

B. Future blessings 2:28—3:21

1. God preparing a new people (His spirit upon all flesh)
2. God's victory over the enemies of His people
3. God's presence among His people.

THE EXCLAIMER OF REPENTANCE— GOD'S PROPHET

TEXT: 1:1-3

- 1 The word of Jehovah that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.
- 2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land.
Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers?
- 3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children,
and their children another generation.

QUERIES

- a. Who was Pethuel?
- b. Why ask if such a thing had happened in past generations?
- c. What purpose would be served in telling of this event for generations to come?

PARAPHRASE

This is the message of Jehovah God that came by revelation to Joel who is the son of Pethuel. Listen to this all you aged men and let all the other people of the land give their attention! Are you able to recall in all your days or the days of your ancestors such a disaster as this? You shall teach your children the significance of this and your children shall teach their children and their children shall teach other generations.

SUMMARY

The event Joel is about to interpret is so unprecedented it is to be used to teach many future generations of the judgment of God.

COMMENT

v. 1 THE WORD OF JEHOVAH THAT CAME TO JOEL THE SON OF PETHUEL; Joel unequivocally claims his message to have been revealed from Jehovah. He did not get it from other prophets or from other sources. His interpretation of the locust plague and drought came di-

rectly from God. Of Pethuel we know nothing other than this. Undoubtedly he is mentioned only to distinguish this Joel from another well-known Joel of that day.

v. 2 HEAR THIS . . . HATH THIS BEEN IN YOUR DAYS . . . OR YOUR FATHERS? This locust plague, coupled with the drought, brought such unexampled devastation to the land of Judah that the most ancient man of the nation could not remember any time to equal it for its terribleness. Using historical events for didactic purposes was a principle established by the Law of Moses (cf. Deut. 6:4-9; 32:7, etc.). Joel's record of this calamity has served hundreds of generations of God-fearing people for over 2500 years, as a warning and a source of strength.

v. 3 TELL YOUR CHILDREN . . . THEIR CHILDREN . . . AND . . . ANOTHER GENERATION; This same principle, using historical events for teaching the nature of God, is just as valid today as it was then, inasmuch as we have divine revelation by which we may apply and interpret these events. We shall deal with this more specifically later.

THE EXTENT OF THE PLEA FOR REPENTANCE; VIVID, ARRESTING

TEXT: 1:4-12

- 4 That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.
- 5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and wail, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.
- 6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw-teeth of a lioness.
- 7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig-tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.
- 8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.
- 9 The meal-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of Jehovah; the priests, Jehovah's ministers, mourn.
- 10 The field is laid waste, the land mourneth; for the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.
- 11 Be confounded, O ye husbandmen, wail, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field is perished.

12 The vine is withered, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate-tree, the palm-tree also, and the apple-tree, even all the trees of the field are withered: for joy is withered away from the sons of men.

QUERIES

- a. What are the different insects described by Joel?
- b. Who is the "nation" come upon the land of Judah?
- c. What would the significance of the cutting off of meat and drink offering be for the people?

PARAPHRASE

What the first plague of locusts leaves after it has eaten all it wishes, others will come swarming the land and eat; what they leave others will come hopping all over the earth eating as much as they will and if they leave any, still others will come to destroy all that is left. You had better sober up from your drunken stupor you notorious drunkards and weep and howl because the fresh sweet juice of the grape has completely perished. A mighty, numberless horde of hostile enemies has invaded my land. Their teeth are as fierce and strong as lion's teeth. They have ruined my vines and stripped the bark off my fig trees and left their trunks and branches bare and white. Mourn as a maiden mourns whose fiance has died. So complete is the devastation there is not enough grain or wine left to make an offering in the Temple. The priests who minister before the Lord mourn; the farm land wastes away and seems to mourn because it bears no produce at all; neither grain nor grape nor olive. Turn pale with disappointment you people and howl you vine dressers because the whole harvest is gone. Every growing plant or tree; whether it be grape vine, fig, pomegranate, palm or apple it has withered; indeed, all of man's gladness has withered and been consumed. There is no joy at all among the people.

SUMMARY

Through successive plagues of swarming locusts the grain and fruit, in fact all vegetation, is being utterly consumed. Even the land is represented as mourning over the desolation.

