

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

## **I Will Pour Out My Spirit**

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**Joel 2**

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### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to the Book of Joel. In terms of background, we actually know less about Joel than just about any other Old Testament author. We don't know who he was, when he lived or where he came from. He makes no concrete historical references and he is not mentioned in any other books so there has been a wide range of opinions expressed about where he fits into Old Testament chronology. The simple answer is we don't know for sure. And not knowing isn't really a problem because the value in Joel is not really that he opens up for us a particular episode in Israelite history; the value in Joel is that he establishes a general blueprint for how God addresses sin and idolatry among his people and how God will work in the future to execute his final purposes with respect to redemption, wrath and renewal. My plan this morning is to walk you through the whole book so that you can see these patterns and respond accordingly. First of all let's notice:

### **How God Works Generally With Respect To His People**

Take a look at 1:2-4:

- <sup>2</sup> 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?
- <sup>3</sup> Tell your children about it,  
 Let your children *tell* their children,  
 And their children another generation.
- <sup>4</sup> What the chewing <sup>4</sup>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. (Joel 1:2-4. NKJV)

I think we are talking about an actual locust infestation here but the way these locusts are described suggests that the prophet wants us to understand them also in a spiritual light. Certainly that becomes explicit in Revelation 9 when the Apostle John borrows the imagery from Joel 1 – there the locusts are clearly demonic, but here we are probably meant to see real locusts, with the suggestion that behind the locusts there is spiritual malice. Locust infestations actually were not themselves that unusual in the ancient world but four successive locust attacks convinces the prophet that these events cannot be thought of us as run of the mill misfortune, these events are extraordinary and they point to the Providential Hand of God. God sent the locusts! God orchestrated this series of extraordinary trials. The prophet appeals to the old men because as people who have been around the block a time or two, they should be able to recognise that these days are not normal days. These are strange days, the prophet says and they speak a warning from God. What Joel wants us to understand is that:

### **1. God uses extraordinary trials to humble his people and to halt idolatry**

There are a few really important truths here that we need to see. When extraordinarily bad things happen there are always a complex of causes that need to be understood. Take 9/11 for just a second. That was an extraordinarily horrific event. The immediate cause of that event was the relatively small group of Islamic Jihadists out of Saudi Arabia and Yemen who planned and executed those terrible events. But behind that cause there is spiritual or demonic agency. Demons went forth and stirred up madness. But behind the demons going forth there was the decree of Almighty God. The prophet says to the old men, “You know that things like this don’t just happen. God is Sovereign and nothing like this can happen unless God decrees it.” That is the sort of statement that could get you in trouble in Joel’s day just as it can today but you old

men and you old women who have seen a bit of history know that it is true. God uses extraordinary trials to humble his people and to halt idolatry.

The prophet says that this famine brought on by the decree of God, the agency of demons and the instrumentality of locusts has been so severe that the worship inside God's house has been halted. This isn't hard to imagine. The worship under the Old Covenant involved a fair amount of agriculture produce. There were grain offerings and animal offerings and it is very easy to imagine how a severe famine could literally shut down the worship of God's people. That's what happened. There were not enough animals and not enough grain to run the church. Worship ground to a halt. Now why would God decree a series of disasters that would specifically target the worship of his own people? Scholars often suggest that we have to read the 12 minor prophets as a whole, as a collective in order to properly understand them and I think they are right. There is a particularly close relationship between Amos, Hosea and Joel. Amos 5 says this:

- <sup>21</sup> "I hate, I despise your feast days,  
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.  
<sup>22</sup> Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,  
I will not accept *them*,  
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.  
<sup>23</sup> Take away from Me the noise of your songs,  
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. (Amos 5:21-23. NKJV)

Why would God target the worship of his own house? Because he had come to hate the worship of his own house. Amos tells us that it was partly because people were worshipping in the house of God but living cruel, selfish and unjust lives the other 6 days of the week. Hosea tells us that it was also because of the syncretism of the people and the corruption and ignorance of the clergy:

