

Joel

Again it will help your understanding if you can read through the whole book of Joel as we begin these studies. This book will take us through Ash Wednesday next week (17th February) and on into Lent.

We may be struggling with the Covid virus but we do not have to worry too much about a plague of locusts! A quote from 'Inter-governmental Authority On Development' says:- "A typical desert locust swarm can contain up to 150 million locusts per square kilometre. Swarms migrate with the wind and can cover 100 to 150 kilometres in a day. An average swarm can destroy as much food crops in a day as is sufficient to feed 2,500 people." For people living in an agrarian economy it can mean starvation! Read Exodus chapter 10, verses 12 – 20.

Chapter 1, Verse 1:- Author, date and background We know nothing about the prophet "Joel, son of Pethuel," aside from what we can glean from the writings that appear in his book. It is not certain exactly when the prophet lived. Because of certain linguistic and theological features of the book, many Old Testament scholars have concluded that Joel prophesied after the people's return from the Babylonian exile. But the placement of Joel between Hosea and Amos bears witness to a traditional view that dates his ministry earlier possibly in 830 B.C. before the prophet Amos. Whichever view one takes regarding the historical occasion for the book, the theological theme is clear. The prophet announced that the crisis of locust was no mere accident, but the hand of God. The invading army of locusts was God's punishment (it is described as "*my great army*" in chapter 2: verse 25). Even more telling, Joel announced that the present historical crisis was a foretaste of a less than desirable future event to come – "*the day of the Lord*" (chapter 1: verse 15). In response, Joel bids the people to repent and throw themselves on God's mercy: "*Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him*" (chapter 2: verse 14). Unlike the prophets Amos, Micah, or Isaiah, Joel did not emphasize repentance as turning away from evil deeds and toward a life of justice. Rather, he emphasized repentance as turning to the Lord in worship: "*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly*" (chapter 2: verse 15). Joel does not focus on justice, name specific sins, or single out specific people or castes of people for their sins. Rather, Joel bids all the people to turn toward God in repentance and worship.

Chapter 1, verses 2 – 3:- The land of Canaan was traditionally very fertile - "*a land flowing with milk and honey*" Exodus chapter 3, verse 8. This plague of locusts was a "one off". Not even once in a lifetime, more like a story which would be told to generations to come.

Verse 4:- Literally - Shearer, swarmer, hopper and devourer description of four different kinds of locust in one great swarm!

Verses 5 – 7:- The "*drunkards*" represent the higher classes of society. The vines and fig trees, symbols of peace and prosperity (see Micah chapter 4, verse 4), were ruined.

Verses 8 – 10:- The loss of the grain harvest and the vines affected the Temple worship. The offering of meal and wine was part of the daily sacrifice in the Temple (see Exodus 29, verses 38 – 42 and Numbers 28, verses 1 – 8.) The nation was called to lament like a young bride bereaved on her wedding day, (verse 8).

Verses 11 – 12:- The farmers and vine dressers are helpless, looking on the ruin of all their labours. "*and gladness falls from the children of men.*"

Verses 13 – 14:- The first call to repentance! Note the contrast in verse 13 between "*..my God!*" and "*...your God.*" The God of the prophet calls for repentance - "*pass the night in sackcloth,*" The God of the priests of the Temple demands "*cereal and drink offering*". Read Micah chapter 6, verses 6 – 8. In this call to repentance the whole people are involved.

Verses 15 – 18:- Destruction of the food supply means no more high festivals with celebrations and feasting! Even the animals are suffering through lack of pasture.

Verses 19 – 20:- This first chapter ends with a personal prayer. The prophet himself cries out to the Lord along with all of nature. Compare with Romans 8, verses 19 – 25. Note that this reading from Romans ends on a positive note. We still "*hope for what we do not see and wait for it with patience*"!