

Joel-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

Today in America, a *locust invasion* is quite remote. We can hardly imagine the desolation and desperation as a result of such (4). But there have been similar '*invasions*' in our history from which we can identify (earthquakes, fires, diseases, economic collapse, 9/11). "*Your best life now*"? Hardly. *Theodicy*: the dilemma of the co-existence of tragedy and evil with a good God. What say you? The most remarkable thing about Joel's prophecy is not that he describes the unprecedented and unmitigated disaster so graphically accurate, but how he deals with it: to the elders (2), to the drunkards (5), the farmers (11), and the priests (9, 13-14, 19-20) – *a call to all to mourn*. Christians need to learn from Joel's approach to suffering – neither glorifying it nor denying it. But who's responsible for it? Isn't that always our question? Joel sees, wants all to see, that it is God always in sovereign control (15) of both calamity and blessing, of both "*the day of the Lord*" (1:1 – 2:17) and the victory to come (2:18 – 3:21). Will Judah repent? (2:12-13) Will we? Seems Jesus addressed this very idea (Luke 13:2-5).

Chapter 2

"*Hang in there; things will get better!*" Joel's message is just the opposite: "*Blow a trumpet!*"... the destruction of locusts was nothing compared to the coming final judgment of God (1-2). There is a day coming, "*the day of the Lord*" (other days, calamities and military invasions only foreshadowed), in which God will intervene in history to judge the world (Is.13:6, 9-10; Ezk.30:3; Amos 5:18-1-20; Zeph.1:14-17). Jesus refers to the same event (Matt.24:29-31) as does the Apostle Peter (2 Pet.3:10). The Good News is this: God is true to His nature and Word; God will rule and reign through His Messiah, our Redeemer Jesus Christ (27). Repentance is the only legitimate response (12-13): "*heartbrokenness*" rather than the glib and feign (Hos.6:1-2 vs. 14:1-2). Repentance is the confession of specific sins specifically; true contrition; and true conversion ("*return*"). And what is the incentive? Grace and mercy... "*Who knows whether He will not turn and relent... and leave a blessing behind...*" (13-14) Christians now know! For His own, God resolved both His holiness and His love by taking the promised judgment upon Himself in Christ. And the "*blessing*"? Joel hints (28-32) what is actuated for and experienced by "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord*" (32): first, the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2); second, the lavishness of the new heavens and new earth (Rev.21:1-8).

Chapter 3

Restoration awaits, as does the final judgment: "*Like waters collecting behind a great dam, God's wrath has been gathering and increasing as it awaits the day when it will be released in fury.*" (Boice; 1 Pet.4:17; Acts 17:30-31). This is how Joel closes his prophecy: a warning of final accountability. Why? Because we have broken God's laws and sinned against Him. The charge against the nations (2-6)? The persecution and prosecution God's people, who are His by creation and redemption. The Judge of all the earth must do right (Gen.18:25; Rom.1:18-20). God's challenge – Battle in the *Valley of Jehoshaphat* (9, 12) – and you see the irony? First, the ungodly do just the opposite of the God of peace (10-12; Is.2:4; Micah 4:3-4). Second, "*mighty men, warriors*" (9, 10)? Really? In the words of a playwright – "*Your Arm's Too Short to Box with God!*" One can almost hear the derisive laughter of God (Ps.2:1-5): men and women marching; justice administered ("*the valley of decision*" or court of justice, 14). One last irony: "*harvest*" (13), normally a time of joy, but there will be no joy when the Lord Jesus comes to tread out God's wrath (Rev.14:14-20). Dare we think that the challenge of God to the nations is for others only and not also for ourselves (Rom.2:4-5)? Ah, yes... but for the Good News (16-18)!

-Reflecting on Joel-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Joel. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Joel before we move forward?

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 15.7