- <sup>6</sup> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.  
Because you have rejected knowledge,  
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;  
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,  
I also will forget your children. (Hosea 4:6. NKJV)

The prophets are saying that God showed up for church one Sabbath and the people sang their songs and offered their offerings but the preacher spoke nonsense, despising the Word of the Lord and the people went out and lived evil, corrupt, self serving lives, abusing the poor and

fornicating with the gods of the nations and he said, “ENOUGH! Shut it down. Better no worship than this worship.” And that, the prophet said is what was happening now. This famine, this serious of extraordinary events that we are enduring is God’s work to slow us down, humble us down and shut down our idolatries.

Now we need to pause here and understand that. The God of the modern day church, who looks suspiciously like Santa Clause does not quite square with the God we are seeing in this text. In this text we meet a God who will make war on his own people when they begin to forget him and when they begin to worship the gods of the world. Listen to me Christian, if you begin to drift into superficial Sunday only worship God WILL MAKE WAR ON YOU until he has your attention and until he secures your sole allegiance. He will trip you up, press you down, he will shake all your idols and punch holes in all your buckets until you return to him and give him the allegiance you swore at your conversion. God is a jealous God and he fights for and WITH those whom he loves.

## **2. From within trials and difficulties, God calls for repentance and warns of escalation**

The point of view for this prophetic book is clearly from within the time of extraordinary trial. The prophet is standing seemingly at the end of the fourth rather serious catastrophe, the fourth locust event and he is saying: “These events, extraordinary as they are, are merely harbingers of future wrath and judgment! They are warnings calling on us to repent and foretelling worse events yet to come if we should persist in our rebellion!” The prophet is standing after the four locust events and before the trumpet, which in the Bible often stands for the official beginning of a battle or the official dawning of a Divine Visitation and he says, “Do you think the four locust events were extraordinary? They were nothing. You haven’t seen anything yet!” Look at chapter 2:1ff:

<sup>1</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion,  
And sound an alarm in My holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;  
For the day of the LORD is coming,  
For it is at hand:

<sup>2</sup> A day of darkness and gloominess,  
A day of clouds and thick darkness,  
Like the morning *clouds* spread over the mountains.  
A people *come*, great and strong,  
The like of whom has never been;

Nor will there ever be any *such* after them,  
Even for many successive generations.

<sup>3</sup> A fire devours before them,  
And behind them a flame burns;  
The land *is* like the Garden of Eden before them,  
And behind them a desolate wilderness;  
Surely nothing shall escape them. (Joel 2:1-3. NKJV)

The prophet says: “I see an army and a war that will leave the land utterly barren and waste.” If we don’t repent, God has Act 2 and it will make Act 1 look like a Sunday School Picnic! After famine will come a war! This war will not simply be the random product of international politics, this will be a war instigated and directed by Almighty God. Look at 2:11:

<sup>11</sup> The LORD gives voice before His army,  
For His camp is very great;  
For strong *is the One* who executes His word.  
For the day of the LORD *is* great and very terrible;  
Who can endure it? (Joel 2:11. NKJV)

The prophet makes it very clear that God rides at the head of this destroying army. This war is an act of Divine Wrath. The Bible says some things about war that we should remember, on this day above all others. The number 4 in the Minor Prophets 4 as in Revelation is often associated with Divine Providence. Four is the number of the 4 winds, the four corners of the earth and it often represents God’s control over all the events that shape and move the world. In Zechariah 1 we meet the Old Testament four horsemen. The prophet asks who they are and he is told:

“These *are the ones* whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth.” (Zechariah 1:10. NKJV)

Their job in Zechariah 1 is to maintain the status quo until God is ready for the next stage of his developing plan and providence. Then in Zechariah 6 we have 4 horse drawn chariots which now represent the execution of God’s plan and providence – the horseman set the table and then at the time of God’s choosing the chariots go forth to execute. The prophet tells us who these FOUR are:

