

Session 1 Introducing the Book of Joel

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the book of Joel is the Day of the Lord and how to rightly respond to it. That's the key—how to rightly respond. If the topic is the Day of the Lord only, then it leaves us with just an interesting theological discussion. But the point is that because the Day of the Lord is coming, this is how we respond and how we live.

THE MOST SEVERE JUDGMENTS AND THE GREATEST REVIVAL ARE YET TO COME

Joel 2:12: Here is the key passage of the entire book of Joel. This is how we respond. The theme, the underlying theme of the entire book is Joel 2:12. “Now therefore,” says the Lord, ‘turn to Me with all your heart.’” In other words, it is a call to the first commandment. This is another way of saying, “Love Me with all your heart.” If you want, you can write in verse 12, “The first commandment.” “Now therefore, in light of everything I’m teaching you on the Day of the Lord,” Joel is saying, “in light of all these new insights, these exciting dimensions of the outpouring of the Spirit and these terrifying dimensions of the judgment of God, love Him with all your heart.” Because as we’ll see over and over throughout this course, the Day of the Lord has a positive aspect: The greatest revival ever seen in history is yet to come. The Day of the Lord has a negative element as well: The most severe judgments in history are yet to come. So the greatest revival and the most severe judgments, the greatest positives and the greatest negatives, are yet ahead of the human race. They are yet ahead of this hour of history.

I believe there are people alive on the earth right now, and I’m talking about very possibly you, in your own lifetime or the lifetime of your children or grandchildren, who will see these positives and negatives. I think this is that pertinent of a subject. But whether or not you see this in your lifetime, as I believe you will, your children or grandchildren must understand these and respond to the Lord in the way He says.

“REND YOUR HEART, AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS”

So in verse 12 He says, in essence, “Now therefore, in light of all this teaching, turn with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning.” Then in verse 13 He goes on to say, “Rend your heart” (Joel 2:13). *Rend* means *tear*. “Rend your heart, and not your garments.” In the ancient world, and in ancient Israel, men and women would tear their garments to show their grief. Joel said, “Don’t tear your shirt to say, ‘I’m in so much pain over my sin.’ Tear your heart, not your shirt.” It was traditional to tear your garment to show how serious you were about how much you hated how much you had failed or how worried you were about the judgment of God. They would tear their garment: “Oh no, we’re in big trouble!”

He says, “Rend your heart, not your garment.”

“IT SHALL COME TO PASS AFTERWARDS THAT I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT”

Then He goes on in verse 28, “It shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28). We’ll show you in some of the later classes how, when He says, “It shall come to pass afterwards,” He’s talking about after the prayer and fasting of verses 12-17. When He says in verse 28, “It shall come to pass afterwards,” He’s saying, “After you’ve done the fasting and prayer of verses 12-17, then I will pour out my Spirit.” That’s the underlying premise of the book of Joel: “The Day of the Lord is coming, rend your heart, return with all your

heart to love Him with fasting and prayer,” and then in verse 28, “I will pour out My Spirit, I will release an increase of the activity of the Holy Spirit.” That’s the overall premise of the entire book.

THE BOOK OF JOEL, A MINIATURE BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Joel has often been referred to as a miniature book of Revelation. It’s three chapters and it covers many of the main broad themes of the book of Revelation. In three chapters you can get the whole thing, or at least the major positives and negatives, of the end-time drama, the scenario that God is going to release. You’ll be able to see both of them here in the book of Joel.

EQUIPPING FORERUNNERS TO PREPARE THE UNPREPARED

Paragraph A. I have been asked, “Why is it so important to study the book of Joel?” Because again, it is a miniature book of Revelation. We’re on page 9 on session notes number one. The purpose of studying this book, this little three chapter, miniature book of Revelation, is to equip forerunners to prepare the unprepared. That’s the point in one sentence: to equip forerunners, and forerunners are messengers. Forerunners are people who deliver a specific message, and here is the message. The message involves the unique dynamics of the generation in which the Lord returns. That’s in paragraph B. What do I mean by “unique dynamics?” There’s the greatest positives of history, the greatest revival, and the greatest negatives of history, the greatest judgment and the greatest attack of Satan, which is different than judgment. They’re all coming to the earth at the same time. It will create a very unique environment on the earth. The biggest problem on the planet will be confusion. People will be confused, “What is God? What is the Devil? What’s coming next? How are we supposed to respond? What are we supposed to do?” Confusion and fear will be a very common response in those final decades leading up to the coming of the Lord.

