



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

WEEK 22

JOEL

MAY 28 - JUNE 2, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	2 Chron 1-5, Psalm 106	Joel 1-3, Psalm 106
Tuesday	Joel 1-3, Psalm 107	Joel 1:1-20, Psalm 107
Wednesday	2 Chron 6-10, Psalm 108	Joel 2:1-27, Psalm 108
Thursday	2 Chron 11-15, Psalm 109	Joel 2:25-32, Psalm 109
Friday	Amos 1-3, Psalm 110	Joel 3:1-21, Psalm 110

Walk Through The Bible Readings

MONTH AT A GLANCE

May 27, Week 22 - Joel

Monday	2 Chronicles 1-5	Psalm 106
Tuesday	Joel 1-3	Psalm 107
Wednesday	2 Chronicles 6-10	Psalm 108
Thursday	2 Chronicles 11-15	Psalm 109
Friday	Amos 1-3	Psalm 110

June 3, Week 23 - Amos

Monday	Amos 4-6	Psalm 111
Tuesday	Amos 7-9	Psalm 112
Wednesday	2 Chronicles 16-20	Psalm 113
Thursday	2 Chronicles 21-25	Psalm 114
Friday	2 Chronicles 26-30	Psalm 115

June 10, Week 24 - Jonah

Monday	2 Chronicles 31-33	Psalm 116
Tuesday	Jonah 1-4	Psalm 117
Wednesday	2 Chronicles 34-36	Psalm 118
Thursday	Obadiah 1	Psalm 119
Friday	Hosea 1-5	Psalm 120

June 17, Week 25 - Hosea

Monday	Hosea 6-10	Psalm 121
Tuesday	Hosea 11-14	Psalm 122
Wednesday	Isaiah 1-6	Psalm 123
Thursday	Isaiah 7-12	Psalm 124
Friday	Isaiah 13-18	Psalm 125

June 24, Week 26 - Isaiah

Monday	Isaiah 19-24	Psalm 126
Tuesday	Isaiah 25-30	Psalm 127
Wednesday	Isaiah 31-36	Psalm 128
Thursday	Isaiah 37-42	Psalm 129
Friday	Isaiah 43-48	Psalm 13

PRAYER JOURNAL

This week I am praying for . . .

. . . travel mercies and safety for Kenya Mission Team members: Jane Beard, Thomas Brunner, Bonni Carr, Peggy Diller, Tim Ferguson, Joy Hunt, Carole Mathews, Joe Mazzela, and Rod & Shelley Ulrich.

. . . Jan Holsclaw, who has been doing very well with cancer treatment, but had to have emergency abdominal surgery this week.

And . . .

READ

Joel 1-3 (Overview)
Psalm 107

REFLECT

Although very little is known about the prophet Joel, it is believed that he was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah (in contrast to Elisha, Jonah, Amos and Hosea who were prophets to Israel) and that he is believed to have been one of the earlier prophets, prophesying around 825-809 BC while the other prophets to Judah were believed to have been at least 100 years later (Isaiah 739-681 BC, Micha 733-701 BC, Obed around 720 BC, Nahum 650-620 BC) and Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Daniel all coming even later.

Despite the lack of information about the person of Joel, his prophecy is, nevertheless, powerful and significant. He describes in vivid language the ruin of the land from plague, the need for repentance, God's intent to restore the land, to pour out the Spirit of God on all people, the judgment of the nations and the blessing on Israel following judgment. That's a lot to pack in to three short chapters.

One of the overarching themes in the book of Joel is the "day of the Lord." In chapter 1, the event of the locust plague and the resulting havoc and devastation are a signal of a coming day of the Lord. Joel uses the calamity to appeal to people to humble themselves and cry out to God for deliverance. Chapter 2 describes the day of the Lord and indicates a destruction unlike any seen before (Joel 2:2) The imagery of a locust plague is revisited which includes "A description of their executioners in which there is a blending of the idea of the locusts with that of the warriors" (James M. Gray).

Finally in Chapter 3 many scholars feel that a future "day of the Lord" is referred to. While the interpretations of when this occurs/will occur

remains varied, it is clear from the text that God's intent is to judge all nations in regard to God's "inheritance, my people Israel." As with much biblical prophecy, it is difficult to discern a clear meaning for the Day of the Lord, but it appears to be a referring to a common theme in prophetic texts: Eventually God's judgment will come to the nations and it is serious business.