“These *are* four spirits of heaven, who go out from *their* station before the Lord of all the earth. (Zechariah 6:5. NKJV)

Four in the Old Testament often symbolizes the angelic agency that affects God’s Sovereign plan upon the earth. We see that in Revelation; we have the four horseman who represent conquest,

war, famine and plague. They are table setters. The Day of Wrath properly begins with the sixth seal – cosmic disturbances - a pattern we see borrowed directly from Joel. The point is simply this, Joel in harmony with the Minor Prophets and with the Book of Revelation views WAR as a tool of God's Providence to accomplish God's purposes of wrath and redemption. War is never an accident. War is always madness. That's why we never see it coming! Before WW1 people were saying that the financial systems of the great European powers were so interconnected that war was no longer possible. The politicians in Europe intentionally integrated the financial systems to make war impossible. A London insurance company insured German U-boats at the outbreak of WW1! They tried to create economic disincentives to make war insane. But war has always been insane and it happens anyway. After WW1 and the horrible butcher's bill they said that war was now too horrible to contemplate. They called WW1 the war to end all wars. With modern technology now – machine guns, tanks, etc. war was simply too costly to be embarked upon by any sane political actor. But what happened? We got an insane political actor – Adolf Hitler. And war happened again. Now we say that because of nuclear deterrents war will never happen again between great powers. It would be insane. But God turns the minds of madmen to his purpose – as ever he has done. War is always one mad man away and God can make it happen in a snap and the prophet says if we do not repent in these times of extraordinary trial, God will make a war to punish us for our sins.

But if God's people do repent, the Book of Joel promises that:

### **3. When there is repentance, God restores and refreshes**

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD will be zealous for His land,  
And pity His people.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD will answer and say to His people,  
“Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil,  
And you will be satisfied by them;  
I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. (Joel 2:18-19. NKJV)

God is prepared and ready to turn away from purposes of wrath towards favour and restoration! He will rebuild the worship of his house – he will provide again that which he took away and we will be satisfied and vindicated before the nations! God does not punish because he likes to punish, he does not chastise because he delights in trial and difficulty – he only uses those things to restore his people to a right relationship with himself. If we humble ourselves and worship

God as we were created to do, there is no need for these events to be prolonged or escalated, the prophet says. If we truly repent, not merely making an external show of it, if we truly repent God will repent – he will turn away from his purposes of wrath and he will restore and he will refresh.

The first half of the Book of Joel covers a lot of the same ground that is covered in the Book of Hosea. But unlike Hosea Joel in the second half of his book, moves from the general way that God works with respect to idolatry and sin among his people to a prophesy predicting how God will work in the future to execute his final purposes with respect to redemption, wrath and renewal.

### God's Future Work With Respect To Redemption, Wrath and Renewal

When John Calvin was giving his lectures on Joel that eventually he edited and made into his commentary on Joel he said: “We shall see as we proceed that the chapters have been absurdly and foolishly divided”. (John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries Volume XIV; p.xvi.) There is a clear subject break between 2:27 and 2:28 and every scholar agrees that the chapter break should be there. 2:27 is the end of section 1 and 2:28 is the start of section two and now Joel begins to look into the far future and he talks about the two great events of the latter days. The first great event in the last chapter of human history is the great outpouring of God's Spirit:

#### 1. God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh

<sup>28</sup> “And it shall come to pass afterward  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,  
Your young men shall see visions.

