



FOCUS VERSES

Acts 2:16–17

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

LESSON TEXT

Joel 2:15–18

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.

Joel 2:21–23, 27–32

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

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27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God confirmed His Word with many signs and wonders by the outpouring of His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Discerning the Times

Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* opens with the famous line "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." In many cases, we may find it difficult to discern the times in which we live. On one hand, we hear of economic problems, unrest in cities, and rumors of wars. On the other hand, we may experience blessings, enjoy a relaxing vacation, and feel peace in our homes. Even in the midst of hearing about bad events, we can enjoy good things from God.

Seasons of life change. We may find ourselves struggling with bills, fighting sickness, and being in conflict with others. Yet these bad times may lead to an unexpected bless-

ing, an opportunity for healing, or a challenge to offer forgiveness. Throughout our journey in this life, we will come face to face with the good and the bad. Calamity may come, but blessing may be waiting around the corner.

Through all the winds of change, God encourages us to put our trust in Him. The timeless One let us know that His love, mercy, and grace are eternally available to those who refuse to lean on their own understanding. Perhaps the best way to be discerning of the times is not to read an online newsfeed, listen to a radio report, or talk with a friend. Instead we should make time for Bible reading, prayer, and meditation, spending time with the One who transcends time.

OUTLINE

I. THE DAYS OF JOEL

- A. Good Times in Judah
- B. Bad Times to Come

II. THE DAY OF THE LORD

- A. The Day of the Lord Announced
- B. The Call to Repentance

III. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

- A. Joel's Prophecy
- B. Peter's Preaching

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The Book of Joel is difficult to date. Some scholars locate the prophet in the time of King Josiah while others set him in the post-exilic period. While most prophets date their activities to the reigns of specific kings, Joel does not. Perhaps that is because he prophesied around the time when the high priest Jehoiada was battling the pretender-to-the-throne Queen Athaliah. During Athaliah's evil reign, Jehoiada waited for God's timing to replace the wicked queen with Joash, Judah's rightful ruler.

Jehoiada had led the Davidic line away from the brink of disaster when he saved

young Joash and prevented the underhanded Athaliah from killing all the royal family. As a result, the young king had grown up in the house of God. Waiting for the opportunity to bring Joash to power, Jehoiada raised the heir to the throne with godly principles, setting the stage for a political and religious revolution in Judah.

Judah faced the old enemy of idolatry as well as a new foe in Athaliah. Athaliah's wicked actions proved unsurprising, considering that she was the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, two Baal worshipers who respected neither the Lord nor His people. She came to Judah as part of a political marriage to King Jehoram. Upon Jehoram's death, Athaliah was the queen mother to the new king Ahaziah. Her negative influence caused him to do evil during his life. When Ahaziah died, Athaliah, who had inherited her parent's penchant for treachery and idolatry, attempted to annihilate the Davidic line. In spite of her evil scheming, good times would once again return to Judah.

For six years, Joash remained hidden in the house of the Lord under the guard and tutelage of Jehoiada. In the seventh year,

Jehoiada anointed the boy king. Having seized control of the army, Jehoiada made his move against the usurper Athaliah. After accusing Jehoiada and his troops of treason, Athaliah was put to death.

Jehoiada renewed the people's covenant with the Lord, tore down the house of Baal, and removed the priest of Baal from power. The new king, Joash, followed the teachings of Jehoiada, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. He repaired the Temple and created economic prosperity for the workers repairing the Temple, the priests of God, and the people of Judah.

Although God had prevented calamity from overcoming Judah and had restored the kingdom, Joel knew the good times would not last forever. Perhaps that is why the Book of Joel is hard to date because it speaks of both salvation and calamity for God's people—two key elements that frequently appear in the Bible. Therefore Joel's message is a timeless reminder of the judgment of God as well as the hope of salvation.