Fortunately for those looking for hope in the midst of this very dire and scary prospect of the joy of mankind withering away (Joel 1:12), God provides through Joel an equally compelling vision of God as patient, forgiving and eager to spread an abundance of both material needs and knowledge of who God is. Joel's name means the Lord is God and as we will see in the upcoming week, the book of Joel proclaims the same: "Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God" (Joel 2:27).

RESPOND

Reading prophecy can be overwhelming. Remember to be constantly looking for the larger messages. What is God's purpose in relaying these images? The Bible is often seen as portraying a life that is always one step away from disaster, but on closer examination we see that the consistent intent of God is to bring us to Him, which results in both our joy and His. Even in the middle of the horrific accounts of Joel, we read: "Surely he has done great things. Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things." (Joel 2:20-21)

PRAY

Holy God who wants us near, please let us see Your desire for us.

- A.T.

READ

Joel 1:1-20

Psalm 107

REFLECT

The effects of the plague of locusts that Joel details in Chapter 1 are truly horrific. Verse 4 explains, most likely, how each stage of a locust's growth causes further destruction, implying that absolutely nothing is spared. The locusts strip all the vegetation from the land. The vines wither, the trees are stripped of bark, which dries them up and kills them, the seeds beneath the ground shrivel, the cattle and sheep have no food. This of course cripples the economy and the ability of people to make offerings to God and causes widespread mourning and suffering. Even joy and gladness have been cut off from the house of God. It is clear that this plague of locusts affected every living thing around.

Joel's purpose, however, was not only to tell of terrible things, but to call people to act in a way that honors God. So Joel uses this plague to alert the people to attend to God's ways. In the second verse he calls the attention of the elders and the people at large. He asks them to reflect on the enormity of the current situation in light of history. He instructs them to teach their children and the next generations about this event, not simply as history but as a warning of what the future may hold.

Then in verses 13-15 he tells the priests to formally mourn (put on sackcloth), and call the people to gather in the house of God and fast so that they can cry out to the Lord in humility for salvation from the plague. These actions are the only recourse available to the priests as there is no food or wine for offerings. They must simply be humble and ask God for mercy. Joel's directive to the priests is one of the first signs of hope

in this book. Amid tales of utter desolation, Joel's instructions affirm that God is in control and that even when our normal offerings cannot be made, we can always offer ourselves humbly to God and cry out for the Lord's help.

Joel models his own instruction and in verse 19 he himself cries "To you, O Lord, I call." He states that along with him the wild animals pant for God, an indication that all creation relies on the Almighty God.

RESPOND

Joel's words to the people during the locust plague remind us that in difficult (even seemingly insurmountable) times, we all have a responsibility to maintain our relationship with God. Leaders and the wise among us are to compel us to gather, to fast, to humbly recognize God's authority over this world. The people are to respond by coming together, participating in the fast and voicing our cry to the Lord. The prophets declare over and over that this coming to God, honestly and in humility, is required of us to avoid a devastating separation from God. The remarkable fact is that in doing so we experience joy beyond measure.

PRAY

Help us to remember You when we are devastated, to come to You, acknowledge who You are and cry out for You.

*But I pray to you, O Lord,
in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God,
answer me with your sure salvation. Psalm 69:13*

- A.T.

READ

Joel 2:1-27

Psalm 108

REFLECT

The second chapter of Joel continues the description of the locust plague but with a renewed urgency. It is now relayed in the present tense and the relation of the plague to a future day of judgment by God is more apparent and direct: “Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand ...” (v1). And even though the locusts are likened to an army and it is the Lord who is “at the head of his army” (v11) presumably responsible for a wave of cataclysmic events (v10) in this day of darkness and gloom, (v2) we seen in verse 12 an enduring characteristic of God: His will to reconcile with his people. “‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’” God always gives many chances and He is never eager to punish.

Joel then steps in with his prophetic directive, an amplified version of his message in chapter 1. After telling them to put on sackcloth (Joel 1:13) he now explains that that is merely an outward expression of the attitude that is needed from the heart. In beautiful, concise language Joel declares: “Rend your heart and not your garments.” Putting on sackcloth and rending (tearing) one’s garments were an ancient tradition to signify mourning or repentance, so this command had deep meaning for its audience who understood that their humility before God was the issue.

