

THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD
Joel 2:1-11

Intro: Perhaps it is not quite accurate to entitle one message in this prophecy, The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, because the whole book deals with this subject. Cf. 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14. Cf. also, "in that day" (3:18).

However, this is the chapter where Joel first describes it somewhat in detail. And, if Joel was the first of the writing prophets, as we believe he is, then this is the first description that was ever given.

In Deut. 28 Moses had anticipated this "day" without actually naming it. HERE, JOEL TELLS US JUST WHAT IT WILL MEAN TO ISRAEL.

But, we need to ask ourselves: When will this "day" be?

It is very similar to another "day" which is mentioned in the NT: "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

The context of the passages tell us that these days anticipate two of the greatest events in all of history:

- 1) "The day of Jesus Christ," the NT expression, is the day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns for His Church. We speak of it as, The Rapture. That is the event for which we all are now waiting.
- 2) "The day of the Lord" (Jehovah), is the day when Jesus Christ will return to the earth to reign. It is preceded by The Great Tribulation, and it is followed by Christ's millennial reign upon the earth. All of this takes place after the Church has been removed.

So, without mentioning the first coming of Christ, and without saying anything about this present age in which we are living (because nothing had been revealed about it as such), Joel directs his attention especially to the terrible judgments which lead up to the second coming of the Messiah, the Great Tribulation. That is where we are tonight in the book.

It is important to have these details in mind.

But now let us see the relationship between chapter 1 and chapter 2 in Joel.

In chapter 1 Joel is describing a plague which has already taken place. In fact, Israel is right in the midst of it. It has come for the very reasons described by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy—the disobedience of the people. BUT GOD RAISED UP JOEL TO LET THEM SEE THAT THE JUDGMENT THEY WERE EXPERIENCING WAS DESIGNED BY GOD TO AWAKEN ISRAEL TO THE FACT THAT AN EVEN

GREATER JUDGMENT WAS COMING IF THEY PERSISTED IN THEIR DISOBEDIENCE, AND HE EVEN DESCRIBES WHAT THAT JUDGMENT WILL BE LIKE "UNDER THE IMAGERY DRAWN FROM THAT OF THE CALAMITY THEN ENGROSSING THE AFFLICTED NATION" (JFB, IV, 515).

I. THE LAND (Joel 2:1). Cf. v. 15.

This was the work of the priests (cf. Num. 10:8). And this is one reason they had been addressed in 1:13ff.

Many times in the psalms Zion is the place of Israel's hope.

Why the emphasis upon "Zion"? Because this was the place where the presence of God was manifested, and the place where the Messiah would come (see 3:16). IF ZION WERE IN TROUBLE, THEN NO PART OF THE LAND WAS SECURE! And so he also addresses "all the inhabitants of the land."

Notice the times Joel mentions Zion: 2:15, 23, 32; 3:16, 17, 21.

II. A DESCRIPTION OF THE JUDGMENT--taken from the details of the plague of locusts (2:2-10).

Notice all of the figures of speech in these verses.

After having said in 1:2 that the plague of locusts was the worst ever, so now this can be said about "the day of the Lord." (See. v. 2 of ch. 2).

This whole passage indicates the course that the world will take right up to the coming of the Lord--that it will not get better, but worse.

A. Like a day that is dark (v. 2).

Two ideas are here:

- 1) Nothing can be more terrorizing than for day to be turned into night. Cf. v. 10; 2:31; 3:15.
- 2) But it will come with the suddenness and universality of the "morning spread upon the mountains."

B. Like a fire (v. 3). Note the significance of "the garden of Eden." Contrast also Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35.

Men talk about Israel blossoming "like a rose" today, but that time has not yet come. Cf. Isa. 35:1.

C. Like horses and chariots in battle array (vv. 4, 5). The head of a locust is similar to that of a horse, and so the comparison is very fitting.

The army and the fire make a terrifying prospect.

Note: V. 6 is almost parenthetical, showing the effect of the day at this point--with more to come. The muscles in the faces of the people will be like a woman in travail, and death will seem to overtake the people through fear even before the armies arrive.

D. Like mighty men, like men of war--advancing relentlessly (vv. 7-9).

The battle will go entirely according to their plan. Cf. v. 7.

One of the great dangers of warfare is that men on the same side kill each other through confusion. Cf. Gideon and the Midianites in Judges 7, and Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron. 20 against Moab, Ammon, and mount Seir! Nothing like that will go on here. Cf. v. 8.

"Fall upon the sword" is better, fall among the darts, i.e., whatever Israel might do to defend themselves will be like they did nothing.

IT IS ALMOST AS THOUGH GOD HAD TAKEN THE PROMISES GIVEN TO ISRAEL AND TRANSFERRED THEM TO HER ENEMIES. Cf. Isa. 54:17, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."

"Like a thief"--The enemy will go through the city just like they were not expected and there was no one home to keep them from taking all that they want.

E. The shaking of the earth, and the signs in the heavens, which according to Matt. 24:29 will immediately precede the return of the Lord.

III. THE JUDGE (v. 11).

Note a very interesting change since the beginning of the prophecy:

- 1) God speaks of Israel as,
 - a) "My land" (1:6).
 - b) "My vine" (1:7).
 - Of the temple as,
 - c) "The house of the Lord" (1:9, 13, 14, 16).
 - Of Jerusalem as,
 - d) "Zion . . . my holy mountain" (2:1).
- 2) Then, with 2:1b, there is a change:
 - a) "The land," not, my land. Cf. 2:1, 3.
 - b) "The peoples," not, my peoples. Cf. 2:6.
 - c) "The city," not, my city. Cf. 2:9.

Also, "the priests, the Lord's ministers" (1:9).

- 3) Until v. 11, where we have,
 - a) "His army"
 - b) "His camp" - both of these referring to Israel's enemies.

The thought seems to be that the heathen obey Him more than His own people do, so they become His instruments of judgment upon Israel.

All it takes is "His voice." HE WILL CARRY OUT HIS WORD, AND NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO ESCAPE THE AWFUL JUDGMENT THAT IS TO COME.

Concl: What lessons are we to learn from Joel up to this point?

There are several:

- 1) God's judgments never come without a previous warning--often many warnings.
- 2) There is a gracious purpose in God's judgments--to prevent the necessity of future judgments.
- 3) The perversity and sin of the human heart, even among those who claim to be the people of God. The key to blessing is so simple: just obedience to the Word of God. But, in spite of all that God has said and done, His words seem to fall on deaf ears.
- 4) The absolute certainty of judgment, the judgment of the last days. The only uncertain factor is when!

No wonder that Joel goes from this to a call to repentance. Oh, that we as the Lord's people would have our ears open to the Word, and our hearts turned toward God, that in these days when it is getting easier and easier to sin, we might be kept right in the center of the will of God.

The other morning in our reading in Daily Light we read Lev. 20:26,

"And ye shall be holy unto me; for I, the Lord, am holy, and have separated you from other people, that ye should be mine."

May God give us the desire to walk with Him in these days, that our lives may be used to turn others to Him!