Peter quoted Joel's prophecies of hope and destruction in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. While Peter spoke of the catastrophic events prophesied in the Book of Joel, he also looked to the prophet to explain that salvation had come to the world through Jesus. This all-inclusive salvation was for sons, daughters, young men, old men, servants, and handmaidens. Everyone had the chance to experience the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. The great and wondrous Day of Pentecost had to precede the great and terrible Day of the Lord because God would offer salvation to everyone before raining judgment on the earth. Today we have the same opportunity for deliverance through the infilling of the Holy Ghost. Our personal response to God, however, is of great urgency because the Day of the Lord is imminent.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE DAYS OF JOEL

A. Good Times in Judah

If Joel prophesied close to the reign of King Joash, then good times had again come to

Judah. Without an heir of David to rule over Judah, the kingdom would truly be lost. God, however, had promised an unending line of Davidic kings. This promise had to remain intact because Jesus, the son of David, would be the perpetual king over God's people.

The saving of Joash allowed this prophecy to continue. With God having rescued the Davidic line from the edge of oblivion, the future seemed bright. A new king, who had learned godly principles and had a good relationship with the high priest, was on the throne. The Temple of God, which had fallen into disrepair, had been restored. The renewal of the Temple signified a renewal of the covenant between God and the people of Judah.

B. Bad Times to Come

In spite of this prosperity, Joel prophetically saw looming destruction on the horizon. While the monarchy had eliminated some of the chaos in the Book of Judges, God's people still seemed stuck in a cycle of sinning, falling into bondage, crying out for help, and being delivered. The kings may have mitigated the effects of God's wrath by pleading with the Lord and turning away from Baal. Righteous acts like those of King Joash may have delayed God's sentence, but ultimately the people of God would have to pay the price for disobedience.

The locust plague (Joel 1:4; 2:25). The plague of locusts would be severe. The instrument of destruction God had used to hurt the Egyptians would metaphorically bring intense misery to Israel. Other prophets spoke of the overwhelming destruction brought by locusts. Amos told of locusts (palmerworms) eating fig trees and olive trees (Amos 4:9, NKJV). Nahum used the insatiable locusts as a metaphor for the devouring power of fire and the sword (Nahum 3:15–16, NKJV). Joel also used the metaphor of the locusts to warn of a great army, hungry for battle.

The prophet referred to the nations descending on Judah as different types of locusts coming to lay claim to whatever the previous locusts had left uneaten. The chewing locusts, the swarming locusts, the crawling locusts, and the consuming locusts would have their fill. (See Joel 1:4, NKJV.) Yet God still offered hope. While the Lord vowed

to rebuke the locusts in Malachi 3:11, God went one step further in Joel 2:25, promising to restore the years the locusts had eaten. God would make up for the lost time the enemy had taken.

The severe drought (Joel 1:16–20). The people would need to seek God's help for the swarming armies as well as for the brutal drought that would lay waste to the land. Joy and gladness would be cut off from the house of the Lord. The future would look grim because seeds would rot in the earth rather than grow into fruitful plants. Barns and granaries would be empty. Even the beasts of the field would have no pasture to sustain them. Rivers would dry up, and flames would scorch the land. As a result, both people and animals would cry out to their Maker.

The call to mourning and prayer (Joel 1:2–14). The approaching calamity called for everyone to seek the Lord. Every echelon of society needed to cry out to the Lord, from priests to farmers, right down to the lowliest drunk. The priests were to remove their vestments and lament in sackcloth. The dismayed farmers were to cry out to God. The prophet called for drunkards to awaken from their slumber and weep. Joel implored the people to cry like the virgin dressed in sackcloth, mourning for the husband of her youth.

II. THE DAY OF THE LORD

A. The Day of the Lord Announced

All of this misery and lament as well as the hope for salvation are associated with the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is mentioned five times in the Book of Joel (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). The Day of the Lord is a time when the enemies of the Lord will be judged and Israel will be restored. It is a day of divine intervention.

