

## **Session 1 Introducing the Book of Joel**

### **I. WHY STUDY JOEL**

- A. I have often been asked why it is so important to study the book of Joel. What relevance do the locust plagues and military invasions of ancient Israel have in our day? Why should we spend a lot of time and energy poring over this Old Testament book?
- B. We must study the book of Joel because it equips end-time forerunner messengers to **prepare the unprepared** for the unique dynamics that will occur in the generation in which Jesus returns. We study this three-chapter prophecy because God has uniquely designed its message to prepare the end-time church for the unprecedented glory and crisis that will occur in events related to the Day of the Lord. It is an “instruction manual” to prepare the Bride for such a time as this.

### **II. AN OVERVIEW OF JOEL’S MESSAGE**

- A. Joel 1: A natural disaster (agricultural and economic crisis)
- B. Joel 2:1-11: A military crisis (Babylonian invasion of Israel as a type of the Antichrist’s invasion)
- C. Joel 2:12-17: The response that God requires to release His protection and blessing
- D. Joel 2:18-31: The breakthrough of God’s blessing (agriculturally, politically, spiritually, etc.)
- E. Joel 3: God’s punishment of His enemies (the Antichrist’s armies will be destroyed)

### **III. PREMISE 1: ACTS 2 INTERPRETS JOEL 2**

- A. On the day of Pentecost, 120 followers of Jesus were gathered together eagerly waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit, as they obeyed Jesus’ command to wait (tarry) in Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:12-15). For ten days they sought the Lord together with continual intercession and, undoubtedly, with some fasting.

<sup>49</sup>***“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Lk. 24:49)***

<sup>14</sup>***These all continued with one accord in prayer...<sup>15</sup>the number...was about a hundred and twenty. (Acts 1:14-15)***

- 1. A sound like a mighty, rushing wind filled the house and each one beheld tongues of fire resting on the others and all were filled with the Spirit as Joel prophesied (Acts 2:1-4).  
<sup>2</sup>***Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues... (Acts 2:2-4)***

2. Though there were many different languages represented, the Jewish multitude began to hear the wonders of God proclaimed in their own tongue from the mouths of these Galileans! The multitude was confused, perplexed, and amazed by what they were seeing and hearing.
- <sup>6</sup>The multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup>Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another... <sup>12</sup>So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” <sup>13</sup>Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.” (Acts 2:6-13)*
- B. Peter, under the anointing of the Spirit, interpreted that what was happening was not due to wine, but to the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Joel—that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:29).
- <sup>16</sup>This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>“It shall come to pass in the last days...that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh [on all nations]; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.” (Acts 2:16-17)*
- C. Peter drew a connection between their continual prayer and the outpouring of the Spirit, saying, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel!”
- D. What happened on the day of Pentecost was only a down payment of something that God has promised to release in fullness in the generation in which the Lord returns. What began that day with 3,000 believers was to increase dramatically with global dimensions—touching all flesh.
- E. Acts 1-2 was meant to be understood as a model of how the Spirit is poured out. The apostles followed the pattern set forth in Joel 2:12-17, 28-32—as the people prayed with fasting, the Spirit would be poured out, and whoever responded would be saved. Joel prophesied that the Spirit would draw people from all nations to Jesus (Acts 2:21) as the Spirit was poured out.
- <sup>17</sup>“I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh [all nations]...<sup>21</sup>It shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (Acts 2:17, 21)*
- <sup>12</sup>“Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping...<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast...<sup>28</sup>And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh [all nations]...<sup>31</sup>before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup>It shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (Joel 2:12, 15, 28-32)*
- F. Alongside this revival, Joel describes a great *crisis for all Gentile nations in Joel 3*. Joel 3 also points to judgment on the nations in the generation in which the Lord returns. Throughout history, God’s prophets have spoken of an hour of calamity coming to the planet, which Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:7; Mt. 24:21).
- G. There is coming a worldwide revival that will far surpass what happened in the book of Acts.

- H. The book of Joel provides us with a clear prophetic picture of the most dramatic hour in history. The Spirit will be poured out in an unprecedented way at the same time that God shakes everything that can be shaken (Heb. 12:26-29). This twofold release of positive and negative events (Joel 2:11) is at the heart of Joel's prophetic message.

