

Books of The Bible

A Survey of The Prophecy of Joel

Introduction

In studying the prophets it is important to understand where they came in the history of Judah. The writer of 2 Chronicles ends with an encouraging future, but not before the Babylonish captivity had taken place. There is recorded the rebellion of Zedekiah against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. 36:13) and the moral depravity of the people in spite of the pleadings of God. It is recorded, “The chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem”, and it is added, “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was no remedy*” (2 Chron. 36:14-16).

The prophets were the messengers of the Lord and the books which bear their names and Lamentations were divided into three groups:

- a) Those which had to do with the nation before the captivity:
 - i) Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah.
- b) That which had to do with the city and land during the captivity:
 - i) Lamentations
- c) Those which had to do with the nation just prior to and after the release from the captivity:
 - i) Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The book of Joel in a very distinct way reminds me of a summer’s evening where, in the distant sky, there are dark clouds approaching and in the distance is the rumbling of the thunder of an approaching storm. Judah had experienced some wonderful days during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah but while there had been an outward restoration, it was not a deep heart return to the Lord. Just as the rain being lashed by the storm approaching, so God had sent major judgments on His people. They had experienced the devastation by the various insects and added to that was a drought (ch. 1:17-20) which caused all the grass to wither and fail. There had been a fire (ch. 1:19-20); the river had dried up and due to all these calamities, there was no vintage, no harvest and no fruit (ch. 15, 11, 12). Bad as this was, if they did not repent there was worse to come, the Day of the Lord when the approaching army would come and devastate everything taking them captive. It was an “either” or “or” situation. Either repent and turn to the Lord while He was graciously and patiently waiting or be ready to receive the full brunt of His judgment.

When Joel wrote God was going to use the enemy of Israel (Assyria) as His rod of discipline (Isa. 10:5, 24; 30:31), it had not yet reached its full infliction of destruction on Israel. It seems that God was using the nations of the Philistines, Edomites, Phoenicians and Egyptians as a warning before the full judgment would fall.

- a) God would use the Babylonians to chastise His people in part because the nation did not keep its “Sabbaths”. Every seventh year the land was to lie fallow and for four hundred and ninety years that had not been done so God determined to give the land its rest by sending the nation into captivity for seventy years (2 Chron. 36:21). Because they refused to listen to God’s gracious warnings, He brought the Chaldees against them (2 Chron. 36:17). When Joel prophesied God was still offering grace so the full destruction had not yet come. God was seeking to make them aware of His judgments by famine (ch. 1:4, 12), drought (ch. 1:18, 20) and fire (ch. 2:3). These were the condemning signifiers of that which would come if they did not repent.
- b) Twice it is said, “Blow the trumpet” (ch. 2:1, 15). This was a sign of impending judgment (Jer. 6:1) and a warning (Ezek. 33:3) as an alarm when going against an enemy (Num. 10:9). In this case it is the Lord as an enemy coming against Israel through the Babylonians. The strong nation (Babylonians) were already in the land (ch. 1:6) causing devastation (ch. 1:4-7) The day of the LORD is at hand (ch. 1:15); the day of the Lord cometh (ch. 2:1). What is the “Day of the Lord?”

Books of The Bible

A Survey of The Prophecy of Joel

The Day of the Lord

To appreciate the solemnity of Joel's prophecy it is important to have a grasp of the Day of the Lord. Since the Day of the Lord has such a prominent place in Israelite history and in future prophecy, a separate article is being written on it. At the minute, suffice to say that the "Day of the Lord" is the time when the judgment of the Lord is double pronged; the full unabated execution of divine righteous judgment on arrogant sinful defiant man, and God acting on behalf of His people showing that their God is the true God and all others are worthless useless pieces of earthly matter.

The Man

From the references in ch. 1:13 and 2:17 it would appear that Joel was not a priest. His name means, "Jehovah is God".

When did Joel prophesy?

There are two extremes suggested for Joel's prophesying, one early on in the reign of Josiah before the captivity and the other suggests the book was written late in time after the Babylonish captivity. It is not really a matter of importance else God would have indicated when it was, but rather like Obadiah, God wants his people of all ages to focus on the message which is, a dreadful day of divine fury is going to come on this world. Judgment will ultimately be vented on God's people and the nations which reject God. It is a frightening book emphasizing on perhaps more than any other, the horribleness of the Day of the Lord. That is the day when God, through Christ, exercises His prerogative to righteously deal with humanity either in judgment, because of their sins, or in grace because of their repentance.

The seriousness of Judah's sin

The judgment of God was not to show that He was bigger than puny man. The glory of His supremacy had been mocked at by idolatry. They refused to listen to His warnings by His prophets and the catastrophes of the insects. His great name had been treated as nothing. In short, He was viewed as an impotent insignificant God who was all talk and no action. Now God is going to intervene and bring glory to His great Name.

- a) The judgments sent by God are not just to awaken man's conscience but are to bring them to repentance for the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11).
- b) In those ancient days when enemy forces met, each wanted victory for it indicated the ability of their god over the opposing sides god. To the Babylonians, if they won they would claim their god was greater than Jehovah so the glory of God was at stake. It was a tension point. If God let the Babylonians win they would attribute greatness to their god. God could not let Judah tolerate the idolatry of His people in putting a piece of wood etc. as being equal with the Almighty. The resolving of the matter was clear, let the Babylonians win to chastise Judah but later let the Babylonians be beaten so that their foolishness in their god would be brought low.

Key Verses: ch. 2:12-14

Key Words: The Day of the LORD (5)

Key Concepts:

The people of God had gotten so far from Him that they failed to see the judgements as judgments, much like our own day. Joel had to remind them that their sins had brought the judgment of God and repentance was vital.

Books of The Bible

A Survey of The Prophecy of Joel

Aspects of God:

When there is true repentance there will be blessing from God. He is not taken in by outward tears but by a broken spirit and contrite heart.

Suggested Structure:

- 1) Ch. 1:1-2:17 - Historical
- 2) Ch. 2:18-3:21 - Prophetical
- 3) Ch. 1:1-2:11 - The Plagues of palmerworm, locusts, cankerworm and caterpillar.
- 4) Ch. 2:12-17 - The Pleas of God
- 5) Ch. 2:18-3:21 - The Promises and Purposes of God

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia