

BOOK OF JOEL

This is a short book comprising of only 3 chapters but it is a powerful and important book that contains wonderful truths about God. Hence, a verse by verse approach will be adopted for this book.

1. Little is known about the author of this book, Prophet Joel, except the name of his father.
2. The era in which Joel lived and the time period when these events occurred is also unclear. Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain the specific national problems happening at that time through the writings of Prophet Joel. Hence, this book is not restricted by a particular historical time frame and was written in a general way, giving us principles that are still applicable to us today.
3. Like other prophetic books, 99% of this book of Joel comprises of poetry.

Chapter 1

1. Joel 1:1-12. The book begins with the description of a locust invasion that had taken place before the Word of the LORD came to Joel in verse 1.
 - a) It should be noted that locust invasion is common in Africa but a rare phenomenon in the Promised Land. Joel was telling Israel that this was God's judgment on Israel as a result of some national sin of Israel since it was a rare event that happened specifically to God's people.
 - b) This differs from Covid-19 which happened worldwide and is a pandemic, not just on God's people, hence we should not conclude that Covid-19 is a judgement of God on His people.
 - c) Another way to ascertain if a particular event is the result of God's judgement on His people is to check if it fulfills any particular prophecy in God's Word.
 - d) Since one square km of locust is able to consume, in one day, the amount of food required to feed 35,000 people for a day, the locust invasion described in Joel probably caused the entire land to be laid waste. The destruction was so extensive that even greens to be used in worship in the Temple was lacking.
2. Joel 1:13-20. Knowing that this event as a judgement of God on His people, Joel called for a national repentance. However, Israel did not truly repent as they attributed the event to coincidence, rather than God's wrath or judgement on them.

Chapter 2

1. Joel 2:1-11. Since the people did not repent, a second attack took place.
 - a) It is not very clear if this attack was caused by a locust or an army, but based on the style of writing, it could be an army whose attack was as devastating as that caused by locusts.
 - b) In those days, Babylon would employ a strategy known as the scorched-earth policy in which they would destroy the land (including children, women, animals and trees) that they have conquered completely to terrify the surrounding nations into surrendering to them.

- c) This was yet another instance of God's judgement on Israel due to unrepentance.
2. Joel 2:12-17. Another call for repentance was issued to the people and they were warned by God not to pretend to repent as in first instance.
- a) True repentance is not about ceremonies or rituals done habitually, e.g. putting ashes on head and ripping of clothes, but about the heart.
 - b) Many Christians today also go to church habitually but their heart is not focused on worship of God but thinking about worldly things.
 - c) True repentance requires a change of heart, it is the heart crying out, regretting what we have done. In Joel 2:12-13, God said, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning, so rend your heart and not your garments."
 - d) As in verse 13, when true repentance happens, we can be assured that God would relent from doing harm because God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (i.e. loyal love). He is a compassionate God.
 - e) Therefore, repentance does not only involve saying the words of a "sinner's prayer."
 - i. It requires a change of heart, acknowledging that we are sinners who sin every day because of our fallen, wicked nature and are destined for hell.
 - ii. It is a mistake on the part of many "Christians" to think that it is alright to sin, like the foolish Israelites described in Joel, just because God has not taken action to punish His people yet for their sin.
3. Joel 2:18-27 illustrate the beauty of repentance.
- a) God promised His people recovery and the refreshment of the land if they truly repented.
 - b) The reason behind this promise can be seen in verse 18 where it says that God had pity on His people.
 - c) Like rebellious children who grumble against their parents and arguing with them, "Why can't I do it? Dad, everyone does it.", we sometimes also do the same to God too. However, it is sheer arrogance to question God.
 - d) God welcomes all who truly repent.
 - i. This can be seen in verse 25 where God promised to restore to Israel the years eaten by the locusts.
 - ii. True repentance brings about total restoration. This means that our broken lives and wasted years can be restored. The mistakes that we have made before trusting in Christ become useful lessons and experiences that can be used to teach and bless others.
 - iii. When we repent, God does not only forgive and forget but also restore and turn all the bad things of the past into good. Our baggage is taken away and those are no longer wasted years.
4. Joel 2:28-29 give us a preview of the remarkable future blessings promised by God, even though Israel might not have understood them fully at that time.