*<sup>26</sup>But now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."<sup>27</sup> ...that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb. 12:26-27)*

- I. It is essential for the Body of Christ to grow in understanding of Joel's prophetic message.

#### **IV. PREMISE 2: ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF JOEL'S PROPHECIES ARE FUTURE**

- A. The book of Joel was written for the people of Joel's day, yet its greatest purpose and fulfillment is for the generation in which the Lord returns. Joel's message is essential to help equip people to be prepared for the unique dynamics occurring in the years leading up to Jesus' return. We must not allegorize this book; if we do, the relevance of Joel's weighty message is lost.
- B. The purpose of this study is not to discuss the different positions of various scholars. Rather than presenting the theological processes of others, this study focuses on explaining what I believe the text means. My interpretation of this book is not new or unique; the view I hold is shared by several scholarly commentaries, which see the ultimate fulfillment of Joel's prophecies as occurring in the generation in which the Lord returns.
- C. I believe the book of Joel has its *greatest* and most *complete* fulfillment in literal future events. I believe that the negative events described prophetically in Joel 2:1-9 were *partially* fulfilled in history, in the Babylon invasion of 586 BC. However, I believe they will have a *greater* and more *complete* fulfillment in the generation in which the Lord returns.

#### **V. JOEL PROPHESED JUST PRIOR TO THE BABYLONIAN INVASION (606–586 BC)**

- A. The dating of this prophecy has been debated by scholars for generations, resulting in three common views. The most convincing view is that this book was written in the generation *just prior* to Babylon's invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem in 606–586 BC. I believe that the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem occurred a few decades *after* Joel's prophetic ministry.
- B. One of the most important dates in Old Testament history is 586 BC. At this time, Israel underwent the darkest and most devastating period in its history in the Old Testament. The Babylonian army, under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar, decimated Israel by taking many Jewish people into Babylonian "work camps" for seventy years (Jer. 25:9-14; 29:10).
- C. In Deuteronomy 28:25-66, Moses prophesied the destruction that was inflicted on Jerusalem and Israel by the Babylonian armies in 586 BC and the Roman armies in 70 AD. However, Moses' prophecy of disaster has not yet been *completely* fulfilled; it will happen in the end times. The destruction that the Babylonians and the Romans brought upon Israel in 586 BC and 70 AD is a prophetic foreshadowing of what will happen under the Antichrist's empire in the end times.

<sup>32</sup>“Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people...<sup>41</sup>for they shall go into captivity...<sup>49</sup>The LORD will bring a nation against you...<sup>50</sup>a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young...<sup>52</sup>They shall besiege you at all your gates...<sup>64</sup>Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other...<sup>65</sup>And among those nations you shall find no rest...” (Deut. 28:32, 41, 49-52, 64-65)

- D. It is important to understand the 70-year period in which Israel was in captivity in Babylon in order to understand the Old Testament prophets. Many of them were either preparing Israel for the military invasions of the Babylonian army, or they were looking back to interpret it as a picture of the judgment and deliverance at the end of the age (Zech. 12-14; Ezek. 38-39; Jer. 16).
- E. Joel’s prophecy of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem (Joel 2:1-9) was probably given to Israel a decade or two before this great disaster occurred.
- F. The Holy Spirit’s purpose in including Joel 2:1-9 in the Scripture was not just to give us a historical record of a past calamity; it also serves as a prophetic picture of Israel’s greatest shaking occurring at the end of the age. Babylon’s military invasion in 586 BC foreshadows the most severe invasion of Israel by the Antichrist’s worldwide empire in the future (Zech. 12-14).
- G. God’s purpose for including Joel 3 in the Scripture was to describe the greatest ***deliverance of Israel*** and the greatest ***destruction of her enemies***. This was partially fulfilled by the fall of Babylon. Its ultimate fulfillment will be when the Antichrist’s empire falls (Rev. 19:11-21).
- H. God repeatedly pointed to the exodus from Egypt as a picture of His deliverance, as He pointed to the Babylonian invasion of 586 BC as a picture of His judgment. Both are prophetic pictures in the Old Testament of judgment and deliverance that will come to Israel in the end times.
- I. Joel carries both messages: first, God’s judgment on rebellious Israel, who refuses God’s mercy (Joel 1:1-2:9); second, judgment on Israel’s reprobate enemies in order to deliver Israel (Joel 3). God will once again deliver His people just as He did in Moses’ time, and He will once again use an evil leader (Antichrist) as He used Nebuchadnezzar, for example.
1. The book of Joel has an application for the end-time agricultural, economic, and military crisis. The nations will also witness an unprecedented worldwide release of the Spirit.
  2. The *complete* fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy will include the Joel 1 locust plague (agricultural and economic crisis, Rev. 8), the Joel 2 military invasion (Zech. 12-14), and the Joel 2 worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.
- J. In the end times, God’s people will experience the greatest heights of victory in the midst of the greatest hour of pressure and persecution. ***It will be our finest hour.***

