

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

MAY 10 - 15, 2021



**COURSE** SERMON SERIES  
5/9 - 8/1  
**CORRECTIONS**

THE MINOR PROPHETS

# MONDAY

## Isaiah 13: 1-13

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Joel is one of the few Old Testament prophetic books that contains no overt reference to its historical context. However, there are clues within the text that suggest it was written as early as the late 9th century BC and as late as the 5th century BC. One clue is that Joel seems familiar with many of the early Hebrew prophets and uses concepts found in them, sometimes with a different meaning.

For example, several times Joel mentions the “Day of the LORD,” a concept that is introduced by the prophet Isaiah (13:6, 9) and also referenced by Amos (5:18, 20), as well as Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. Joel also reverses a prophetic statement found in both Isaiah (2:4) and Micah (4:3), both of whom wrote, “*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*” Joel, in contrast, writes, “*Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears*” (3:10).

This familiarity with earlier prophets, along with specific mention of Israel having been sold to the “Greeks,” (3:6) suggests that Joel is a postexilic prophet who likely wrote after Israel had returned to Jerusalem in the late 6th century BC. Throughout his prophecies he demonstrates familiarity with and concern for the priestly service at the temple (e.g., Joel 1:13-14; 2:14-17), which was restored around 515 BC.

Locating Joel in this context makes him a contemporary of Haggai and Zechariah. This period of Israel's history was a time of tremendous challenges as Israel attempted to discern God's work in its midst. It is instructive that Joel turned to biblical themes familiar to him and his contemporaries as he attempted to discern God's work in His world.

As we shall see this week, Joel interpreted the events of his day in light of the Day of the LORD. This theme included two dimensions: a Day of Judgment against those who had opposed God and a Day of Salvation, a day when God would act on behalf of His people. As Joel used the prophetic tradition to understand what was happening in his day (i.e., a locust plague), so many centuries later the Apostle Peter would use Joel to explain the amazing events of Pentecost. Both Joel and Peter found new meaning in the ancient biblical texts as they interpreted them in light of what God was doing in their midst.

## QUESTIONS

What can you do to become more familiar with Scripture? How do you interpret the events of the past year in light of Scripture? Which biblical texts seem most relevant to the health and social issues we face?

## PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Living Stones Ministries (LSM) covets your prayers as they work with families whose lives have been upended when a loved one identifies as LGBTQ. Pray against the enemy's attempts to keep family loved ones isolated. The goal of LSM is to bring healing, to give hope, and to be a redemptive resource for these hurting families.

# TUESDAY

## Joel 1

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In Joel 1 the prophet describes a locust plague that had brought great suffering to the people of his land. Locust plagues are not uncommon in the Middle East and East Africa. In fact, one in Kenya was reported to cover nearly 1,000 square miles. At 80 million to 160 million insects per square mile, that represents a massive number of insects eating everything in sight.

We do not know how big the swarm was that Joel witnessed in his day, but he used four different words to refer to the locusts: swarming locusts, great locusts, young locusts, and other locusts (Joel 1:4). Joel compared this plague of locusts to a mighty army (v. 6) and described the destruction they brought: vines laid waste, fig trees ruined, trees stripped of bark (v. 7), fields ruined, the ground dried up, and the grain, new wine, and olive oil destroyed (v. 10). There is little wonder that he counsels the farmers to despair, wail, and grieve (v. 11) and states, *“Surely the people’s joy is withered away”* (v. 12).

While locust plagues are a natural phenomenon, Joel saw this particular plague as evidence of the Day of the LORD. The Day of the LORD had a rich prophetic tradition in Israel. Joel linked that tradition to the event of a locust plague because he saw it as a fulfillment of God’s promise of judgment on the land for Israel’s disobedience: *“You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land”* (Deuteronomy 28:41-42). The locusts

were not just a destructive pest that devastated the crops but agents of God's judgment that called for a response of repentance. Joel called his people to specific actions (1:13-14):

- Put on sackcloth
- Wail
- Declare a holy fast
- Call a sacred assembly
- Cry out to the LORD

Joel concluded chapter 1 with a personal lament: *"To you, LORD, I call"* (v. 19). Joel was in tune with what God was doing in the world around him and challenged his readers to do the same.

## QUESTIONS

Given all that transpired over the past 15 months, are we as Christians able to recognize God's work in our world? Without claiming that the coronavirus pandemic is God's judgment on a disobedient world, do we recognize the need for both national and personal repentance? Do we identify God's concern for the oppressed in our society's struggle with issues of racial justice? What is God saying to His Church today and how would He have us respond?

## PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

During the year Living Stones Ministries sponsors several online events to bring encouragement, understanding and hope to families in crisis. Pray for the clear leading of the Holy Spirit in the planning and implementation of these online events. Pray for the families impacted by sexual brokenness to know God and thrive.

# WEDNESDAY

## Joel 2:1-17

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Joel continued in chapter two with the Day of the LORD theme. This Day is close at hand (2:1). In the following 10 verses (vv. 2-11) Joel described an invading army, one that relentlessly marched on destroying everything in its path, one that caused anguish among the nations (v. 6), and one that caused disturbances both on earth and in heaven (v. 10). It is unclear whether this army is simply another way of describing the locust plague (albeit, with some poetic license), or whether the locust plague was introduced to foreshadow a military threat about to descend upon Israel. One can find evidence to support either interpretation, but it is perhaps instructive that the army described here does not attack, kill, and plunder but seems to be content simply invading and consuming everything in sight.

What is clear is that whatever type of army is coming, this is the LORD's doing: *"The LORD thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys His command"* (v. 11). The invading army is not merely an accident of nature (i.e., locust plague) or an arrogant military power flexing its muscles (i.e., an invading nation). This is the LORD's army carrying out His command. He is exercising judgment upon His own people.

