

A JUDGMENT WITHOUT PRECEDENT

Joel 1:1-4

(First in a series on The Prophecy of Joel)

Intro: It is very likely that Joel is the oldest of all of the prophetic books of the OT. This conclusion is reached by noting what Joel does not say as well as what he does say.

He does not mention any king of Judah, although it seems clear that he lived in Jerusalem and prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah.

He does not mention Assyria or Babylon, nor does he even mention Syria.

He does not have a great deal to say about the sins of the people, although a careful reading of the prophecy gives indications as to what some of their sins were. But, at least, they had not reach the major proportions which developed later.

Even as far as the prophet himself is concerned, we are limited completely to what we find here. We do not know what tribe he came from, nor how long he had been a prophet, nor where he ministered. ALL WE KNOW IS THE NAME OF HIS FATHER, AND HIS NAME: "Joel, the son of Pethuel." This is also the only mention of his father in all of the Word of God.

But from all of the evidence which has to be considered, when we place him first in chronological order among all of the prophets, we can see what a tremendous influence he had on other prophets! "It is estimated that twenty-seven phrases, clauses, or expressions in the seventy-three verses of Joel's book have parallels in other Old Testament writings" (Robinson, p. 42). If we are right in placing him first, then Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi all have quoted Joel, and so must have been influenced by him.

The fact that we refer to him as a minor prophet must not keep us from seeing that his influence was MAJOR!

Another point of interest about Joel's prophecy is ITS SCOPE.

Joel begins by speaking of a judgment that Judah was experiencing in his day, and he looks far, far ahead to "the day of the Lord" (1:15). The one seems to foreshadow the other.

AND THIS SEEMS TO BE THE MAIN POINT OF THE PROPHECY. NEVER BEFORE HAD JUDAH EXPERIENCED SUCH A JUDGMENT (1:2). IT WOULD ONLY BE SURPASSED BY "THE DAY OF THE LORD" (2:1, 2). THIS WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT THE CONDITIONS WHICH JOEL'S PRO-

PRESIED AGAINST WERE CONDITIONS WHICH WOULD, FOR THE MOST PART, CHARACTERIZE HER HISTORY, AND FINALLY BRING THE TERRIBLE JUDGMENTS OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION!

If you are unfamiliar with some of the terms which Joel uses, I expect to define them as we go along. I hope you will read his prophecy each week--at least once, and even more. BUT TONIGHT WE WANT TO SEE HOW JOEL BEGINS TO POINT OUT THAT THIS WAS A JUDGMENT WITHOUT PRECEDENT!

Let us note carefully the following:

- I. THE SOURCE OF THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE (1:1a): "The word of of the Lord that came . . ."

Cf. 2:11, 12, 19, 32; 3:16, "his voice."

Did you ever read the OT and notice how many times you have the expression, "Thus saith the Lord"?

Cf. Isa. 44:24a, 26-28.

The authority of the Word of God does not rest upon its acceptance or rejection by men, but upon the fact that it is the Word of God! And we need to let people know that it is the Word of God.

This is the reason the inspiration of Scripture is always under attack in some way.

HOWEVER, THERE IS NO GREATER EVIDENCE THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD THAN THE EVIDENCE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY.

Joel's primary message was to his generation. There was no predictive prophecy involved in that. They were going through judgment, and it was very, very evident! And God had raised up his servant to warn His people. It was the word of Joel, yes, but it was first and foremost the word of God!

- II. THE PROPHET WHO GAVE THE MESSAGE (1:1b): "Joel, the son of Pethuel."

This is all we know about either one of them, but let us not feel that we are as destitute of information as it might appear at first.

We do not really know what Pethuel means. Probably most Hebrew scholars accept the translation, persuaded by God.

But we do know two things that can help us here:

- 1) We know that the Israelites attached special importance to the naming of their children.
- 2) We know what Joel means. It means, Jehovah is God, or whose God is Jehovah.