## VI. HABAKKUK AND ZEPHANIAH ALSO PROPHESED THE BABYLONIAN INVASION

- A. God raised up other prophets in Joel's generation. I believe that *Habakkuk and Zephaniah* were contemporaries of Joel. Joel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are similar in their language and message of God's judgment on rebellious Israel by Babylon. They each cried, "Trouble is coming to those who refuse mercy. Cry for mercy and return to God in repentance with fasting and prayer!"
- B. I assume these three were friends, each participating in this difficult assignment of warning a prosperous and religious nation that great trouble was coming soon. Few listened to them.
- C. *Jeremiah and Ezekiel* came soon after them; possibly a decade or so later, yet preceding the Babylonian invasion. Isaiah and Micah also prophesied of this judgment about 100 years earlier.
- D. The message of the Old Testament prophets was unpopular with the majority. Their message was opposed, thought to be wrong and irrelevant. End-time forerunners will face similar opposition.
- E. We are possibly in the early days of the generation that will see a worldwide outpouring of glory, along with intensifying pressures, that will culminate with the second coming of Jesus.
- F. The Lord often gives a prophetic warning several decades ahead of time to prepare the people.
- G. The role of forerunners is to sound the trumpet and gather the people to solemn assemblies to cry out for mercy, warn of coming troubles, and prophesy of the great increase of God's glory.
  - 1. The Western world has been experiencing a degree of economic prosperity with much religious liberty over the last several decades. However, things are about to change.
  - 2. When the Babylonian army approached Israel, the message of Joel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah was taken far more seriously by the Jewish people. In a similar way, the forerunner message will be received as significant by many as negative events increase.

## VII. PREMISE 3: GOD USES EVIL LEADERS AND MILITARY INVASION

- A. In the Old Testament, God judged rebellious nations through *military invasions*. He used wicked kings and armies as *His instrument of judgment* against rebellious nations (Hab. 1).
- B. We are sometimes offended by the idea of God sending a military crisis to judge a nation.
- C. God sets the boundary lines that limit the actions of earthly rulers. Satan also acts inside the perimeters that God sets for him. We see this principle in the life of Job. Satan wanted to kill Job and his faith, but God put boundary lines of restriction on Satan.
- D. After a season of testing, Job ended up with a radiant heart and more blessings than before.
- E. God either *raises up* or *allows* evil leaders and their nations and uses them as His tool to discipline other nations until they cry out to God for mercy and deliverance.

- F. The people of Joel’s generation were surely offended by his message that God was going to send the wicked armies of Babylon to discipline them as a nation.

### VIII. PREMISE 4: THE COMING THEOLOGICAL CRISIS—THREE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

<sup>18</sup>*“The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come...” (Rev. 11:18)*

<sup>6</sup>*“Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” (Mt. 11:6)*

<sup>20</sup>*The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (Jer. 23:20)*

- A. When God’s judgments increase in the land, a theological crisis emerges in the earth. Many questions will arise. I identify three questions that leaders in the Body of Christ must answer. These questions are not new; God’s shepherds have always had to answer them.

- B. **Question 1:** If God is a God of love, why will He allow this?

1. The most common question that God’s people grapple with is: how can a God of love *allow* and even *raise up* evil nations to be the rod of discipline? It was this tension that Habakkuk wrestled through when he cried to God about the Babylon invasion of Israel.

