

Tuesday Evening Bible Study
Series #8: The Minor Prophets
Session #6: Joel
Tuesday, February 17, 2017

Introduction to Joel

- Jo'el means "Yahweh is God." The roots are the same as the name Elijah.
- The setting of Joel is Judah.
- The dating is unclear. There is no chronological formula (e.g. reference to a year during the reign of a king) to date Joel.
 - The dating ranges from 800 to 300 BCE.
 - Non-mention of the enemies of Judah (Syria, Assyria, or Babylon) suggests an early date in the 800s.
 - Some scholars suggest that the three enemies are not mentioned because Judah had already fallen to them centuries before, which would date it in the post-exilic period around 400 BCE.
 - A third possibility is late pre-exilic (ca. 600 BCE), because it *does* mention Greeks and makes reference to literature associated with the Persian period. The name Joel is prominent in Persian-period biblical literature.

Summary

A terrible plague of locusts is followed by a severe famine throughout the land. Joel uses these happenings as the catalyst to send words of warning to Judah. Unless the people repent quickly and completely, enemy armies will devour the land as did the natural elements. Joel appeals to all the people and the priests of the land to fast and humble themselves as they seek God's forgiveness. If they will respond, there will be renewed material and spiritual blessings for the nation. But the Day of the Lord is coming. At this time the dreaded locusts will seem as gnats in comparison, as all nations receive His judgment.

The overriding theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the Lord, a day of God's wrath and judgment. This is the Day in which God reveals His attributes of wrath, power and holiness, and it is a terrifying day to His enemies. In the first chapter, the Day of the Lord is experienced historically by the plague of locusts upon the land. Chapter 2:1-17 is a transitional chapter in which Joel uses the metaphor of the locust plague and drought to renew a call to repentance. Chapters 2:18-3:21 describes the Day of the Lord in eschatological terms and answers the call to repentance with prophecies of physical restoration (2:21-27), spiritual restoration (2:28-32), and national restoration (3:1-21).

Outline

- A. Superscription (1:1)
- B. The crisis and call to action (1:2 – 2:17)
 1. Lament over the ruin of the country (1:2-12)
 2. A call to repentance and prayer (1:13-20)
 3. The day of the Lord is near! (2:1-11)
 4. A renewed call to repentance (2:12-17)
- C. God's response & promise (2:18-27)
- D. A future of well-being for Israel (2:28 – 3:21)
 1. God's spirit poured out (2:28-30)
 2. Judgment on the nations (3:1-8)
 3. Judgment on the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:9-17)
 4. The glorious future of Judah (3:18-21)

Notes

- A. Superscription (1:1)
 - No mention of a king could suggest that there was no longer a monarchy.
- B. The crisis and call to action (1:2 – 2:17)
 - A series of poems, some of which identify a crisis, some of which call the people to action.
 - 1. Lament over the ruin of the country (1:2-12)
 - Elders probably refers to local or village officials
 - Some scholars suggest that the four kinds of locust represent four different invasions.
 - 2. A call to repentance and prayer (1:13-20)
 - Here Joel calls for a ritual lament (sackcloth, wailing, offerings)
 - 3. The day of the Lord is near! (2:1-11)
 - This is a prominent theme in Joel.
 - 4. A renewed call to repentance (2:12-17)
 - This represents an abrupt change.
- C. God's response & promise (2:18-27)
 - God responds to the people's lament
 - Northern army – with the exception of Egypt, most of Israel's invaders came from the north.
 - eastern sea = Persian Gulf
 - western sea = Mediterranean Sea
 - stench = victims of locust swarms describe a fetid odor from the millions of dead insects that remain when the plague is over.
- D. A future of well-being for Israel (2:28 – 3:21)
 - God will again bring victory that will result in marvelous fertility
 - 1. God's spirit poured out (2:28-32)
 - All will be prophets in the "day of the Lord."
 - The spirit will fall on all people regardless of status or class, like as has never been seen before.
 - vv. 30-31 are apocalyptic in language—an unusual switch of genre. ?later inclusion. Portents = cosmic events
 - 2. Judgment on the nations (3:1-8)
 - Judgment against the nations that were cruel to Israel.
 - 3. Judgment on the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:9-17)
 - "Jehoshaphat" may be a play on the word "shaphat" = judge.
 - 3:16a is identical to Amos 1:2. Some biblical scholars believe Amos took it from Joel.
 - 4. The glorious future of Judah (3:18-21)
 - 3:18a is almost identical to the first part of Amos 9:13.
 - Reference to the Wadi Shittim (Wadi of Acacias), may symbolize fertility.
 - The book ends with the Lord dwelling in Zion.

Resources

Notes from The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), 2010

Notes from HarperCollins Study Bible (NRSV), 1989

James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1983)

"Book of Joel," <https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Joel.html>