

A Severe Locust Plague Comes Upon Israel

Joel 1:1-14

Joel 1:1-14 – *“The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. ² Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? ³ Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, And their children another generation.*

⁴ What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten. ⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep; wail, all you drinkers of wine, Because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.

⁶ For a nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number; His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion. ⁷ He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree; He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white.

⁸ Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. ⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the LORD; The priests mourn, who minister to the LORD. ¹⁰ The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, The new wine is dried up, the oil fails.

¹¹ Be ashamed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field has perished. ¹² The vine has dried up; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—All the trees of the field are withered; surely joy has withered away from the sons of men. ¹³ Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

¹⁴ Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.”

Background Notes

What do we know about the prophet of the Lord named Joel? All we know is what is mentioned in Joel 1:1 - Joel was the son of Pethuel, and his prophetic book was the word of the Lord. As the word of the Lord, the prophecy of Joel certainly has something to say to us today, just as it did in ancient Israel.

The theme of Joel's prophecy is **“The Day of the Lord.”** This key phrase, *“the day of the Lord,”* is found five times in the book. Joel 1:15 - *“Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand.”* Joel 2:1 - *“Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand...”* Joel 2:11- *“For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?”* Joel 2:31 - *“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord...”* And Joel 3:14 - *“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”*

As we study the prophecy of Joel, we will see, as in a number of the prophetic books, that the day of the Lord has both an historical significance and a future significance. In other words, some prophecies about the day of the Lord have already been fulfilled, but most of them await to be fulfilled in the End Times.

The prophecy of Joel was one of the earliest written prophetic books. One of the indications that Joel was written early is the mention of Israel's enemies at this time. Joel 3:4 - *"Indeed, what have you to do with Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against Me?"* Tyre and Sidon were cities of ancient Phoenicia. Phoenicia and Philistia were enemies of Israel early in her history as a nation.

Edom's violence against Judah is mentioned in Joel 3:19. We believe that this attack of Edom (also mentioned in the book of Obadiah) was early in Judah's history as a nation.

So most likely the prophecy of Joel was written between 835 and 830 BC, not too many years after Obadiah's prophecy, while Joash was king of Judah.

Doctrinal Points

1. God uses natural disasters to speak to a nation.

Verses 1-14 are a description of a devastating locust plague that took place in the land of Israel. Locust invasions still take place in the Middle East today. Millions of locusts darken the sky, and they eat every bit of vegetation available in their path. Locust plagues can vary in their intensity, and the one described here in Joel 1 was a big one. Read verses 2-3 again - this was a big natural disaster. This terrible locust plague would be remembered for years to come – in fact, for generations to come.

Verse 4 mentions four different kinds of locusts:

What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten;

What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten;

And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

Most likely Joel was referring to the different waves of the locusts in this devastating locust plague. The main point here, however, is that the locusts had *completely* devastated the land.

Look at verses 7 and 10-12. Every area of life was disrupted in the land because of the locust plague. Even the worship and service to the Lord was disrupted: *"The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of*

the Lord; the priests mourn, who minister to the Lord.” The pain of the people of the land was like that of a woman who had lost her future husband in death. *“Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth”* (v8).

The normal way of life was totally disrupted. *“Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men”*(v12). Israel would have known that this locust plague was not by chance. God was speaking.

God is sovereign over nature, and God uses natural disasters to speak to nations. God used fire and brimstone to speak to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. God used the plagues in Egypt to speak to Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt. God used the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in the 1st century to speak to Pompeii and the corrupt Roman Empire. God still uses natural disasters to speak to nations. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, volcanoes, tornados, blizzards, droughts – all natural disasters are under God’s control.

God uses natural disasters to cause people to realize that they are not independent of Him, and to remind people that mankind is not in charge. How many disasters will it take to turn our nation back to God? God uses natural disasters to speak to nations.

2. God uses natural disasters to speak to His people.

Israel would have known in no uncertain terms that God was speaking to them through this locust plague. Under the Mosaic Law, God had said that if His people would not trust Him, and if they disobeyed Him, then He would have to send consuming locusts as a form of discipline. Deuteronomy 28:38 - *“You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it.”* So Israel knew that God was using this locust plague as a wake-up call for His people.

In this case the discipline had a good result. A national time of prayer and fasting was called (v13-14). The people realized that God was speaking, and they responded with prayer and fasting. What a great example to follow! If only our nation would seriously call for a national time of prayer and fasting and repentance, God would be pleased.

The principle of 2 Chronicles 7:14 still applies today: *“If My people who are called by My name 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.”*

Churches, ministries, families, and individuals can also practice times of prayer and fasting. If we sense that God is disrupting our lives with natural events (or in any form of disruption), it would be a good idea to call for a day of prayer. We’ve done this a number of times at Emmaus Bible College. Families can have a day of prayer and fasting during times of crisis. The fasting can include fasting from food, but perhaps even more appropriate would be fasting from entertainment, like TV or video games. God can use times of crisis, including natural disasters, to speak to His people.

Practical Application

Remember Mount St. Helens!

Do you remember the eruption of Mount St. Helens? Mount St. Helens is the volcano that erupted in the state of Washington in May 1980. The eruption of Mount St. Helens was a natural disaster, and God can speak through natural disasters.

Did God speak through the eruption of Mount St. Helens? Yes, He did! Not in the same sense as He spoke out against the moral corruption of Pompeii through the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the 1st century. But God spoke out against the godless theory of evolution with the eruption of Mount St. Helens.

Let me explain. The theory of evolution points to fossils as proof of evolution. Fossils are found in layers of sedimentary rock, that supposedly took millions of years to precipitate out of water and slowly build up, layer upon layer. Thus it is theorized that the fossils contained in these layers would be the record of evolution. One problem is that the fossils don't line up in the rock layers according to the theory of evolution.

But there's more – and here's the point now. As a result of the eruption of Mount St. Helens, and the catastrophic mudflows that followed the eruption, a miniature grand canyon was formed on the north side of the mountain. Layers of sediment were rapidly built up by mudflows, and then, before the layers hardened, the Toutle River carved a canyon through the soft layers.

When you stand in that canyon with the many layers of sediments towering above you, you could easily be convinced that these many layers of rock took thousands of years to build up. Guess what, folks? Those layers were built up in a matter of **hours**, and the carving of the canyon took only a matter of **days**! And now all the layers have hardened into sedimentary rock. So – it doesn't take millions and millions of years for sedimentary rock layers to build up!

Fossils are the result of quick burial in rapidly built-up sediment, such as you would have had in the great Flood at the time of Noah, as recorded in the Bible. So fossils are the result of death in the biblical Flood, and the layers of sedimentary rock in which the fossils are found are the result of rapid build-up of sediments during the Flood. They are not the record of evolution.

So - remember Mount St. Helens!