In the remaining verses of today's reading, Joel returns again to a call to repentance expressed in one primary response: returning wholeheartedly to the LORD. *"Rend your heart and not your*

garments” (v. 13). The call to tear their hearts in repentance—tearing them away from all other attachments and loyalties—is a powerful visual image of what true repentance is. Notice that the rationale for returning to the LORD is not because of how sinful the people have been but because of how gracious the LORD is: “for His is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity” (v. 13). The need for repentance is urgent: an assembly should be called and everyone should come. All should implore God to turn aside from the promised devastation because that is what the LORD is like: He listens to the pleas of His humble people.

## QUESTIONS

Do we, like Joel, see God’s freedom to act as God chooses, even when those actions have unpleasant consequences for God’s people? Do we turn to God because we know Him to be gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love? As Christians living in an increasingly secular society, how can we ensure we represent the fullness of God’s character (i.e., holiness and grace) to those who do not know Him?

## PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Pray for LSM staff as they continue to develop children’s resources that promote a biblical view of sexuality and gender. They need wisdom to use God’s Word to help build character and self-confidence in children. Pray that the staff will communicate clearly who they are in Christ and celebrate their gifts.

# THURSDAY

## Joel 2:18-32

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The whole tenor of this book shifts as the LORD replies to His people: *“Then the LORD was jealous for His land and took pity on His people”* (2:18). In the following verses, the LORD’s salvation is presented as the Great Reversal, the LORD restoring all that was lost in the locust plague. *“I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully”* (v. 19); *“the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green”* and *“the trees are bearing their fruit”* (v. 22); *“the threshing floors will be filled with grain”* and *“the vats will overflow with new wine and oil”* (v. 24); and *“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten”* (v. 25). Joel again uses four different words to describe the locusts and the LORD identifies them as *“my great army that I sent among you”* (v. 25). The identification of the locusts as the army that had previously been implicit is now made explicit.

Within this declaration by the LORD, key elements of Joel’s theology shine through. The LORD is both jealous and One who takes pity on His people. He restores the rain because He is faithful (v. 23). He works wonders for His people that they might praise Him (v. 26). He desires to be known by His people and make His presence known among them (v. 27). Joel wants people to know their God and His love for His people.



The LORD's favor does not stop with the restoration of the land, crops, and abundant produce. Remember, Joel's call to his people had been to *rend* their hearts and now the LORD declares how He intends to *mend* their hearts. He promises to do this by pouring out His Spirit on all people: sons, daughters, old men, young men, women (vv. 28-29). To this point in Israel's history, the pouring out of God's Spirit was largely reserved for special leaders and/or those given special tasks. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed by God's Spirit at various times. The day is coming, the LORD promises, when He will pour out His Spirit on all His people and will save all those who call upon Him. The Day of the LORD is still coming (v. 31), but now it brings salvation rather than destruction.

## QUESTIONS

Reflect on whether you know the LORD as He desires to be known. To what extent is your focus on what the LORD can do *for* you (e.g., restoration of relationships and prosperity) rather than what the LORD wants to do *in* you by the Spirit? Ask the LORD to show you what He wants to do *in* you.

## PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Prayer for God's guidance of LSM support group leaders, who've been impacted by a year of COVID-19, as they continue to reach hurting families. Many of these leaders demonstrated much creativity as they implemented innovative ministry methods to bring a healing approach through God's Word both in person and online.

# FRIDAY

## Joel 3

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In the final chapter of Joel, the prophet envisioned another manifestation of the Day of the LORD: the LORD's judgment upon nations that had abused Israel. The LORD plans to bring all the nations together in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2), a name that simply means, "The LORD judges." The picture Joel presented is one marked by a divine trial, judgment, retribution, and destruction of Israel's enemies. While Israel likely saw some justice in the nations being paid back for the things they had done, the people of Israel are primarily spectators rather than warriors in this judgment.

After the nations are all summoned to the Valley of Jehoshaphat (vv. 9-11), the prophet pled, "*Bring down your warriors, LORD!*" This day of judgment is accompanied by celestial signs: "*The sun and moon will be darkened and the stars no longer shine*" (v. 15). In this context, the prophet stated, "*The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble*" (v. 16). This statement evokes the image of the LORD appearing at Sinai to give the law to Israel. The same LORD who gave the law will hold the nations accountable for how they have treated others, particularly His people, Israel.

In the midst of such proclamations of judgment against the nations, Joel reminded his audience that "*the LORD will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold for the people of Israel*" (v. 16). This statement

precedes promises of blessing to God's people, including promises of God's presence, Jerusalem's holiness, protection from foreign invaders, abundant produce, and never-ending water (vv. 17-18). Such promises need to be seen in the context of Deuteronomy's blessings upon Israel if they kept their covenant with the LORD. While Israel has not kept its covenant with the LORD, Joel knows that the LORD will not allow that to stop Him from still blessing His people. After all, the LORD is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. And He, the LORD, dwells in Zion (v. 21), i.e., in the midst of His people.

## QUESTIONS

Do we, like the prophet Joel, recognize that judgment is the LORD's prerogative? When others offend or mistreat us, are we able to leave matters of justice up to the Lord? There are, of course, times when we must take action to stop or prevent abuse. But do we see that we too are responsible to treat others with human dignity and respect, to do what is just and right, and even to love others as ourselves? To whom might God have you show greater dignity, respect, and love this week?

## PRAYERS FOR LIVING STONES MINISTRIES

Pray for Denise Shick, LSM director, who offers pastoral care at an all-time high level along with writing resource material and planning events. Pray for Melinda Serrano, the office assistant, who juggles many responsibilities and ministers to hurting callers; and for Karin Chavis, the care coordinator, who ministers to and prays with family members nationally and internationally.



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