Joel 1:15 speaks of the impending Day of the Lord. Several attempts are made to help the people recognize the severity of their situation. One can picture the prophet shouting, "Alas for the day!" as he desperately tried to awaken the people of Israel from their spirit of drunken sleep. When a shout would not rouse the people, Joel called for a trumpet blast (Joel 2:1). The sound of the alarm from the holy mountain needed to make the

people tremble at the fearsome news that the Day of the Lord was rapidly approaching!

If the shout of the prophet and the piercing cry of the trumpet could not call the people to action, then perhaps the thundering voice of the Lord would demand their attention (Joel 2:11). The prophet hoped the people would see the great urgency of turning to God because no one would be able to withstand the intense fury of the Day of the Lord.

If the people failed to hear, then perhaps they would be able to see the approaching danger. The sun and the moon would herald the coming of the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:31). With the sun darkened and the moon turned into blood, perhaps the people would finally respond. Joel knew that their choice would be key because he wrote that multitudes were in the valley of decision, and "the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). Israel, the Gentiles, and the church would all find themselves in the valley of decision during the last days.

Last days of Israel. The terms *last days*, *latter days*, *last times*, *latter times*, and *time of the end* are commonly used to describe the last days of the nation of Israel, the Gentiles, and the church. God stretched forth His hand to save the world by taking on humanity (Galatians 4:4–5), speaking to the world (Hebrews 1:1–2), and sending the promise of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:17–21; Joel 2:28–32). The precious blood of Jesus was chosen to deliver humanity. God had foreordained His plan before the foundation of the world to bring salvation in the last days (I Peter 1:18–20).

Last days of the Gentiles. God had already begun to reveal the last days of the Gentiles in the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 2, God showed King Nebuchadnezzar what would come to pass in the latter days. Kingdom after kingdom would arise until a great stone would topple all the kingdoms of the world. The stone is the rock Christ Jesus. Revelation 19:11–20:5 depicts Jesus, faithful and true, riding on a white horse, dispensing the judgment prophesied by Joel. According to Joel (3:2, 12), kings, captains, and mighty armies of the Gentiles will gather together for battle in the last days in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Jesus will emerge triumphant, and Satan will be bound.

Last days of the church. In spite of this blessed hope, the church will experience difficult times in the last days. Some will give in to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (I Timothy 4:1–3). Others will love themselves, money, and pleasure more than God (II Timothy 3:1–5). Many will turn away from truth and sound doctrine and seek teachers whose messages cater to their selfish desires. Scoffers will arise to mock the coming of the Lord (II Peter 3:3; Jude 1:18–19). Many antichrists will arise as a sign that the church is truly living in the last hour (I John 2:18).

B. The Call to Repentance

Seeing that all of these things will take place, the church and the world should heed the call of the prophet Joel and return to God with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Such repentance must not be for outward show since the selfish masses in the last days will have a form of godliness but deny its power (II Timothy 3:1–5). Joel entreated the people to rend their hearts and not their garments.

In spite of all his prophecies of judgment, Joel still believed God was “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil” (Joel 2:13). Joel held out hope God would change judgment into blessing. He prayerfully asked, “Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him . . . ?” (Joel 2:14). Joel’s prayer was answered. God would allow His people the opportunity to repent while presenting them with the blessing of the Holy Ghost before the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

III. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

A. Joel’s Prophecy

Joel’s hope that God would turn away from anger rested on the people seeking the Lord. Before the Day of Pentecost, 120 gathered in the upper room to devote themselves to prayer and to wait for the promise of the Holy Ghost. The disciples who remained faithful to Jesus were there along with Mary the mother of Jesus and the brothers of Jesus.

Joel had prophesied of judgment coming to all nations of the earth, and John the Revelator had restated this prophecy. God, however,

had a great plan to send the message of salvation throughout the world first; He would empower his church to deliver it (Acts 1:8).