<sup>29</sup> And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29. NKJV)

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit seems to work in drips and drops and to empower here and there and God's work appears more narrow and focused in terms of the nation of Israel and within the nation the priests and the prophets but a day is coming says Joel, when the Spirit will be poured out in a torrent and it will be poured out broadly on all flesh – Jew and Gentile, male and female, young and old, slave and free. The words “all flesh” don't mean “all the people in

the world”, they mean “all kinds of people” – we see that played out in Acts 2 which Peter said was the fulfilment of this prophesy. The 120 gathered disciples came pouring out of the upper room preaching the Gospel in the tongues of all the gathered people. Men and women, rich and poor, young and old were prophesying under the power of the Holy Spirit in fulfilment of this sign and people from all over the world repented and came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Pentecost was the first of the two major events associated with the last days. It was a day of tremendous significance. On the Day of Pentecost with the pouring out of the Spirit broadly we see election going from national to personal and we see the priesthood and prophetic offices being generalized. That’s why as Protestants we believe in the priesthood of all believers – that doesn’t mean that we don’t have clergy, it means that we believe that the job of the clergy is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. This isn’t football with 50000 fatties screaming their lungs out while 22 guys on the field play the game. This is church where every member ministers. That’s the priesthood of all believers because of the broad and general outpouring of the Spirit.

Now because of the day and age we live in I need to stop here and address a side issue. There are so many silly arguments and distractions out there in Evangelicalism right now over the charismatic implications of this text. I don’t have time this morning to address all of them and it would be foolish of me to try. In fact if I were to write a book about the last 30 years of Evangelical history on this issue I think I would call it “Adventures In Missing The Point”. We argue today over whether speaking in tongues still exists, whether it is useful, whether it should happen in the prayer closet or over the microphone. We argue about whether being slain in the Spirit is a legit thing or evidence of demon possession, we argue about whether faith healers work for God or for the devil and we debate whether Spirit baptism happens at conversion or through some later subsequent experience. Now listen, I’m not saying those conversations aren’t important, but I am saying that most of those conversations miss the point of **WHY THE SPIRIT IS Poured OUT IN THE FIRST PLACE**. The Spirit is not poured out on God’s people to entertain them or to heal them from the horrors of lower back pain, the Spirit is poured out to save men and women in advance of the wrath to come. This is act 1 of the latter days but it is not the **END** of the latter days. Act 1 was given to save people from Act 2. Joel describes the second significant act in the latter days in chapter 2:30-31:



<sup>30</sup> “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:

Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

<sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned into darkness,

And the moon into blood,

Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. (Joel 2:30-31. NKJV)

## **2. The Great Day Of The Lord will break forth with frightful signs and dire warnings**

Many Biblical scholars have speculated about the phrase: “blood and fire and pillars of smoke”. Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated as “pillars of smoke” is the word *tee-maw-aw* from the word for tree which some commentators think means “mushroom shaped clouds of smoke as from a volcano”.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars similarly speculate that the events in Revelation described under the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal look an awful lot like what you would see from a massive super volcano and associated fall out. Both mention the sun becoming dark and the moon taking on a bloodish cast. Some speculate that the subsequent problems with the vegetation, the seas and the fresh waters mentioned in Revelation would all stem naturally from such a catastrophic event. Are they correct in these speculations? Who knows. Here is what we know. The next step in God’s future purposes with respect to redemption, wrath and renewal will come suddenly, it will be a catastrophe and it will be a phenomenon of global scale and proportion. The good news is that because the Holy Spirit will have empowered and equipped the church, it will also be a time of unprecedented spiritual harvest. The Apostle Peter says it is this concern that is causing the delay between Act 1 and Act 2. He says in 2 Peter 3:9:

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward <sup>us</sup>, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9. NKJV)

Peter had been the one who announced and declared that Pentecost represented the dawn of the last days but now people were starting to say: “If that was act 1 how come we haven’t seen act 2? We’ve read the Book of Joel too Peter and we know what is supposed to happen next.” Peter says the delay is due to God’s desire for all to come to repentance. The delay is not slackness, it is mercy. God is giving time to a Spirit empowered church to rescue souls from the wrath that is to come. But the patience of God is not indefinite as Peter himself goes on to say. The Day Of Wrath will come with frightful signs and warnings and in the end:

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<sup>1</sup> As in Wolff cited by Hubbard.