COMMENT

v. 4 THAT WHICH THE PALMER-WORM HATH LEFT . . . ; There are some who think Joel has given us here four different stages in the development of the one species of locust. Others think we have here four different species of locusts. Palmer-worm means "gnawer-shearer;" locust may be defined "the multitudinous one;" canker-worm means "licker, lapper," or "hopper;" caterpillar means "devourer, stripper." Dr. Laetsch, in *The Minor Prophets, Bible Commentary*, pub. Concordia, comments, "*Locust*, would emphasize the immense masses, the other three terms, their insatiable voracity." We prefer to explain Joel's use of these four terms as simply a designation of successive stages of the plague of locusts. In other words the locusts came upon the land one increment after another in immediate succession until the land was stripped of all vegetation and then the Lord caused a great drought to come upon the land (cf. 1:17-20). The use of the number four probably symbolizes completeness (cf. Isa. 11:12; Jer. 15:3; Ezek. 1:5-6; Amos 1:3ff). Lange and Keil and Delitzsch agree that the proper name is locust while the other terms are figurative, poetic terms to describe the completeness of the work of these great hordes, one after another.

In the December, 1915, issue of *The National Geographic Magazine*, there is a vivid description of a locust plague covering all of Palestine and Syria, by John D. Whiting. According to this account the swarms of locusts appeared in March, coming from the northeast, going toward the southwest in such thick clouds they obscured the sun from sight. The females, about three inches long, began immediately to lay eggs, sinking a hole about four inches deep into the hard soil and depositing about one hundred eggs in a neat cylindrical arrangement (about an inch long and as large as a lead pencil) all enclosed in a glue-like substance. As many as 75,000 eggs may be concentrated in less than one square yard of soil. Once the female locust has laid the eggs, her life's mission is done. She flies away—where to no one can say—and soon dies. Within a few weeks the young locusts are hatched. They resemble large black ants (having no wings) when first hatched. A few days after hatching they start their forward march of about 600 feet per day, clearing the ground of all vegetation before them. They hop forward much like fleas. At the end of May they molt, issuing forth in the pupa state, still unable to fly, standing upright. In this stage they leap only when frightened, using their two long and powerful hind-legs. In the last molt the wings emerge from their

membranous sacs where they have been developing and the locust can now fly. After a few days in the flying stage the color of their bodies deepen into a pronounced red effect. We shall refer again to Mr. Whiting's account as we proceed with our comments.

v. 5 AWAKE, YE DRUNKARDS, AND WEEP; The original language indicates those addressed here were in a drunken sleep so sound as to be snoring. It indicates that drunkenness was widespread and stupefying. The prophet admonishes the wine-bibbers to come to their senses, recognize the warning of God in the devastation and weep and mourn in repentance. The "sweet wine," or, "new wine" was spoken of as being found within the grape still in the cluster (cf. Isa. 65:8) and there was great rejoicing when it was first pressed from the grape for it was considered a special blessing from the Lord. Now it was cut off—there was no new sweet wine to be found anywhere in all the land!

v. 6 FOR A NATION . . . WITHOUT NUMBER . . . TEETH OF A LION; The prophet portrays the locusts as a "nation", a "people", and this figure is used by the writer of Proverbs to picture ants and badgers (cf. Prov. 30:25-26). This is a figure well chosen since locusts give the appearance of being a well organized army of people. Joel's graphic description of their behavior in chapter 2 illustrates why they should be called a "nation." Their teeth, though tiny, are the weapons of this army. In proportion to their very small bodies, their jaws are even stronger than a lion's.

v. 7 HE HATH LAID MY VINE WASTE . . . BARKED MY FIG-TREE . . . CLEAN BARE AND CAST IT AWAY; Whiting writes: "Once entering a vineyard the sprawling vines would in the shortest time be nothing but bare bark . . . When the daintier morsels were gone, the bark was eaten off the young topmost branches, which, after exposed to the sun bleached snow-white. Then, seemingly out of malice, they would gnaw off small limbs, perhaps to get at the pith within." God, the Giver and Owner of the vineyards and orchards, speaks through the prophet, calling them His vines and His fig trees.