Forerunners are messengers. They give clarity to the others who don’t have clarity on these very important themes that are described here in the book of Joel. At the end of paragraph B, I write that the book of Joel is like a forerunner instruction manual. God designed it so that we would know how to respond and how to interpret the great glory and the great crisis that I believe is just around the corner. It could be several decades, it could be a little longer than that, but maybe it isn’t so long. We don’t know. No one knows the day or the hour.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF JOEL’S MESSAGE

Roman numeral II, still on page 9. An overview of Joel’s message. Joel 1: There’s an agricultural crisis and he tells them how to respond. That’s the theme of Joel 1. An agricultural crisis is an economic crisis; one leads to the other every time. What are we supposed to do when an economic and agricultural crisis happens? Joel 1.

But in Joel 2:1-11, it isn’t an agricultural crisis; it’s far more serious. It’s a military crisis because a foreign army, that of the Babylonians, was invading the nation of Israel. The prophet Joel was saying, “They’re coming. They’re coming. There is coming a military invasion. If you think the crisis of chapter 1, the agricultural crisis, was severe, you haven’t seen anything like the crisis coming. It is a military crisis.”

THE RESPONSE GOD REQUIRES IN ORDER TO RELEASE HIS PRESENCE AND PROTECTION

Paragraph C. This is the heart of the book, which we looked at just a moment ago, the response that God requires in order to release protection, in order to release the blessing of the Spirit’s power and presence, and in order to release deliverance, deliverance from our enemies. This is the response God wants. Let there be no mistake; the nations are confused: “What are we supposed to do?” Even the Church is confused. The Lord says, “Be confused no more. It is clear what I want you to do. I want you to come into unity with Me. If you come

into unity with Me and you get Me on your side, or better yet *you* get on the Lord's side, then there's no enemy that can defeat you." If you don't have the favor of the Lord in a time of crisis, then you have no way to deliver yourself. That's the meaning of this. There's economic crisis in our nation right now and probably an agricultural crisis not far away with the droughts and everything else. There's an agricultural crisis in some areas, but almost no one is praying and fasting and doing what Joel said. Heaven is saying, "I'm waiting. I'm waiting. I've told you what I want. The crisis will get more severe. I want you to come into agreement with Me and I want you to call on My favor and My favor will come and make all the difference in the world."

THE BREAKTHROUGH OF BLESSING AND THE VINDICATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Paragraph D. Joel 2:18-31. This is a great one. It's the breakthrough, the breakthrough of blessing. It is agricultural, political, and spiritual. God's breakthroughs, which we can read in the other prophets, are summarized here. Most of the main breakthroughs that are coming in the future are right here in Joel 2. It's in condensed summarized form, but most of the main ones are there.

Joel 3: God punishes the enemy. This is what Israel was waiting for. He punishes the enemy and He vindicates His own people. What Joel 3 is describing, ultimately, is the great enemy of Israel, the Antichrist at the end of the age. That's what is going on here.

THE WRATH OF THE DEVIL, THE SIN OF MAN, THE TRAVAILS OF CREATION

I'll give you four points that aren't on the notes. I'll reference these many times throughout this course. There are four causes of trouble, or four sources of trouble. Source of trouble number one is Satan's rage. Satan attacks humans. He has rage; he has anger. Source of trouble number two is man's sin. Our sin causes us trouble even without the Devil raging against us. We can cause so much trouble for our life and country just by sinning, even if the Devil isn't involved. Number three, creation's groanings. That's in Romans 8. Paul says, "Creation is groaning" (Rom. 8:22, paraphrased). There's the accumulation of sin that's building in its impact on the created order. That's why there are hurricanes and volcanoes and all these convulsions in history, because creation is groaning because man has sinned. There's an identification of what human beings do on the earth and the earth itself. My point is this: Sometimes there's a great earthquake or a hurricane. Someone says, "Is it the people who live there? Are they the ones who caused it?" Sometimes it's related to the people who live there; other times it's related to the fact that creation is groaning. We live in a fallen world. Because of our sin, there's an accumulated impact on the globe and there are hurricanes and storms. The groan of creation is part of the trouble.

THE UNQUENCHABLE COMPASSIONATE FURY OF GOD'S ZEAL FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Number four is the most serious of all. I save it for last. God's zeal, or you can say His love, the fact that God loves us so much, means He will not allow us to continue without confronting us if we're living in a path of destruction and rebellion towards Him. He intervenes in order to get our attention. That's why He intervenes, to get our attention. He's zealous. He's zealous for righteousness. He disciplines, He judges, He confronts wrong because He cares. If He didn't care, He wouldn't confront.

So there are four sources of problems. Satan is raging, man is sinning, creation is groaning, and God has zeal in His heart; He has passion. Those four together are the source of why there are troubles in the world. Not every trouble involves all four. We don't always know which of the four are involved to which degree. Is this man's sin, God's judgment, Satan's rage, or just the groan of creation? We don't know. The Spirit will help us as time goes on. Whenever there's trouble in the earth, it always goes back to one of those four.

THE ONLY, ONLY SAFE PLACE IS IN THE CENTER OF THE FLAME

Here is what the message of Joel is saying: Regardless of which one it is, even if all four are involved, the response is the same. You turn to God with all your heart, cry out for mercy, cry out for intervention. The favor of God comes and the bad things stop. The Lord says, “No matter which of the four it is, the answer is in My favor being released to you. I can settle all four of them.”

People debate, “Which one is it? Is it mostly the people who sinned down when the big earthquake or hurricane hit? Did they sin or was it not their sin? Was it Satan raging? Or was it really God’s zeal to get their attention? Or was it creation groaning?” Again, all four of them are often involved for different reasons, but they’re involved together. God says, “If in the end you can’t separate them”—which it’s a challenge to do—“know this: If you turn to Me with all your heart, you will obtain favor.” That’s Joel 2:12-17, the heart of the book. “You get my favor in your midst.” It doesn’t matter what storm you’re in; if Jesus is in the boat, you’re safe. The whole sea can be in a storm, but if He’s in the boat, you’re safe. If Jesus is out walking on the water, you’re safe on the water, not in the boat. You’re safe in His favor. Wherever He is, that’s the place of safety. That’s the message of the book of Joel.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST IN ACTS 2 WAS MODELED ON THE PLAN LAID OUT IN JOEL 2

We’re going to go through a few premises here, premises that are necessary to understand the message of the book of Joel. Roman numeral III. Premise number one is that on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out in Acts 2, Peter was actually referring to and interpreting Joel 2. On the day of Pentecost when the outpouring of the Spirit happened, Peter said, “What we’re doing here on the day of Pentecost is what Joel talked about.”

It wasn’t just that the Spirit was moving; there was a model in Joel 2 that they were following in Acts 1 and Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. When they gathered here in paragraph A, in Acts 1:14, it says, “[They] all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” They were doing the coming to the Lord, praying and fasting, turning to God with all their hearts. They were actually doing Joel 2:12 right there in Acts 1:14, the first part of Joel 2. Then they were crying out to God as Jesus told them in Lk. 24:49: “Go to a prayer meeting; tarry in Jerusalem” (Lk. 24:49, paraphrased). To *tarry* means to wait: “Wait in a prayer meeting,” in that context. “Go in Jerusalem and wait, pray for the outpouring of the Spirit.” That’s also a reference to Joel 2.

These 120 intercessors were doing the first part of Joel 2. They were in the house of prayer, so to speak. They were calling out for the outpouring of the Spirit. They waited ten long days. Suddenly the wind, the fire, and the wine, these three elements, broke in. Interestingly, Joel said, “You would have dreams and visions,” but he didn’t even mention wind, fire, and wine. When Joel said, “If you pray and fast and turn to Me, and the Spirit is poured out, you get dreams and visions,” he wasn’t limiting it to dreams and visions. He meant, “You’re going to get the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit, by which dreams and visions are guaranteed, are promised, but you aren’t limited to those limitations of the Spirit. The realm of the Spirit will increase in your midst.” That’s what Joel was saying. Here in Acts 2, they get the wind, they get the fire, they get the wine; they don’t get dreams and visions. No one fell asleep and had a dream. None of that happened. The Spirit broke out, and here in Acts 1-2 they were actually following the model of Joel 2. They were in a prayer meeting fasting, crying out for the Spirit, asking for the negative to be lifted and the positive to be released, and that’s exactly what happened. The reason we care about that is not just so we can say, “Wow Peter, you did it right.” Because the application is, the Joel 2 model and the Acts 2 model, which is the same model, is the model we’re supposed to

embrace as people in the kingdom of God. Prayer and fasting isn't supposed to be some weird, radical thing that a few wild people do in houses of prayers. The prayer and fasting is the model of how the kingdom works from Joel 2 and Acts 2. It's a normal part of the kingdom.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CONTINUAL PRAYER AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT

