

June 13

Joel

Today you read the Book of Joel.

Our study of the Old Testament has brought us now to the period of the writing prophets. Twelve of these are known to us as the Minor Prophets, not because they were less important than the others (though for the most part they were not famous men in themselves) but because the writings they left behind are shorter than those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

There are 12 other individuals by the name of Joel noted in the Old Testament. One was a son of Samuel. Another one of David's mighty men. But we are not given any direct information outside of this little Book about the Joel who wrote the Book.

Before we briefly talk about what you read today, I want to mention that due to the brevity of these 12 Books, they were all combined into one large scroll in the centuries before Christ. In the Septuagint they became known as the "12 Prophet Book." This will help you to at least remember the number of Minor Prophets: there were 12 tribes in Israel, 12 apostles in the church and 12 Minor Prophets in the Old Testament canon. It is difficult to say with certainty when the Book of Joel was written. This is of course because it does not mention specific kings, events or people.

A plague of locusts had just descended upon Judah and wreaked terrible havoc upon the land, creating a famine and setting the scenario for further natural disasters like the fires which may have been caused by an accompanying drought. The locusts have destroyed the crops. That in turn has had disastrous effects upon the livestock whose grazing land has been destroyed and obviously upon the food supply and the total economy. The drought that caused these things produced the conditions for the fires and things have gotten worse and worse. The disaster has even destroyed Judah's ability to worship because the grain and wine for the food and drink offerings is not available and the animals for the other offerings may soon be dead!

Joel point out this devastation as Judgment from God, but more importantly indicates that this is just a foretaste of the Ultimate Judgment to come.

Joel is the prophet who introduces the concept of the Day of the LORD. When you see this phrase, it is a day in the future, and a very specific day. The phrase is picked up by other prophets and New Testament writers to speak of a day in their future - and still in our future - where there will be massive devastation. As a matter of fact, if you want to remember one key phrase that is Joel's greatest contribution - think of "Day of the Lord."

One key indicator of the Day of the Lord is that the Sun Moon and Stars will be darkened. Three times in the book of Joel, he forecasts the darkening of the skies

and their beacons of light in correlation with the Day of the LORD. Is this an ultra-eclipse? A series of bombs that causes the skies worldwide to be filled with smoke? Some other supernatural method? We don't know. But we do know that devastation will follow this.

For those of you who like to study the end times, this "Day of the Lord" with darkening skies is one of the keys to determining the timeline of events in the last days. It is a clearly marked day with references in Joel, Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 as well as references in I Thessalonians. It enables us to put together a timeline of the tribulation. If you are interested in more on this, check out the sermon series on cccomaha.org called "Future Shock". There, One whole message is dedicated to the timeline of events based on this Day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord will be a day of awesome destruction and pain. God will bring a world of hurt against those who have set themselves against him. Our response then and now should be the same. Even though the Day of the Lord may be far in the future, we should turn to God now... this way we will not ever be caught off guard. This is the point of Chapter 2.

"Even now', declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows?" He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing ..."

After what happened in Judah, and before the Day of the LORD and Joel reminds them that the only appropriate response is repentance. Real repentance that goes much deeper than superficial activities, "Rend your hearts and not your garments." That, of course, looks back upon the ancient custom of tearing your clothing and covering yourself with ashes when you wanted to express deep repentance or sorrow. Just remember, Joel is saying, it is the state of your heart that God looks at, not your clothing.

Is there something you need to repent from today? Joel's words would be the same to you. Rend your heart, not your garments because the Day of the LORD is coming and you want to be right with God when it does.

This has been Mark Ashton reminding you that the Day of the LORD comes like a thief in the night. Nobody knows when it might come. Are you ready? Turn to God!