v. 8-9 LAMENT LIKE A VIRGIN . . . THE MEAL-OFFERING . . . CUT OFF FROM THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH . . . PRIESTS . . . MOURN; Now the prophet calls upon the whole nation to mourn. This is a mourning not only because of the loss of wine and grain but because the loss of these material things have disrupted divine worship. There is not even enough grain or wine to be found to make up an acceptable

offering in the Temple. The prophet calls for a "godly sorrow that worketh repentance" (cf. II Cor. 7:9-10)! Their sorrow is to be one of total immersion—like the sorrow of a newly married maiden who has lost her husband by death in the first few days of marriage. God's bride, the covenant people, has been cut off from communion with her Husband. She should lament and weep—her attitude should be one of heartfelt mourning. The cessation of the daily sacrifices and offerings was for all practical purposes a cessation of covenant relation—a sign that God had rejected His people. Even in the last siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., the sacrificial worship was not suspended till it had been brought to the last extremity; and even then it was because there were none to offer the sacrifices and not because there were no more materials to sacrifice.

v. 10-12 THE FIELD IS LAID WASTE . . . BE CONFOUNDED . . . WAIL . . . THE HARVEST OF THE FIELD IS PERISHED . . . EVEN ALL THE TREES OF THE FIELD ARE WITHERED: FOR JOY IS WITHERED AWAY FROM THE SONS OF MEN. Whiting records that in 1915 the locusts he observed in Palestine appeared in their fully developed flying stage about June 10 and began at once to complete the destruction begun in the earlier stages. They attacked the olive trees, whose tough, bitter leaves had not been to the liking of the creepers. Food becoming scarcer, both creeping and flying locusts attacked the olive trees, and between the two they stripped every leaf, berry, and even the tender bark . . . Likewise every variety of tree was attacked with the sole exception of the Persian lilac and the oleander bushes. Of the cacti they ate away layer after layer over the whole surface, giving the leaves the effect of having been jack-planed. Even on the scarce and prized palms they had no pity, gnawing off the tender ends of the swordlike branches, and, diving deep into the heart, they tunneled after the juicy pith. The destruction of the present grain crops in Joel's day would also mean no harvest for next year since there would be no seed with which to sow another crop. The absence of grain and all other green vegetation would also probably mean the death of many animals. The drought which accompanied this locust plague would certainly decimate animal life and many people probably starved to death also. The whole nation had fallen into the hands of a chastening God. There was plague, drought, famine and as a result the worship of God in the Temple through offerings and sacrifices has been forced to a cessation. There was both physical and spiritual starvation. Truly, joy had withered away from the sons of men!

QUIZ

1. How do we know that Joel's interpretation of what this locust plague should mean to the people is not his own?
2. How did Joel intend the people use this unprecedented historical event for teaching purposes?
3. Why does Joel describe the locusts in four different terms?
4. Why admonish the drunkards to "awake"?
5. How ferocious are the locusts in their attack upon the vegetation?
6. To what extent are the people to mourn and why?
7. How extensive is the destruction of the locust?

THE EXTENT . . . VIVID, ARRESTING (cont'd)

TEXT: 1:13-20

- 13 Gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament, ye priests; wail, ye ministers of the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meal-offering and the drink-offering are withholden from the house of your God.
- 14 Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the old men and all the inhabitants of the land unto the house of Jehovah your God, and cry unto Jehovah.
- 15 Alas for the day! for the day of Jehovah is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty shall it come.
- 16 Is not the food cut off before our eyes, yet, joy and gladness from the house of our God?
- 17 The seeds rot under their clods; the gardens are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the grain is withered.
- 18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.
- 19 O Jehovah, to thee do I cry; for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.
- 20 Yea, the beasts of the field pant unto thee; for the water brooks are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

QUERIES

- a. What is "sackcloth" and why put it on to mourn?
- b. Why "sanctify a fast?"
- c. What is the day of Jehovah and how was it "at hand?"