Paragraph B. In Acts 2, Peter says, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). So Peter is telling them, "A portion of Joel 2 is being fulfilled right in your midst because we have embraced the model." In other words, "We've done what God told Joel to do in a time of trouble and blessing. He told us what to do; we're doing it. The answer is being released right here in our midst." Peter, paragraph B, drew a connection between continual prayer and the release of the Holy Spirit. He drew the connection.

THE MIRACLE OF PENTECOST WAS ONLY A TASTE OF WHAT IS STILL TO COME

Paragraph D. Some people will tell you Joel 2 was fulfilled in Acts 2. They're saying, "Peter did it, it's done." No. Peter only had a small down payment of a much bigger promise. Because in Joel 2, the promise wasn't that 120 people in one city would get touched by the Spirit. That wasn't the promise. The promise is that the Spirit would be poured out on a global level; all the people of God across the earth would have dreams and visions. It would prepare the people of God for the greatest crisis that would come in human history. That's the message of the book of Joel—that the anointing of the Spirit isn't for the purpose of making meetings better. It prepares us for the greatest harvest, the opportunity of history, and for the greatest crisis, that we could be connected to the Lord, and live in faith, not in fear; that we would be in a place of confidence and power when the greatest crisis comes; that we would be part of the answer, not part of the problem. That was core to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Joel 2.

THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE SAKE OF PARTNERSHIP AND HARVEST

Some people think of the outpouring of the Spirit as mostly to make a meeting better. It does make meetings livelier. However, there's a bigger reason why God pours His Spirit out; it's for the harvest. I won't develop it, but here in the notes He tells us in verse 31 that "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:31). The outpouring of the Spirit is for the sake of the harvest, for the sake of the purifying of the Body of Christ, and for the sake of partnering with the Lord in power and faith and love in the great crisis. That's what the outpouring is for. It isn't just to make a ministry a little more famous and a little livelier. God is pouring His Spirit out for a specific reason. That's what is laid out here.

THE GREATER FULFILLMENT OF THE BOOK OF JOEL WILL COME IN THE LATTER DAYS

Let's go to the middle of page 11. The second premise. Again, the first premise is that what Peter had was just a down payment. Don't let some theologian tell you, "Well, it was all fulfilled back in the old days." No, Peter only had the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in one city. God said nothing about 120 people in one city; He said the whole globe. He said everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will have dreams and visions. Everyone will operate in power, globally. That wasn't fulfilled in Acts 2, not completely. It was only a down-payment fulfillment in a limited sense. The second premise is that the ultimate fulfillment, the biggest fulfillment, the greatest fulfillment of the prophecies of Joel, is yet future.

Paragraph A. Joel was written for the people of his own day, yes. The book was written, the people were blessed in that day. But God had a far bigger audience to whom He was giving this prophetic message. He was giving it for the generation in which the Lord returns, where a billion or two billion people may be equipped by the message of the book of Joel. Obviously it was a blessing in his day and it was a blessing throughout Church

history; but the bigger reason God gave this message was for the one or two billion in the generation the Lord returns, that they would understand what is happening.

IT IS YOUR INHERITANCE TO OPERATE IN THE ANOINTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Paragraph C. I believe the book of Joel has its greatest and its most complete fulfillment in the future. I'm looking forward to the day when every born again believer has visions and dreams and everyone operates in power. Not a few men here and there, everyone. All flesh. When it says, "My Spirit will be poured out on all flesh," it means every individual who's born again who calls on the name of the Lord. They will operate in anointed ministry. Beloved, it is your inheritance to operate in the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY BABYLON IN 586 B. C.