Judah restored (Joel 2:18–27). This deliverance would come from the wine of the Holy Ghost. The wine Judah had lost would be restored. God had cut off the new wine from the land in Joel 1:5. God’s mercy would allow new wine and oil to return to the land. The children of Zion would rejoice because of the abundant early and latter rain. Wine, oil, and rain symbolize the blessing of the Holy Ghost that God poured out on His people on the Day of Pentecost. This outpouring of the Spirit made some of the Jews present in Jerusalem think the 120 in the upper room were full of new wine.

God’s people renewed (Joel 2:28–32). In actuality, the 120 were living the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. God was taking shame away from His people and pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh. The judgment Joel prophesied would still come, but God had a work of salvation to complete before those prophecies would come to pass.

B. Peter’s Preaching

Peter spoke of this renewing when he preached to the Diaspora Jews who had returned to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. Wars and exiles had scattered these Jews throughout various nations. As a result, they spoke many different languages. When they heard the Galileans speaking in their own languages, they were amazed.

Peter seized this opportunity to explain the prophecies of Joel. Peter referenced Joel’s prophetic judgment by speaking of signs in heaven, on earth, and with the sun and the moon (Acts 2:19–20). However, he showed that God had a plan to save the world from destruction—a strange plan that included making people look like they were drunk on new wine.

This is that (Acts 2:16–20). Peter informed the Jews who heard the commotion going on in the upper room that “these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:15–16). In Acts 2:17–18, Peter quoted the words of the prophet in Joel 2:28–29. God

was pouring out His Spirit on all flesh. Sons and daughters would prophesy. Young men would see visions, and old men would dream dreams. Joel's prophecy was not limited to social class or gender; all would have the opportunity to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Pentecost for all (Acts 2:37–39). The Holy Spirit poured out on the Day of Pentecost is available to all people. After Peter preached about Jesus' death and resurrection, those who heard his sermon "were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. He said, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Perhaps Peter was taking another cue from Joel here because the prophet had said, "Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation" (Joel 1:3).

As a result, the message of Pentecost continues to be preached today, and God still offers the gift of the Holy Ghost to "whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD" (Joel 2:32).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Joel prophesied that the coming Day of the Lord would be a blessing to God's people Israel (Joel 3:17–21) and a judgment of nations (Joel 3:1–16). In like manner, the coming of the Lord will be a glorious rapture to the church but a curse to the lost. Therefore the people of God must present the message of salvation to the world because the days are

short. (See Romans 9:28.) The window for reaching the world is coming to a close.

The urgency to present the message of salvation and see the lost repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost has never been greater. Even a famous atheist recognized the powerful driving force that should propel Christians to reach the world. He said that if Christians truly believed the lost would die and suffer the punishment of Hell, then he understood why they would be so impassioned in trying to convince people to accept the deliverance Jesus offers.

But perhaps the church has lost the pressing need to reach the world. Perhaps the church has become at ease in Zion and has forgotten its mission. If so, the message of Joel should awaken the church. If the voice of the prophet, the trumpet, or the voice of the Lord will not revive the church from its slumber, then perhaps we should take one more look at the prophecy of Joel.

With the gospel being preached throughout the world and missionaries reporting mass infillings of the Holy Ghost, we know that many are calling on the name of the Lord and being saved. If this prophecy of Joel is being fulfilled, then it will be only a short time before the Day of the Lord comes and God raptures His church. Then the hope of salvation will be replaced by the wrath of God.

Though some may mock us as they mocked Noah, we must preach the Word. Though some may seek teachers who will tell them what they want to hear, we must speak the truth. We must make salvation available to whosoever will—while we still can! ■

REFLECTIONS

- Today's lesson talked about salvation and looming judgment. With whom will you talk about the Lord before it is too late?
- Joel prophesied of salvation coming to the world regardless of social class, and the Book of Acts reports the door of salvation being opened to the Samaritans and Gentiles. How do we reach out to people of different classes, races, and ethnicities?
- In the face of impending doom, Joel still believed that God would be gracious and merciful. How can we show grace and mercy to friends, family, and even strangers?
- Discuss the fact that people misunderstood the infilling of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. How can we be like Peter and turn mocking and confusion into a message that will save many souls?