
2. The groanings of creation that are not *explained by the Scripture or the prophets* as directly orchestrated by God as an explicit act of judgment. For example, in the book of Acts a famine is prophesied. The famine is not explained as an act of judgment. It is simply predicted.

- D. Whether a natural disaster is declared in Scripture or by authentic prophets the response is to be the same. Paul explained this in Acts 17 when he said:

**26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him. (Acts 17:26-27)**

## THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

Session 02: God's Use of Natural Disasters in the Day of the Lord (Joel Chapter 1)

---

### V. GOD'S USE OF NATURAL DISASTERS & MILITARY CONFLICTS AT THE END OF THE AGE

A. The book of Joel is so powerfully relevant to us in this hour because as God used natural disasters and military conflicts in Joel's day, so also will He also use natural disasters and military conflicts at the end of the age to bring about His purposes in the nations.

B. Joel explains God as the primary problem - not locusts, Babylonians or the Antichrist. God is employing different agents temporarily to accomplish His objectives in the earth.

C. Such severity will be required because of the commitment level of the nations to their rebellion against God:

***The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws ... Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. (Isa. 24:5-6)***

D. The judgment events in the book of Revelation dramatically impact the created order:

1. The 7 Seals (Revelation chapter 6) revolve around military conflict and impact the social atmosphere of the nations taking the lives of 1/4 of the earth's population (6:7-8). Jesus the Lamb of God is the one responsible for decreeing the commencement and conclusion of this great conflict (6:1-2).

2. The 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls (Revelation chapters 8-9 and 16) revolve around natural disasters affecting the air, water, vegetation and topography of the nations. As with the 7 Seals, God takes responsibility for these events declaring them to be acts of judgment.

E. Jesus taught that the natural created order would convulse before His return like a woman in labor (Matthew 24:4-8). The two primary things he described were natural disturbances (like earthquakes and famines) and military conflicts (wars and rumors of wars). These are called "the beginning of sorrows" or "birth pains." These are but the beginning stages of what will culminate in the greatest crisis the earth has ever known.

F. Jesus' description of the end-times in Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13 and the book of Revelation all draw from Isaiah chapter 24 where God declares that the coming eschatological natural disasters are designed and administered by Him as acts of judgment. The description is horrific resulting in the "distortion of the face of the earth," the "violent breaking of the earth," the "burning of its inhabitants" to the point where "few men are left."

G. Whether we're comfortable with the idea of God using natural disasters as acts of judgment or not He has and He will. And it's essential that we "stand in the counsel of the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:18) so that we can stand in that hour unfounded in the counsel of

## **THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL**

*Session 02: God's Use of Natural Disasters in the Day of the Lord (Joel Chapter 1)*

---

men. His judgments are “righteous and true” and for the sake of “love” and “mercy.” They are not cruel or unnecessarily extreme.

### **VI. THE 3-FOLD RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS:**

- A. Contend for discernment in our communities and families (Joel 1:2-3)
  - 1. Hear - v. 2a
  - 2. Discern - v. 2b
  - 3. Tell - v. 3
- B. Gather together in corporate prayer and fasting (Joel 1:13-14)
  - 1. Put on sackcloth and lament and wail passing the night in prayer - v. 13
  - 2. Consecrate a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather leaders and cry out to the Lord - v. 14
- C. Engage in intercession individually (Joel 1:19)