Top of page 12. This is an important point to understanding that Joel's prophecies are yet for the future. The dating of the book of Joel is important. Many scholars believe this, as I do; this isn't an isolated opinion. This is an opinion that's widespread among many commentators, though others will debate it. I believe the most convincing view is this, paragraph A. This book was written a decade or two or three—the specifics aren't important—ten, twenty, thirty years before the great Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. This is the one date in the Old Testament you have to learn. It's good if you learn about three, but if you only have room on your emotional and mental hard drive for one date, this is the date: 586 BC. This is one of the most significant days in Israel's history. Many Jews today around the world know about 586 B.C. I'm talking about secular Jews. It's that big of a date in their history. The most devastating thing happened to the city of Jerusalem in the land of Israel. Ancient Babylon is today modern-day Iraq. He was like the king of Iraq; they're right next door. Persia is the nation of Iran. Babylon and Persia, or Iraq and Iran, are in the same geographic area. When you read in the Old Testament, when you see Persia, just think Iran. When you see Babylon, think Iraq. The same drama, the same demons are still at war today over the same geographic area for real. It's the same conflict.

Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army marched over to Jerusalem and took most of the nation captive and marched them back to Iraq, to Babylon, and put them in prison camps. It wasn't so severe that they killed them all systematically, but it was the most devastating thing that happened to the Jewish people in the Old Testament, in 586 B.C. And Joel was telling them, one, two, or three decades ahead of time, "It's coming. It's coming. It's coming. It's coming."

The nation of Israel said, "Oh Joel, quit being so fanatical. Quit being so intense. Chill out. It's not coming."

He said, "It's coming; it's coming," and it came.

The point of it is that God is using this as an example to the nations even in this hour of history. He's saying, "Trouble is around the corner and most of My people aren't paying attention to Me, just like in the book of Joel." The same story is being replayed again right now in modern times. Beloved, something far worse than the problem that came to the city of Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar and from Babylon, a far greater problem than the armies of Babylon, is coming to Jerusalem a few years down the road. Jerusalem will have great, great attack against her. It will be far worse than Nebuchadnezzar, and the book of Joel was written so that Jerusalem could be ready. Not only will it happen in Jerusalem, there will again be trouble like what Babylon did to Jerusalem. The same kind of trouble will strike the Gentile nations through the Antichrist's military invasion of nations of the earth. He's telling them, "You only have one hope: fasting and prayer and calling on My favor."

That's your only hope, My favor; you believing Me, crying out to Me, and My invisible hand delivering you. That's your only hope." That's what the book of Joel is all about.

GOD SETS IN PLACE EVIL LEADERS TO BRING JUDGMENT ON UNRIGHTEOUS NATIONS

Let's go to the middle of page 14. Premise number three. This is a tough one. God uses evil leaders to do His work. Nebuchadnezzar was an evil man. God says, "You'll do, because you'll discipline My people and wake them up. Nebuchadnezzar, I'll use you, I'll even help you. Then after I use you to discipline My people, I'll judge you and give you the justice you deserve. First, though, I will use you in power." This throws people off; yet it's a foundational message throughout the Old Testament prophets. Without this piece of information, we won't be able to interpret what's happening in the future. What's going to happen is, there will be nations and men raised up that are evil. God is actually using them to discipline other nations. Then He will discipline them at the end.

We might say, "Wow, that's pretty intense. I don't know if I like that."

The Lord says, "I'm really smart, I'm really loving, I have lots of power. Trust Me, that's the best way to do it."

You have your notes there. If you would go to page 32 in your notes and session notes three; because I develop this more in the third session notes. I just want to talk about it right now for a moment, this idea of wicked leaders. Roman numeral VII. God will raise up evil leaders to judge sinful nations. During the Day of the Lord judgments at the end of the age, the Antichrist is actually going to be used by God to discipline ungodly nations, and then He will destroy the Antichrist. He won't violate the Antichrist's free will; the Antichrist will operate in his own wickedness, but the Lord will say, "I have need of a person like you. I won't make you wicked, but I will use the choices you've made for your own wickedness. I will use you to discipline nations to wake them up to righteousness."

Paragraph B. It's a great paradox. Because God is the one raising up the Antichrist. It's clear from the Bible that God raises him up. The Devil is involved and sinful men are involved. The people who follow him will be responsible for following him for their own sin. The Devil is raising up the Antichrist, but so is God. They're responding to him with totally different motives. God's motive is very different from man's and the Devil's, but nonetheless, God is raising up the Antichrist. That's an unthinkable thought to many people because they don't know the foundational biblical principles. It's clear here in the book of Joel.

"FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE RAISED YOU UP": GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN EGYPT

Page 33. Paragraph E. The Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, that My name might be declared in all the earth" (Rom. 9:17). Pharaoh was a really evil man; Pharaoh was a very oppressive man, a very evil and very oppressive man. He beat and oppressed the people of God. God says, "I raised you up."

The Devil could then say, "Hey Pharaoh, I've been involved in your career advancement as well." Pharaoh in his own arrogance, pride and sin, advanced his career. But when it's all said and done, God says, "Pharaoh, you only became rich and famous because I put you in that position because I had need for you to be in that position." The idea is that God raised up Pharaoh. To us, Pharaoh's not a big deal, because we think of Pharaoh, we remember the Moses movie, and Pharaoh didn't seem that mean. He seemed like a pretty nice guy who had

an ego problem. No. Pharaoh was a demonic, evil dude. Trust me. He was serious trouble. In that day, if you ran into Pharaoh, you would say, “That man has a bad spirit.” Trust me.

“THE ROD OF MY ANGER, THE STAFF IN WHOSE HAND IS MY INDIGNATION”

Paragraph F, God raised up Sennacherib. That’s a funny name; it’s Assyrian. The Assyrians attacked Israel. That was the other big date, but I won’t push that date on you. I won’t push 721 B.C. on you. The two big crises occurred in 721 B.C. and 586 B.C. But 586 B.C. was by far the biggest. Sennacherib was an evil man. God called him, “The rod of My anger, the staff in whose hand is My indignation” (Is. 10:5, paraphrased). God says, “I’m using this evil Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. He is a rod in my hand. I’m using him against you, Israel. You can bind the Devil all you want, but I’m the one causing Sennacherib to have triumph over you.” Because he had come and invaded and caused great trouble about 200 years earlier. “Your only answer, Israel, is fasting and prayer; the favor of God, is your only chance.”

When Isaiah said, “God is using the king of Assyria,” the people of Israel were so angry.

They said, “How dare you say God is using that wicked king of Assyria? How dare you?”

The nation of Assyria isn’t entirely, but very near to where the nation of Syria is today. It’s an overlap. The boundaries aren’t exactly even, but that gives you the ballpark. To say that an evil king is being used and raised up by God was very offensive. “How dare you?” The nation of Israel was angry at Isaiah when he said that. They said, “We don’t like that you said that. We bind you in the name of Jesus.”

Isaiah said, “It doesn’t matter. You can bind me and Sennacherib. Neither of them will work, because God has raised him up. “Your answer is to cry out to God; you get His favor and then everything changes.”

“WHEN HE HAS DISCIPLINED ISRAEL... I WILL PUNISH HIM AND HIS NATION SEVERELY”

Jeremiah 25:9. Nebuchadnezzar is the evil king who came and destroyed Jerusalem. Look at what God calls him: “He is My servant” (Jer. 25:9, paraphrased). “He is My servant.”

We think, “God, you can’t call a demonized man Your servant. You just can’t.”

God says, “Watch, I will. He’s My servant. I raised him up, but have no fear.”

Look at what it says here: “When he has disciplined Israel for seventy years, I will punish him and his nation severely.” (Jer. 25:12, paraphrased). “I will take care of him, but only after I have used him.” The reason I’m saying this is because this is what’s going to happen to the Antichrist. God will actually raise up the Antichrist, as will the Devil and the wickedness of men. Men will put him in power because they want him to be in power; until they figure out who he is. Jeremiah 27:6: “I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant” (Jer. 27:6, NKJV).

Again, Nebuchadnezzar is a wicked man. This is unthinkable.

“God, You can’t call him your servant. You can all him ‘that little creep’ or something, but You can’t say, ‘My servant.’ Say, ‘That little demon-man,’ or something. You can’t say he’s Your servant!”

God says, “He is My servant; My hand is on him. I am using him. My power is why he’s succeeding, but I will judge him severely. I haven’t forced him to do any evil, but I have given him power. He has done evil, but he is serving My purposes by disciplining My people.”

