

**Text:** Joel 1:1-20

**Title:** The Locusts!

**Truth:** God chastises for disobedience and calls for repentance.

**Date/Location:** Sunday July 19, 2020 at FBC

The purpose of this sermon is informational. III.E. could be evangelistic.

## Introduction

We begin a study of the prophecy of Joel, one of the so-called minor prophets due to its diminutive length of only three chapters.

### I. Author and Date, 1:1

- A. Almost nothing is known about Joel the son of Pethuel. He shows much interest in agricultural things. But he is also interested in the coming Day of the Lord, which is a major focus of his prophecy.
- B. The date of his writing is thought by Bible scholars to be fairly early, perhaps around 800 B.C. and the reign of Joash (835–796 B.C.) or perhaps his son. This puts him before the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. at the hands of the Assyrians. We must remember that this date is tentative, but I will proceed as if it is solid.

#### About this period of Israel's history

We can find out about this time period by looking in the books of the Kings of Israel. For that, we turn to 2 Kings 11-12. Joash (Jehoash) was hidden away by his aunt Jehosheba from his grandmother Athaliah because she was going about killing all of the heirs of her son Ahaziah. She reigned from 841 to 835 B.C., so about six years. Her reign was obviously one of treachery and wickedness—we know because she was not authorized to take the throne, and because of the way she took it.

After Athaliah was deposed, Joash reigned 40 years. At the beginning, under the tutelage of Jehoiada the High Priest, wickedness like Baal worship was put away from the land. He did well as long as his tutor was with him (12:2) However, high places remained. The house of the Lord was repaired after years of delay.

He payed tribute to Hazael of Syria. His servants killed him when he was about 47 years old. Because of this, we know there was an undercurrent of evil going on in the nation.

Joash's son was Amaziah, and he reigned 29 years and did fairly well. Still, the high places were not taken away and sacrifices and incense were offered there. This shows that even though parts of the nation were doing well, many people were steeped in idolatry.

## II. Chastisement by God: Locust Plague, 1:2-12

### A. Locust Plagues

An article in the Times of Israel has an interesting section about “a very difficult year on the horizon: ‘Starting in early 2020, the global Desert Locust situation deteriorated, as favorable climatic conditions allowed widespread breeding of the [locust] pest in East Africa, Southwest Asia, and the area around the Red Sea,’ writes the website.

“It appears that the hardest hit countries will include Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan, the last of which will likely be affected later this summer, said Cressman.

“It is always very difficult to find and treat all infestations, and this is the nature and challenge of managing Desert Locust,’ he said in an email to The Times of Israel. The inability to travel due to coronavirus restrictions may prevent proper, timely treatment.”

This year's swarms do not appear aimed at Israel, but there was an infestation in March of 2013. There have been other incursions in recent decades. A large plague hit Israel in 1959.

B. This recent history helps us to understand the intention of the text in verse 4: there was a tremendous, literal infestation of various kinds of locusts that came into the land of Israel. This was a terrible natural disaster—yet it was not merely “natural.” Joel was prophesying that this would be followed by another natural disaster and then by the coming of a great army (chapter 2).

The human army of chapter 2 is not locusts, and the locusts of chapter 1 are not a human army. Both are bad enough. Look at verse 6: here the locusts are likened to a human army. Later, the

human army will be likened to locusts. This “army” of sorts is without number, and it devours so much it is like it has teeth and fangs like a lion.

- C. The situation was so bad that the residents of the land had never seen anything like it. It was “unprecedented,” a term that we hear a lot these days in our own context. From that time on, it would be told from generation to generation as an important part of the oral history of the nation. Four generations are mentioned in verses 2-3. It is critical to pass on the information about God and His mighty acts to the next generation.
- D. There were four types of locusts:
1. Chewing locust
  2. Swarming locust
  3. Crawling locust
  4. Consuming locust

These locusts were either four different species or four different ways in which they behaved. Needless to say, their work was devastating. They consumed everything in sight.

National Geographic states, “A desert locust swarm can be 460 square miles in size and pack between 40 and 80 million locusts into less than half a square mile. Each locust can eat its weight in plants each day, so a swarm of such size would eat **423 million pounds** of plants every day.”<sup>1</sup>

- E. The locust swarm is a perfect picture for the demonic activity that will be unleashed on the earth. Read about it in Revelation 9:1-7. We know these are not literal locusts because of John’s description of them. They are demonic beings of some sort.
- F. The locust plague had devastating results in Israel and they were living through it (5-12). Imagine if everything were stripped bare in your neighborhood—every tree, every bush, farm plant, flower, etc. The awful outcome is described in verses 5-12. Here is a list of some of the things that would happen:
1. The new wine is gone. Drunkards would weep and wail.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/group/locusts>

2. The vine is laid waste.
  3. The fig tree is ruined, stripped and cast aside. Even the tender bark on the fig tree is stripped off by these voracious eaters.
  4. Grain and drink offerings have been cut off, because there are no firstfruits or other offerings to make. The “increase” of the land is zero.
  5. Fields are wasted, grain is ruined, oil fails.
  6. Wheat and barley are perished.
  7. Vine dried up, fig tree withered, pomegranate tree and palm and apple and all other trees are withered.
- G. Any joy that could be had from food is gone from “the sons of men.” That is, the people are in utter grief because of the famine that is resulting from the locusts eating everything. The locusts ate their joy.
- H. Two responses are called for:
1. Lament, v. 8. Lament like a young woman who has just lost her fiancé or husband to a very untimely death.
  2. Be ashamed and wail, v. 11. The wailing is somewhat understandable. Shame *should* be a response of the people to what is happening to them. They should be ashamed of the sins they have committed. Instead of turning away from God, they must turn away from their sins. They had to be forced to confront their sin by the wrath-filled hand of God. They didn’t take care of issues as they came up, but kept going down the path of sin until their iniquity came to a point of fulfillment and God had to judge it.

