

November 6

Scriptures: Read Joel 1:1 — 2:17

Key Verse: “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand. . .” (Joel 1:15)

Overview

The immediate reason for Joel’s prophecy was the devastation of the land by locusts and drought. It is likely that he wrote his book at the very height of the plague. In this first part of the book, Joel describes the plague and urges people of every class to repent in order to experience the mercy and blessing of God (1:2-2:17). With much emotion and urgency, Joel asks them if they had ever heard of such a terrible locust invasion before. It was something that would be spoken of for the generations to come (1:2-3). The only reasonable explanation for such an out-of-the-ordinary event, causing unsurpassed destruction, was that it was a divine judgment. Joel even calls the locusts “the Lord’s army”. Although the specific reasons for God’s punishment at that time are not stated, it is obvious God desired that they repent and turn back to Him (2:11). This particular calamity is seen as a forerunner of the great and terrible “Day of the Lord” (1:15; 2:1, 11).

The locusts are like large grasshoppers and the four names Joel gives them either refer to different species of locusts or, most probably, to different stages of growth (1:4). The locust swarm was so large that it darkened the sky and devoured every green thing, thus cutting the people of Judah off from bread, wine, and oil (their three most important staples). It also brought an end to the sacred offerings in the temple, for which the priests are especially urged to lament and cry out for God’s merciful intervention (1:9, 13-14). Joel’s description of the locust plague as a strong and invincible military unit may be typical of the Lord’s judgment upon the wicked in the last days (cf. Rev. 9:1-11).

As Joel described their present circumstance, we see that not only were the people suffering punishment but the beasts suffered as well. All of nature has been affected by sin and must bear its guilt. Whereas the beasts and nature could only groan, the people could lift their souls up to God and pray for His mercy; this was the only recourse at such a time. Beyond the ravages of the locusts looms the eschatological (end-times) “Day of the Lord” that no sinner will be able to endure. But there is still hope! As Joel prophesies, the door of God’s mercy is still open to those who sincerely repent with their whole hearts (mind, will, and emotions). True penitence is not an outward act (rending the garment), but an inward sorrow and a rending of the heart (2:13; cf. Ps. 51:17). God takes pleasure in blessing people, not in bringing punishment; for as Joel declares, He is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”.

Their repentance would bring a blessing from God instead of punishment. With Joel’s encouraging words, the people were brought to their knees. Their change of heart was to be announced by the fervent call for an assembly of the people. Once again, the ram’s horn was to be blown, but this time it was a call to a solemn assembly (2:15) and not an alarm (2:1). Their supplication indicates that unless they repent they would not be spared from the locust and that a further and more serious judgment would come upon them — an invasion of a heathen enemy who would rule over them. Joel prays that this would not happen, lest the Name of the Lord God of Israel be reproached by the Gentiles who would think that God could not save His people. Like many other prophets, Joel was concerned that God’s people not profane His holy Name. This is a timeless message that the people of the Lord in every generation need to heed.

Prayer

Mighty God, soften our hearts, that we may be sensitive to know and do Your will always.