ISRAEL’S PROBLEM IS THAT GOD LOVES THEM AND WON’T LET GO OF THEM

This is a very important doctrine. It’s a very offensive doctrine to the humanistic mindset that’s present even in the Church. The humanistic mindset is essentially, “We want everything easier and everything bad is the Devil.” The Devil is responsible for a lot, but he isn’t responsible for everything. One of the biggest problems that Israel has isn’t the Devil, though the Devil is a problem. It isn’t even Israel’s sin, though that’s a big problem, too. Israel’s problem is that God loves them and won’t let go of them. That’s their big problem. He won’t let them go because of His zeal and love for them. He says, “Israel, I will wake you up, no matter what it costs. I won’t violate your free will, but I will wake you up.” It’s the love God has for Israel that will ultimately allow this trouble, because the trouble is the only thing that will wake them up. God says, “I won’t allow you to go forever without waking up spiritually. I just won’t allow it.”

I remember talking to some leaders in Israel and saying, “Bind the Devil and all the bad men and all the sin in Israel. Their big problem is that God loves Israel and Israel doesn’t love God. That’s the big problem.” Because God isn’t going to be quiet—that’s the problem even with some believers. God loves them and they don’t all love God; not in the way that they once did. He says, “I’m not letting go of you. I will get you in a corner and talk eye to eye with you. You’ll be glad when it’s over.”

“LOOK AMONG THE NATIONS AND WATCH—BE UTTERLY ASTOUNDED!”

Here is the offense. Habakkuk 1:5 is such a dramatic passage. “Look among the nations and watch”—this is God speaking—“be utterly astounded!” God is telling the prophet Habakkuk, “Look around and see. I will show you the most dramatic, surprising, mind-blowing thing that you can think of. Look around the nations and see the most startling thing. I will show you something even more startling. Be utterly astounded when I show it to you.”

“OK...”

“I will work a work in your day which you wouldn’t believe even if I told you in advance” (Hab. 1:5, paraphrased).

Habakkuk says, “Well, try me.”

“Think of the most astonishing thing you can think of, and I tell you I will do something that will astonish you even more.”

“I AM RAISING UP THE CHALDEANS... A TERRIBLE AND DREADFUL NATION”

Verse 6, “I am raising up the Chaldeans”—the Babylonians; that’s another name for Babylon. “I am raising up the Babylonians, a terrible and dreadful nation, to wake up my beloved Israel” (Hab. 1:6, paraphrased).

Habakkuk says, “No way.”

God says, “Yes; be utterly astounded. I will raise up a terrible and evil man and a terrible and evil nation to wake up nations. Be astounded.”

Why am I going into this? Joel, as we’ll see as we look at the other sessions, will develop this, and this big problem is going to face the Body of Christ before the Lord returns. What are we going to make of the idea that this man, the Antichrist, will come to world power? He won’t dominate every nation, by the way, but he will have more power than any man has had over the nations. He won’t successfully defeat every nation, but he will go further, far beyond where Adolph Hitler went in terms of the power he amasses. It will never be complete. People will be saying, “What do we make of this?”

God says, “I’m using it.”

This is a very confusing thought. But it’s established in the Old Testament prophets that this is really going to happen.

JESUS RAISES UP THE ANTICHRIST FOR A SEASON AS A DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE

Go to the top of page 34, paragraph K. I have about five or six verses where the Scripture is clear that God raises up the Antichrist. The Devil is totally involved and the sin of man is totally involved. Look at Revelation 6:1. The Lamb opens the seal. Jesus opens the seal and releases the rider on the white horse, the Antichrist. Jesus releases him. “No Jesus, not him, wrong door. No! Don’t let him out!”

Jesus says, “Yes. I will let him out.”

“In the name of Jesus, I bind You from letting him out. Don’t let him out. I take authority over letting him out!” You can’t bind Jesus by the name of Jesus! I’m serious! Jesus lets him out. We’re thinking, “Ahhh. What is going on?”

He says, “I have total control over him. I know what’s happening. Trust me; My reasoning is rooted in eternity, not in time. I know what I’m doing.” These passages show how the authority was given to the Antichrist from God. God is the only One who can give a man authority over the nations. The Devil didn’t give him authority; the Devil didn’t have the authority. God will grant authority to him.