PARAPHRASE

You priests, servants at God's altar, put on mourning clothing, even that which is made from hair, and mourn. And not only in the daytime are you to mourn but even while you are performing the services in the temple at night you are to lie before the altar weeping and lamenting. Be sorrowful and pray because there is no grain or wine for this has caused the offerings in the house of God to cease. Declare a period of fasting and call a solemn meeting of the elders and all the people of the land. Call everyone to the temple of God and there let the priests pray with supplications, crying unto the Lord, for this is a woeful day! The day of the Lord is upon us and it is destruction from the Almighty! The cutting off of all food and the cessation of joyful offerings in the house of God proves to our very eyes that the day of the Lord is destruction upon us for we have been unfaithful. Indeed, the drought is so terrible the seed just lately sown rots in the plowed earth for lack of moisture; the granaries are empty and are rotting away; the barns are falling to pieces from disuse. Even the dumb animals groan because of their suffering. The cattle and sheep are bewildered with fear and hunger because they have no pasture. To Thee, O Lord, I Joel, cry for help for both man and beast. The burning heat of the drought has consumed the meadows of the wilderness and has even burned up all the trees. The animals, in their panting, are crying for help from Thee, O Lord, because they have no water to drink—the drought has dried up all the brooks and burned up all the pastures.

SUMMARY

The extremity of the people of Judah, in both locust plague and drought, is so severe that even the dumb beasts are groaning and "pant" under the Lord!

COMMENT

v. 13 GIRD YOURSELVES . . . LIE ALL NIGHT IN SACKCLOTH . . . MEAL-OFFERING WITHHOLDEN FROM THE HOUSE OF YOUR GOD; Again Joel takes up that which was so impressive to him in v. 9—the cessation of the offerings due to the complete absence of materials with which to make the offerings. It would not have been so calamitous that the people had suffered the loss of physical necessities, but when they were forced to stop presenting their intercessory offerings it indicated that their access to Jehovah, their covenant God, had been

interrupted. It would be as disastrous as telling a Christian he could no longer pray or sing praises or in any manner worship the Lord. So the priests are instructed to put on the customary clothing for mourning and penitence called "sackcloth" in our translation. It was a coarse material woven from goats' and camel's hair and thus of dark color. Sacks were also made from this coarse material and thus it is called "sackcloth." It was not a full garment but more probably a cloth just large enough to wrap around the loins and tie in the front in a knot. They are told they must make their penitent supplications to the Lord day and night without ceasing. The text indicates they should, in some way, prostrate themselves before the great altar in the temple. They are to pray with loud crying ("wailing—lamenting") unto God.

v. 14 SANCTIFY A FAST . . . CALL ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND . . . AND CRY UNTO JEHOVAH; The prophet now instructs the priests to officially consecrate a specific period of fasting. Fasting is a religious exercise whereby the demands of the flesh are subordinated to a concentration upon the spiritual. A fast was a time dedicated to "afflicting the soul—appetites" (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-29). A solemn assembly is also to be gathered. There was no occasion for festive mood now! The elders were undoubtedly called to testify that no such calamity had ever before happened and that this surely must be from God. All the people are instructed to make supplication to the Lord. This statement presupposes, of course, that they will do so in an attitude of repentance.

v. 15 ALAS FOR THE DAY! FOR THE DAY OF JEHOVAH IS AT HAND, AND AS DESTRUCTION FROM THE ALMIGHTY SHALL IT COME. In prophetic literature, the Day of Jehovah generally denotes *any* great manifestation of God's power in judgment or redemption. Sometimes, as here in Joel, the prophet denoted a great, calamitous judgment as the Day of Jehovah which had the purpose of calling the covenant people to repentance and purity. Sometimes, and more often than most realize, the prophet, as in Malachi 3:1-6, speaks of the ultimate crisis in the history of God's kingdom which is to involve the overthrow of all opposition and the complete triumph of righteousness (cf. Isa. 2:2-5; Joel 2:28—3:21; Amos 9:11ff; Zech. 14, etc.) which refers to the culminating work of Christ the Redeemer in His atoning death, justifying resurrection and His establishment of the church. This was THE DAY OF JEHOVAH when Jehovah brought all men under judgment and at the same time provided for all men redemption. This awaits only the consummation at the Lord's second coming. The absence of