### **III. Joel Calls the People to Respond, 1:13-14**

- A. The reason that the nation was facing such a plague was that they had been disobedient to God. That *has* to be a true fact because God promised if they obeyed, they would not suffer such catastrophe. Look at
- Deut. 28:15, 38: “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ... 38

You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it.”

Deut. 28:42 "Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land.

There is only one reason for this kind of stuff to happen to Israel during the pre-Christ era: sin.

- B. Disobedience was an ongoing problem in Israel. Consider Amos, written a generation or two after Joel. He writes of locusts and drought in Amos 4:6-12. A proposed locust judgment was held off by God at that time (Amos 7:3).
- C. Joel calls the priests, first of all, to gird themselves and lament. This was a reference to girding with sackcloth (later in the verse), which was the traditional garment of a mourner. It was rough, dark-colored fabric made from animal hair. It indicated repentance. The prophets (like John the Baptist, Matthew 3:4<sup>2</sup>) wore this kind of garment because they were calling for that kind of response in their hearers.

The lamentation would be a natural response given the fact that the grain and drink offerings were absent. There was essentially nothing left. The wailing and lamentation should have been in repentance, not just because of the bad consequences. In other words, a true repentance should have been observed, not a worldly repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

- D. In verse 14 Joel calls them to set up a community gathering to pray to God for forgiveness. The elders and inhabitants of the land were to gather at the temple for a fast and sacred assembly to cry out to God in repentant faith. This is the only appropriate response for any people. For Israel, it was even moreso, because this kind of thing had been prophesied centuries earlier. They were doubly responsible because they had been told. They could not claim ignorance:

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<sup>2</sup> Note, by the way, that John was a prophet. He was considered as such by the people (Matt. 21:26, Mark 11:32, Luke 20:6) and the Lord did as well (Luke 7:28). He was the culmination of the prophets, the last speaker for God before Christ (Matt. 1:13, Luke 16:16).

1 Ki. 8:37-39 "When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; 38 "whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple [**understood: with repentance**] then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men)...(see also 2 Chronicles 6:28-30).

We might like to do such a gathering in the church, but that will do little good in terms of the repentance side—at least it should not do much good in the sense that we ourselves should not be involved in the sins of our nation. The call for repentance needs to come from the top of our nations and states. It is the people of the nation who need to gather—not just the churches. All people need to recognize that the nations of the world have done terrible wrong.

Have we have grown complacent about calling our secular neighbors to repent? They must repent, or they will perish. And dire national consequences may come soon. This is no game, friends. Do you believe this? Do you think it is appropriate to call people to repent today?

#### **IV. Chastisement by God: Drought, 1:15-20**

The plague of locusts was not all. God also poured out upon Israel a drought. This would make it that much more difficult to recover from the decimation of the vegetation.

A. The Day of the Lord is a key prophetic theme that occurs throughout the Scriptures that includes both judgment and blessing.

1. There is a little “in house” debate as to whether the DOL (as it is commonly abbreviated) refers exclusively to the eschatological program of God at the end times, or if it can also refer to one or

more periods of judgment / blessing in the history of the nation Israel.

2. It is clear that “the big DOL” is in the eschaton. The events it describes surround the coming of Christ the second time. It is the subject of the majority of passages that mention the DOL.
  3. Precisely, the “big DOL” is defined this way: the period in the future in which God judges Israel and the rest of the nations, and subsequently restores Israel to its place of blessing through the New Covenant. The nations also will be blessed in their participation in the kingdom. The DOL begins with the Tribulation and continues through the millennial kingdom. The Tribulation is the judgment portion, and the kingdom is the blessing portion.
  4. I do not believe that there is a huge problem with the interpretation there are other “days of the Lord” in history as long as the above is kept in mind. It certainly appears from the reading of Joel that he thought that the DOL was upon them or “at hand.” Chapter 2:1 says that the day of the LORD is coming, and is at hand.
- B. The drought itself is introduced in 1:16 with the phrase “is not the food cut off...?” There are other phrases that indicate a very severe famine:
1. Seed shrivels under the clods. The dirt was so hard and there was no water to nourish seeds. They rotted. This was different than the stripping work of locusts. It was dry.
  2. Food storage places were in shambles because no one was using them. Barns likewise.
  3. Grain had withered.
  4. Animals were groaning under the weight of the famine. They were restless trying to find food. They cried out to God.
  5. The climate was so dry that fire was a problem. Pastures and trees were burned.
  6. The water brooks were dried up. The “wadis” as they are called were not flowing water. It was normal for these to dry up at

some point in the year, but this was so bad that it was remarkable.

C. Along with the cutting off of food, there is the corresponding reduction of happiness of the people. The joy of worshipping at the temple is gone, according to verse 16. The lack of food for the people meant a lack of food for the priests as well, who relied on the food offerings of the people. The situation was extremely difficult.

There was significant devastation and they were very unhappy people.

D. The physical situation mirrored the spiritual one. Dryness, emptiness, shambles, etc. accurately describe your spiritual life when you do not walk with God.

The people were suffering a famine *not only of bread* but also of the Word of God and of the righteousness that the Word brings when it is elevated to the place where it should be (Amos 8:11).

## Conclusion

God sent judgment in order to extract a positive result: repentance.

As long as there was no repentance, the judgment would go on.

It is pointless to go through God's chastening in our lives without learning something! Read Hebrews 12:1-13 to be reminded of the New Testament teaching on enduring the Lord's corrective hand.

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