“BLESSED IS HE, WHOEVER IS NOT OFFENDED IN ME”

Let’s go all the way back to page 15. We’re going to make another point or two and then we’ll take a break. The fourth premise, top of page 15. As we’re studying the book of Joel, we have a theological crisis, and problems we have to answer. Here is why: When the end-time plan develops fully, the nations will be angry, not happy with God. The nations will be angry. There will be believers angry at God as His plan unfolds. Jesus warned the people in Mt. 11:6, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Because Jesus was about to let John the Baptist die, and the disciples of John the Baptist came to Him and said, “Hey, are you the Messiah?” Jesus did all the miracles. They said, “Yay, John is in prison, everything is good. You’re the Messiah.”

Jesus looked them in the eye and said, “Don’t be offended at Me.”

“Why would we be offended at You? John is in prison, You have all the power. It seems like a slam dunk. Everything is fine. You have power, You like John, John is in prison, he’s our leader. Get him out of prison.”

Jesus let him die in prison. He said, “I warn you, don’t be offended at me. Not only by what I do, but don’t be offended by what I don’t do.”

FORERUNNERS, DISPELLING THE FEAR AND CONFUSION OF A TERRIFYING HOUR

At the end of the age, in the generation the Lord returns, of which I believe we are in the early days, there are things Jesus will do and not do that will offend our humanistic mindset. Forerunners have to answer some of the theological problems that people have when the confusion begins to come and fear breaks out: “What’s going on? What do we do? How do we make sense of this?” God is raising up forerunners to get clarity, and the book of Joel is a great little mini-forerunner book to give clarity to people in the great coming revival as well as the great crisis that’s yet ahead.

Top of page 16. The fifth premise, the end of the age forerunner ministry. Again, paragraph A, when trouble comes, when the Antichrist is raised up, when the rage of Satan has happened, when the judgment of God is coming on the Antichrist and the nations are in turmoil and there’s a great outpouring of the Spirit, there will be significant confusion. The end-time forerunners will be making sense of what’s happening to the people.

“FEED YOUR BELLY, AND FILL YOUR STOMACH WITH THIS SCROLL”

Premise number six. We’ll end with this. We need to be immersed in the book of Joel. That isn’t exactly it; we need to be immersed in the *message* of the book of Joel. It isn’t Joel or Revelation or Isaiah or Ezekiel or Jeremiah. They all have the same message. We need to be immersed in the message of what’s going to happen, the unique dynamics of the generation in which the Lord returns. We need to be immersed in it. We refer to this analogy sometimes from Ezekiel 3. The Lord told Ezekiel, “Son of man, eat this scroll and then go speak to the house of Israel” (Eze. 3:3, paraphrased). Ezekiel opened his mouth and God fed him the scroll.

““Son of man,”” said the Lord, ““feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you” (Eze. 3:3, NKJV). The scroll is the message. The Lord says, “I want you to devour this message.” It was a message of judgment and a message of deliverance. Ezekiel said, “I ate the message and it was sweet” (Eze. 3:3b, paraphrased). He was feeding on the message of deliverance.

God tells the prophet, “I want you to take this message. I don’t want you to just underline the key verses; I want you to devour it. I want you to eat the scroll. I want you to think on it. Study it; memorize some of it. Learn it, break it down, discuss it with your friends.”

That’s what it means to eat the scroll: Completely devour this message. Don’t say, “Well I heard somewhere in Joel that some bad man did something, but he got in trouble anyway so it’s going to be OK, or something like that.” That’s not eating the scroll. We actually want to grasp this message, not just have a general idea that the message exists, but to actually comprehend it.

THE BITTERNESS AND SWEETNESS OF THE SCROLL

Look at what it says in Revelation 10. Now this is John, having the same experience where he eats the scroll—just as Ezekiel did. God gave John a strong prophetic message. He told John, “I want you to do what Ezekiel did; I want you to eat it. I want you to consume it.”

John ate the scroll, and afterwards he said, “It’s bitter and it’s sweet” (Rev. 10:10, paraphrased). This end time message is both bitter and sweet. After John ate it, he said, “Wow, great end-time revival. We win, awesome. But when I ate it, it made my stomach sour because there will be pain, death and destruction.” The message is sweet and the message is bitter; it’s both. We must devour it so that we can understand it. It’s more than, again, knowing that it exists. We actually comprehend it.

I’ll leave you with that. This is just introducing the book of Joel and giving you some foundational premises. In the next session we’ll do some more overview. Then we’ll begin to get verse by verse into it beginning next week.