### **3. God will summon the nations to war and judgment in the valley of decision**

Sometime in the aftermath of this disaster spoken of in chapter 2:30-31; the final warning haven been given, God will summon the nations of the earth to a final war of judgment and retribution in the valley of decision. In chapter 3 God declares:

<sup>1</sup> “For behold, in those days and at that time,  
When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,  
<sup>2</sup> I will also gather all nations,  
And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;  
And I will enter into judgment with them there  
On account of My people, My heritage Israel,  
Whom they have scattered among the nations;  
They have also divided up My land. (Joel 3:1-2. NKJV)

There is no literal valley called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the word simply means “God judges”. This is a war that serves God’s purposes of wrath upon the nations. The criteria that determines their summons to Divine Wrath is given as being their treatment of God’s people. That should give you comfort when next you are facing persecution. God sees and God remembers.

The war in that valley is spoken of many times in the Bible sometimes under different names. You know it better as The Battle Of Armageddon. Same idea. In the aftermath of a global catastrophe with all the attendant water and food shortages that you can well imagine, God summons the nations to a final great war of retribution to serve his purposes of wrath and vindication.

The prophet promises however that:

### **4. God will preserve his people through final judgment**

Look at Joel 3:16:

<sup>16</sup> The LORD also will roar from Zion,  
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;  
The heavens and earth will shake;  
But the LORD will be a shelter for His people,  
And the strength of the children of Israel. (Joel 3:16. NKJV)

Now I wish I could tell you exactly what that means. Some people say it means that God will supernaturally preserve pockets of his people throughout the devastation of those days and that they will physically survive the Great Day of Wrath; others say it means that God will preserve them through death into the shelter of his presence. The Bible speaks both ways of God's preservation and so they may both be in view here. What I know for sure is that death is not defeat for those who persevere in faith and the Lord knows how to preserve a remnant unto the day of salvation.

Lastly Joel says:

## **5. God will restore the earth and live forever with his people**

After the devastation of those days and after God's purposes of wrath and redemption have been completed God will renew and restore. Look at 3:18:

<sup>18</sup> And it will come to pass in that day  
*That* the mountains shall drip with new wine,  
The hills shall flow with milk,  
And all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water;  
A fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD  
And water the Valley of Acacias. (Joel 3:18. NKJV)

A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord that will renew and restore the earth. Identical promises are found in Ezekiel and in Revelation. Wrath never gets the last word. God will restore. God will renew and God will live with his people forever.

Verse 20 says:

<sup>20</sup> But Judah shall abide forever,  
And Jerusalem from generation to generation. (Joel 3:20. NKJV)

The Book of Revelation says it this way:

“Behold, I make all things new.” (Revelation 21:5. NKJV)

Though I may walk through the valley of the shadow of death to see that day, still I declare; come, Lord Jesus.

## **Conclusion:**

Now before we close we need to ask how we should respond to a message like that. Joel wrote more than 2500 years ago and so it isn't always easy to understand how we should respond in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to a message like his. Let me leave you with just a few thoughts. If you are a Christian than I think you need to heed the warning of the first part of this book. God will go to war with his own people when they become superficial in the faith and compromised in their morality. He will go to war with you. He will go to war with churches that neglect the preaching of the word and he will go to war with individuals who surrender to the siren call of carnal culture. That is our God. He is a jealous God and he does not surrender those whom he loves. He fights for them and he fights with them. You need to look at your life and understand that it may not be the devil who is messing you up it may be Almighty God. He may be trying to humble you and return you to your first love. Don't fight him. He has more weapons at his disposal than you can possibly imagine. Just humble yourself and repent. Rend your heart and return to the Lord.

For the non-Christians in the house this morning I can do no better than follow the example of the Apostle Peter. When Peter finished preaching on this text at Pentecost people called out in anguish and asked him how they should respond.

<sup>38</sup>Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39. NKJV)

That recommendation cannot be improved upon. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.