



Joel

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:20

The book of the prophet Joel. It's a short collection of prophetic poems that are both powerful and puzzling. Joel is unique among the prophets for a few reasons. First of all, there's no explicit indication of when this book was written. It's most likely the period of Ezra-Nehemiah after the return from the exile because he mentions Jerusalem and the temple, but there doesn't seem to be any kings. Also unique is that Joel is clearly familiar with many other scriptural books. He alludes to or quotes from the prophets Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Obadiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, even the book of Exodus.

And this is connected with the last unique feature, and that's that Joel never accuses Israel of any specific sin. So like many of the other prophets, he announces that God's judgment is coming to confront Israel's sin, but he never says why. And that's most likely because Joel assumes that, like him, you have been reading the books of the prophets, and so you already know all about Israel's rebellion.

Now, all together, these three features help us understand this fascinating little book, that Joel is a biblical author who was himself immersed in earlier biblical writings. And his reflection on them helped him make sense of the tragedies of his day, but also they gave him hope for the future. Let's dive in, and we will see how this book works.

Chapters 1-2

01:20-04:55

In chapters 1 and 2, Joel focuses on the Day of the Lord. This is a key theme in the prophets, and it describes events in the past when God appeared in a powerful way to save his people or confront evil. Think about the plagues in the book of Exodus. But the prophets saw in these past events pointers to a future time when God would

again confront evil among his people but also among the nations, and bring salvation to the whole world. And so here, in chapters 1 and 2, Joel has brought two parallel poems together that focus on this theme.

So chapter 1 is about a past Day of the Lord. He begins by announcing a recent disaster, that a locust swarm has devastated Israel, and his description of the swarm recalls the Day of the Lord against Egypt. (Remember the eighth plague from Exodus chapter 10.) Except this time, the locusts are being sent against Israel! And so Joel calls on the elders and the priests to lead the people in repentance and prayer, and then Joel actually himself repents along with all of the priests.

Chapter 2 comes alongside, and it has the same poetic design and flow of thought. So Joel announces another Day of the Lord, except this time, it's future, not past. It's an imminent disaster coming on Jerusalem. And he begins describing what seems like another wave of locusts, but he uses military and cosmic imagery. So the locusts become God's army, like cavalry and soldiers that are marching and destroying everything in their path. And the sun has darkened, and the earth quakes, and Joel says, "The Day of the Lord is dreadful; who can endure it?" And so once more, Joel calls on the people to pray and repent. And he says how: "to rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to your God." In other words, Joel knows that repentance can be just a show that you put on to get out of trouble, and he says God's not interested in that. He wants genuine change, for his people to stop their selfishness and evil. And then Joel says why Israel should repent, because "God is gracious and compassionate, he is slow to anger, and he is full of love." He's quoting here from the book of Exodus, about how God forgave Israel after they made the golden calf. And from that story, Joel learned that God's mercy and love is more powerful than his wrath and judgment. And so he leads the priests in acts of repentance and prayer, asking God to spare his people.

Then right after these two poems, the scene shifts, and we have a short narrative about God's response to the repentance of Joel and the people. "So God was filled with passion for his land and he had pity on his people." Then God says he is going to reverse the devastating effects of this Day of the Lord and turn it from judgment into salvation. So first, he's going to defeat the threatening invaders, which were presumably the locusts, and he's going to turn them all away to their own ruin. Then he's going to restore the devastated land and bring it back to life, making it abundant once more. And finally, God says he's going to bring his divine presence among his people. It will become real and accessible to everyone.

Now up to this point, the poems tell a powerful story about Joel leading Israel to see how their sin led to disaster and divine judgment, and that with the God of mercy, there is always hope. But Joel sees in all of these past events an image of the future

Day of the Lord. And so in the final section of the book, Joel writes three more poems that match God's three-part response, and he weaves together images from other prophetic books and expands it all into a vision of hope for all creation.

Chapters 2-3

04:55-06:16

So first, the hope of God's presence among his people gets expanded into a promise about how one day in the future, God's own Spirit, his personal life presence, will fill not just the temple, but all of his people. And here Joel is drawing upon the promises of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that God's Spirit would come to transform and empower his people so that they can truly love and follow him.

Joel then picks up God's promise that he'll confront the threatening invader. And Joel sees in these ravaging locusts a similarity to the arrogant, violent nations of his own day that ravage and oppress people. And so he draws upon the promises of Isaiah and Zephaniah and Ezekiel about the future Day of the Lord, when God will confront evil among all the nations and turn their violence back on themselves, bringing justice to right all wrongs.

And finally, Joel picks up the images of the land's restoration, and he sees here a hope for the renewal of all creation. So he draws on the promises of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Zechariah, that God's final day of justice will be followed by a restoration of the entire world, a new Eden, where God's presence in Jerusalem will flow out like a river and bring about cosmic renewal. And so Joel's poem ends with God's forgiveness and mercy opening up a whole new creation.

Conclusion

06:16-06:46

And so this little book of Joel, it explores profound ideas about how human sin and failure wreak such devastating destruction in our world, about how God longs to show mercy to those who will just own up to their sin and confess it, and about how all of that leads us to hope that God will one day defeat evil in our world, but also inside of us, and bring his healing presence to make all things new. And that's what the book of Joel is all about.