- a) The promise that God made was that He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Therefore, we can see that upon true repentance, God gave far more than what the people asked for. Israel only desired the restoration of their physical land but God promised to give them spiritual blessings.
 - b) During that time, it was understood by the Israelites that the Holy Spirit was only given to a few selected people and only temporarily. E.g. The Holy Spirit rested on David, Solomon etc. but He comes and goes unpredictably. However, God promised in verse 28 that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people including maids, children, etc.
 - c) This promise of God meant that one day, anyone (including illiterate people) who truly repent would receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. This is the greatest gift from God when one is born again, and is far better than any other inheritance.
 - d) In Acts Chapter 2, this promise in verses 28 and 29 was quoted by Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:17-21 also records the ability to “speak in tongues” was given when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon those who believed in Jesus Christ on the Day of Pentecost. This is a spiritual gift given to the believers, enabling them to speak an existing foreign language instantly without learning it.
5. Joel 2:30-31. These verses describe the future events that have not taken place yet.
- a) According to Joel, cosmic changes would take place, e.g. the Moon would turn blood red and the Sun would turn dark, etc.
 - b) The events that occurred at the Cross were a foreshadow of the future events described in Joel 2:30-31 that have yet to happen. Even though the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had taken place during the Pentecost, these cosmic changes prophesized by Joel would probably take place during Jesus’ second coming. Like the other prophets, Joel probably had a “prophetic mountain-view” and hence they were unable to see the time gap between two events of similar nature.
6. Joel 2:32. This verse describes the Gospel message preached by Joel.
- a) The message here is that anyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. The image that can be inferred from this word “call” is that of one who is drowning and shouts for help. It represents a desperate, helpless call for someone to help him (because he cannot save himself).
 - b) Salvation requires the opening of our eyes by God to see how wicked we are (See Acts 26:18-20) instead of comforting ourselves that we are doing alright or are not that bad. Repentance is the change of mind to accept the truth that we are rebels destined for hell, to acknowledge our helplessness and inability to save ourselves and to call on the name of the LORD to save us. It is very similar to people calling the police for help when they are in danger.

Chapter 3

1. Joel 3:1-16.

- a) The phrase “Valley of Decision” here refers to the “Valley of Judgement”. There is a valley, east of Jerusalem, (note that Jerusalem is situated on a mountain)

called the Kidron Valley. This valley is filled with Jewish graves as the Israelites buried their dead there, believing that on the day of resurrection, God will decide at this valley where these dead people will go to in eternity. This is the reason why this place is called the Valley of Decision.

- b) Many nations took the opportunity to attack Israel when Israel was weak. However, God promised in these verses that he would deal with these nations in time to come. This serves as a warning to any nation who might be oppressing Israel because Israel is the child of a powerful Father.
2. Joel 3:16-21.
- a) God promised the people that the restoration of Israel would be glorious like the Garden of Eden.
 - b) God will never divorce Israel because of His steadfast love.
 - c) Likewise, our salvation is eternal and we can never lose it. We can, however, lose our fellowship with God when we sin. This is similar to the relationship a father and son shares. They will always share the same DNA and nothing will be able to change this fact.
 - d) In the same way, the Holy Spirit is His stamp on us, proving that we belong to God and this will never change if we had truly repented and trusted Jesus.

What have we learned about God in this Book of Joel?

1. God works perfectly. When He judges, He will not go soft on His children. This can be seen in how He had afflicted His people with the locust invasion when they sinned. Therefore, be careful about how you live your life as a Christian. Though God will not disown you but will punish you for your sins because He loves you.
2. If you repent, God will not hesitate to restore you
 - a) Repentance is like a door and when we pass through it, we will realise the mat says "Welcome back".
 - b) We will start to realise that sins which we thought were insignificant have now become significant because it is rebellion against God. We will grieve as we realise sins that may not be hurting others is hurting God.
 - c) Repentance leads to restoration and blessings (i.e. benefits).
 - d) It is not about how smart we are but how fast we learn to humble ourselves and realise our rebellion against God. We will realise how we are like a son hurting his father every day even though we may not hurt anyone else.
3. God protects His children. Therefore, this is a warning to others not fool around with His children or bully them.
4. God is slow to anger, compassionate and loves to see His children return to Him and admit their mistakes. As you reflect on the agonies present in your life, examine your heart to check whether it is God's judgement of a sin that you are unrepentant of.