perspective is very conspicuous when the prophets write of The Day of Jehovah. Chronology is largely disregarded and the Day of Jehovah is seen looming up as the immediate background of every great crisis in which the covenant nation may be involved. The great Day of Jehovah when the Messiah shall appear in judgment and redemption (Mal. 3, etc.) is definitely bereft of chronological perspective as far as the prophets are concerned. They did not know what "person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory." And, in fact, God did not tell them exactly when these things were to be fulfilled. There are inspired guidelines, however, (already referred to more than once, especially in our introductory "Interpreting The Prophets), statements of Jesus and the apostles as to the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. One thing is certain in prophetic literature—the Day of Jehovah is surely coming! The steps by which the goal is to be reached are only gradually revealed in the actual march of God's providential works of redemption and judgment. The Day of Jehovah is a day of judgment and redemption—primarily a day of judgment. Not only upon the heathen nations, but, due to the absolute righteousness of God, includes judgment upon all sin. God judges even the children of favor and privilege when they sin (Amos 5:18). His judgment is a purifying, refining instrument in order that a remnant might be saved (cf. Isa. 6:13; Am. 9:9; Zeph. 3:13-20). Gentile nations are used by God as instruments on His Day of Judgment, yet they too shall be judged by Him. And, consequently, even a remnant of the Gentiles will turn to Jehovah as a result of the Day of Jehovah. For further comment on the Day of Jehovah see comments on Obadiah 15 in this volume. What Joel here wants the people of Judah to understand is that the Day of Jehovah is as destruction from the Almighty. The Jews were persuaded, because of their special relation to Jehovah, that the Day of Jehovah was intended to be judgment and destruction upon the Gentiles but victory and conquest and world dominion for the Israelites. They refused to accept the preaching of the prophets that God was holding them responsible for their sins (cf. Zeph. 1:12; Mal. 2:17; Amos 6; Ezek. 8:12).

v. 16 IS NOT THE FOOD CUT OFF . . . JOY AND GLADNESS FROM THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD? Joel, in asking these questions, is actually interpreting for the people the meaning of the calamities that have come upon them. He asks rhetorically, "Can you not see, even from the fact that contact with God has been cut off, that God is visiting us with judgment?" It was no longer possible to offer even the least offering

to God in the temple—there simply was no produce from field or vineyard by which man could commune with His God.

v. 17 THE SEEDS ROT . . . ; THE GARNERS . . . DESOLATE, THE BARNs . . . BROKEN; The grain seed shrivels up and crumbles into dust for lack of rain. The granaries, storehouses where the people stored their grain, stood deserted and unused. The barns, another type of storage place, also used to house animals sometimes, were actually falling apart from disuse. Even the grain that might have been saved and not sown was withering and becoming unusable because of the extreme drought.

v. 18-28 . . . THE BEASTS GROAN . . . ARE PERPLEXED . . . MADE DESOLATE . . . PANT UNTO THEE; FOR THE WATER BROOKS ARE DRIED UP . . . FIRE HATH DEVoured THE PASTURES OF THE WILDERNESS. The cattle and sheep are dumbfounded (perplexed) and bewildered. They are dying of starvation and thirst. Hunger and fear grips them but being dumb animals they can only groan. The prophet personally implores the Lord on behalf of these suffering beasts.

Lange says, "That this latter event (locust plague and drought) should be made the theme of a prophetic discourse, is no way surprising, because Holy Scripture teaches us that all public calamities are divine dispensations designed to awaken men to a sense of their sins, and to bring them to repentance." But as terrible as this plague and drought is and as devastating upon the material means of subsistence as it is, Joel's main concern is that it has caused a cessation of all sacrifices and offerings in the Temple of God. These services and the Temple were visible signs and pledges of God's dwelling in the midst of Israel as His people. When these services ceased it was a sign that God had withdrawn His covenant pledge and presence. In Ezekiel 11:22-25 the glory of the Lord departed from Jerusalem until after the captivity of the Jews. So here, the absence of worship signifies the absence of covenant relation with God. And now, in chapter two, Joel entreats the people and the priests to repent and call upon God for forgiveness and restoration of covenant relationship. Joel, in striking figures, describes the activities by which the people should make their repentance known to God.

First, he reiterates the announcement that Jehovah God is the Executor of this call to repentance. God, using natural agents (secondary causes), is the First Cause behind their extremities. In the first part of chapter two (2:1-11) the prophet creates a literary masterpiece. A vivid, moving picture of words is painted describing God's "army"—the locusts.