<sup>13</sup>*“Why do You look on those who deal treacherously [Babylonians], and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person [Israel] more righteous than he?” (Hab. 1:13)*

2. In essence Habakkuk prayed, “Lord, how can You say that You are righteous when You use the evil nation of Babylon to judge rebellious Israel who is not as wicked?”

3. **Answer 1:** The God of love has no contradiction in His heart when He judges a rebellious nation to stop them from oppressing people and to wake them up spiritually so that they may also be saved. His goal is to remove everything that hinders love. God’s judgments result in people learning righteousness (Isa. 26:9).

<sup>9</sup>*When Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants...learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:9)*

- C. **Question 2:** What can the righteous do to stop or minimize God’s judgment in a nation?

<sup>30</sup>*“I sought for a man among them who would...stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.” (Ezek. 22:30)*

<sup>14</sup>*“If My people...will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chr. 7:14)*

1. What role do the saints play in stopping God’s judgments?
  2. **Answer 2:** God calls intercessors to stand in the gap, between Him (Joel 2:12-17) and the sinful nation, to ask Him to remove, or at least minimize, His judgments (Joel 2:13-14).
- D. **Question 3:** What do the righteous say and do before and after God’s judgments?
1. What specifically are God’s prophetic messengers to call the people to do?
  2. **Answer 3:** A careful study of the book of Joel gives us some of these answers.
  3. God desires to strengthen His people with understanding about His heart and ways. Isaiah said that revelation of God will be our wisdom and stability in times of crisis (Isa. 33:6).  
***<sup>6</sup>Wisdom [revelation of God’s heart and ways] and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure. (Isa. 33:6)***

**IX. PREMISE 5: THE END-OF-THE-AGE FORERUNNER MINISTRY**

- A. When trouble comes, God is accused—even by His people. These accusations must be answered with the truth about God’s heart. He is perfect in love and wisdom and is just in all His ways (Rev. 15:3-4). We can be filled with confidence in God’s love when we understand His heart.  
***<sup>3</sup>...Saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord GOD Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints. <sup>4</sup>...for Your judgments have been manifested.” (Rev. 15:3-4)***
- B. Satan desires to plant lies about God in the hearts of God’s people. One of God’s answers is to raise up forerunners who will prepare the people so they do not accuse God in the coming crisis.

**X. PREMISE 6: THE NEED TO BE IMMersed IN THE BOOK OF JOEL**

***<sup>1</sup>He said to me, “Son of man...eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” <sup>2</sup>So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. <sup>3</sup>He said, “Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll...” I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. (Ezek. 3:1-3)***

***<sup>9</sup>I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book [similar to Ezekiel’s scroll].” And he said to me, “Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” <sup>10</sup>Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it [meditated on it to understand it], and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. When I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. <sup>11</sup>And he said to me, “You must prophesy...about many...nations...and kings.” (Rev. 10:9-11)***

- A. God is bringing forth those who understand His heart of love in the midst of judgment like Ezekiel and John did; they will eat the scroll (or meditate on the message) in its sweetness and its bitterness.
- B. The sweetness of this message is what God sovereignly accomplishes in His love and mercy. It is also a bitter message because it results in great pain coming to many people.

- C. The Lord is raising up men and women like Joel who digest the message thoroughly, including both the sweet and the bitter dimensions. The greatest revival and crisis in history are coming. The Church will be prepared with forerunners who have stood in the counsel of the Lord, those who have “eaten the scroll” of His Word, and thus, have strong understanding of what the Scripture says about the generation in which the Lord returns.
- D. The point of immersing our lives in the message of the book of Joel is to produce confidence in our hearts of God’s love and wisdom, which dislodges all possible accusations in us against God. Moreover, it is to partner with the Spirit in proclaiming the truth of God’s heart to others, thus replacing Satan’s lies for truth, causing offense towards God to be replaced with love and trust.
- E. Forerunners help people have confidence in God’s love and wisdom in times of crisis.
- F. In doing this, they become a “voice” rather than an “echo” in the coming hour of crisis. In that day, forerunners will be voices preparing the Lord’s people for His return and the unique dynamics related to it.