Now the fact that Joel was given this name does not tell us anything about Joel (at least to begin with), BUT IT DOES TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT PETHUEL. It meant that Pethuel was taking his stand against the inroads of idolatry, and that he was declaring his faith in Jehovah as God, and that there was no one else who could share that place with Him!

Thank God for men like Pethuel!

But, now, what about Joel?

He mentions Pethuel because he shares the faith of his father right down to the last detail. Cf. 2:27, "none else." Cf. Isa. 45:5a, "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me."

This was the cry of the prophets against idolatry.

III. THE MESSAGE GIVEN BY THE PROPHET, JOEL (1:2-4).

A. Getting their attention (1:2a).

He is preparing to ask a question, but first he wants to make sure that they hear it.

God is always speaking, and seeking to get men to listen to what He has to say. Seven times in Rev. 2, 3 our Lord says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." It is difficult to get the world to hear, BUT IT IS OFTEN EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO GET THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO HEAR.

Joel especially wanted the "old men" to be listening, but he also wanted to reach "all the inhabitants of the land." The next part of the verse indicates why.

B. Asking a question (1:2b).

Now we see why he addressed the "old men." He wanted to go back as far as he could with the living, and then he extends it on back throughout history: "Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?"

The implied answer is, No!

C. Giving a charge (1:3).

We can learn from history, but we must also be concerned about those who follow us. THEREFORE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARGES EVER GIVEN TO THE ISRAELITES WAS THAT THEY WERE TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN. Here he carries it down to their grandchildren.

Cf. Psa. 78:1-8; Ex. 10:2; 13:8, 14; Deut. 6:6-9, 20-25; Josh. 4:6, 7.

How amazing it is to find this here. Before the details are even pointed out, the Lord wants them to be listening for their children.

What a difference it would make if there were more of us like Pethuel, and the other fathers of Israel who were concerned about the future generations to come!

But there is one other thing here.

D. Describing the judgment (1:4).

You would think that the people would recognize this, but evidently they did not.

There had been four waves of judgment.

This verse has been interpreted in two ways, but the result is the same regardless of the way you look at it:

- 1) That these are four stages in the development of the locust--from the larva to the mature locust. This is one possibility.
- 2) I prefer this second one: that Joel is talking about four successive plagues by four different kinds of locusts.

One writer says that there are known to be over 80 different kinds of locusts.

But, since this was a judgment without precedent, we can note another fact. It is this: In all plagues of locusts (even on succeeding years) the general pattern is that you never have four different kinds, but only one. Therefore, NOT ONLY WAS THE EXTENT UNHEARD OF, BUT THE VERY NATURE OF THIS JUDGMENT WAS UNPRECEDENTED IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE!

Concl: What was the result? THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT. "That which the palmer worm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten"--and the caterpillar did not leave anything!

Let me close on this note.

Have you ever noticed in the Word of God that most of God's judgments are unprecedented? The fall of man into sin . . . the flood . . . the dispersion at Babel . . . the deliverance from Egypt with the death of the firstborn . . . the judgments in the wilderness (a whole generation dying) . . . the Assyrian captivity . . . the Babylonian captivity . . . the world-wide dispersion of the Jews . . . and so on and on.

What does unprecedented mean? It means unheard of, new, having no parallel.

The people who experienced these things for the most part did not really believe that they would happen. BUT THEY DID!

There are some unprecedented judgments yet to come.

There is the judgment of the Great Tribulation. Joel will tell us about this. There is the judgment of Hell itself.

There are those unpredicted judgments which can fall on the people of God who turn from Him and who refuse to walk in His ways. The preaching of the prophets is not popular preaching, but it is necessary preaching. As we consider the prophecy of Joel, let us have our ears open and our hearts open, so that the Spirit of God may be able to speak to us if this is His purpose.

Oh, that we might learn the untold blessings that can be ours if we will only walk with the Lord, seeking to do those things which are pleasing in His sight!