

**A PERSONAL  
VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY**

**JOEL**

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**Joel 1:1 ¶ The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.**

This statement is not very helpful in identifying the prophet Joel. The Accordance timeline shows that he was a contemporary of Elisha, and he ministered in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. I liked the meaning of his name (according to Eastman's), "Jehovah is his God." This opening verse is clear in stating that he is delivering a message from YHWH.

**Joel 1:2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?**

**Joel 1:3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.**

The prophet is calling for the people to pay attention to what he is going to say. He seems to be saying that the circumstances of the time are unique in Israel's history. These are times that they should instruct their children to make sure their children and grandchildren know about. Why would the prophet be encouraging the people to tell their children about these times? Scripture indicates that this is a tool of teaching.

In my study of Genesis I remember noting that God told Abraham why he was judging Sodom and Gormorrah because he knew he would use that example to instruct his own children.

Genesis 18:17-19 "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Moses was careful to instruct the people to teach their children the commandments of God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Moses had also specifically told the people how God would judge them if they refused to obey Him.

Deuteronomy 28:15 "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:"

Deuteronomy 28:38-39 "Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them."

These words have direct application to the following.

**Joel 1:4** That which the palmerworm 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.

All the Hebrew words used in describing the palmerworm, locust, cankerworm and caterpillar are references to some form of locust. It seems to be describing wave upon wave of these creatures that have completely destroyed the grass, trees and crops of the land.

**Joel 1:5** Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

As a result of the destruction of the harvest, there would be no new wine in the foreseeable future, and this would be bad news indeed to those who enjoyed drinking wine.

**Joel 1:6** For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth *are* the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion.

**Joel 1:7** He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast *it* away; the branches thereof are made white.

The Hebrew for the word *nation* includes not only a reference to foreigners or Gentiles, but also figuratively to an invasion of locusts. This invading swarm is impossible to number. Their teeth are compared to a lion because of the power and effectiveness of their attack. They have left the land desolate of plants, trees and crops. Their destruction is so complete that the vines are described as ruined and the fig tree as stripped bare, even of its bark.

I am reminded that the vine and fig tree are symbols of the nation of Israel in scripture, so the description has a deeper application.

Isaiah 5:3-4 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

Jeremiah 24:5 "Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good."

Hosea 9:10 "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time:"

**Joel 1:8** ¶ Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

The prophet calls the people to a state of mourning that he pictures should be as intense as a young woman whose fiancé died before they could get married or a young bride whose husband dies. In conjunction with the thoughts of verse 2-3, this is a call to repentance in light of God's judgment.

**Joel 1:9** The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn.

The devastation of the crops would have a direct impact on the ability of the people to make their offerings to the YHWH. This is of special concern to the priests.

**Joel 1:10** The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth.

**Joel 1:11** Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished.

**Joel 1:12** The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, *even* all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

These verses go on to emphasize the utter devastation of this locust invasion. There was absolutely nothing left for the people to be joyous about. Israel was an agricultural society; there was no fallback position.

**Joel 1:13** Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.

**Joel 1:14** ¶ Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land *into* the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

The prophet turns his address to the spiritual leaders of the people, the priests. To lament in sackcloth was an expression of sincerity as they called out to YHWH. He not only encourages them to wear sackcloth, he also encourages them to call for the elders to lead the people in observing a fast and joining together in crying out in repentance to God.

**Joel 1:15** Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

**Joel 1:16** Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, *yea*, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

**Joel 1:17** The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

**Joel 1:18** How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; *yea*, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

**Joel 1:19** O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.

**Joel 1:20** The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

These closing verses of this first chapter seem to be summarizing the cry of the people to God as they prayed. It's interesting that we often feel the need to "give God the facts" surrounding our requests like He doesn't already know what is going on.

It seems that they recognize this horrible invasion of locusts to be a judgment from YHWH. I wonder why people find it so hard today to recognize the destroying forces of nature as possible judgment from God. They can't seem to

connect with the thought that a loving God will choose to do things that will cause people to repent of their sin and turn to Him in faith. Maybe we should take a longer look at Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:15-34 "But it shall come to pass, **if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God**, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. **Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land**, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. **The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do**, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. **The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee**, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. **The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew**; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. **The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust**: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. **The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies**: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. **The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart**: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. **Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof**. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand. **The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up**; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed away: So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."

These verses are declaring that it is God's hand that will bring about these judgments upon the people even though it is clear that He will utilize the forces of nature, things we would classify as disease (physical and/or mental), and the enemies of the people to accomplish His purpose. Scripture is clear that God is

never changing. Why would we refuse to consider the possibility that similar things today are acts of His judgment?

Malachi 3:6 "For I *am* the LORD, I change not...."