Then immediately Joel assures the people that total humility before God is a good investment because God “is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (v13). We see through this that Joel uses a very balanced approach in persuading the people to align

themselves with God. He may attempt to use images of destruction to get their attention and perhaps scare them into action but he follows it up with equally vivid accounts of the goodness of God to woo them into God’s arms. God’s reply (Joel 2:19-27) to the people when they cry out for help (v17) addresses almost point for point the abundance that God will provide versus the destruction that has taken place. God promises to restore the vegetation, the animals, the rains and even their time (“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten” (v 25)).

Finally God’s reply includes a triple promise about the people themselves. Three times (vv 19, 26 and 27) the Lord states that the people will be full and then immediately promises that His people will never be ashamed again. Interestingly, the first two promises of fullness are in regard to being satisfied by food, while the third is more indirect, yet more profound. In verse 27 God promises: “Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other.” This promise is the ultimate satisfaction – to know that the Lord *is* God, is *our* God and is the *only* God. How gracious God is to satisfy us with that knowledge of Him.

RESPOND

If you struggle with rending your heart about some issue between you and God, reflect on God’s faithfulness and His generous and comprehensive response to His people in the book of Joel. God longs to do no less for us.

PRAY

Surely he has done great things.

Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice.

Surely the Lord has done great things. (Joel 2:20-21)

Amen

- A.T.

READ

Joel 2:25-32

Acts 2:1-33

Psalm 109

REFLECT

After God has restored all the land and it is flowing with autumn and spring rain and wine and oil (2:21-26), the Lord has one more gift for Israel. And God saved the best for last. God declares that He will “pour out his Spirit on all people” (v 2:28). As is always the case with our loving God, He wants to give us material comforts of food and drink and shelter, but He also wants to give us Himself.

After just having declared that He wants His people to *know* who He is in verse 27, verse 28 indicates that God also wants to surround us with His presence the way water surrounds us when we jump in the pool. The notion of *pouring the Spirit* is at once both gentle and all encompassing and aptly describes how the Lord desires that we be steeped in Him. In his sermon titled *This is What was Spoken by the Prophet Joel*, (www.desiringgod.org) John Piper explains, “The picture of a worldwide pouring compels us to think of being soaked and saturated and swept along by the Spirit of God. Joel wanted his readers to anticipate an unmistakable flood-tide of God's presence.”

The apostle Peter understood his intention when he quoted these words of Joel in Acts 2:17-22. The Holy Spirit had come upon the apostles and caused them to speak about the wonders of God in all the discreet languages of the “Jews from every nation” that were their audience. Some of the crowd, upon hearing this, thought they were drunk. But Peter explains, through the words of Joel, that this is the work

of God, expected and anticipated. Many scholars believe that Peter's reference to Joel 2 indicates its fulfillment of the prophecy in regard to the coming of the Holy Spirit but that the rest will be fulfilled in the final day of judgment. What's clear is that Peter felt the Holy Spirit of God had come as God had promised (Acts 2:33).

Furthermore Peter declares that the Holy Spirit is a gift we receive after we humble ourselves before God by repenting and we are baptized, an intentional outward symbol of the Spirit soaking and saturating our life. Peter also declares “the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off...” (Acts 2:38). These are, in fact, the very themes of the book of Joel, that God provides overflowing abundance of Himself when we turn to Him and that restoration to God is available to all.

RESPOND

Allowing yourself to be saturated with God's presence is a process. Although the Spirit is poured out for us, it takes time to seep in to us. Being still before God and letting your mind rest on God and the stories of His people enables the Spirit to soak in. Try giving God some time this week to hydrate you and bring you life.

PRAY

Holy Spirit, come.

- A.T.

READ

Joel 3:1-21

Psalm 110

REFLECT

After relating the terrible details of the locust plague and then the promise of the Lord's restoration of Judah, the book of Joel concludes with God's intention to eventually judge the nations for their poor treatment of Judah. Scholars dispute whether Chapter 3 refers to the final day of judgment or the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and it is beyond the scope of this devotional to discuss that. However, the *message* of the prophecy is valuable either way.

Ironically, despite the fact that Joel's prophesy sets out to warn Judah to turn back to God, the third chapter vigorously demonstrates how God will not turn away from His people. The message is one of comfort and hope for the people. One essential theme is that God will protect "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord" (Joel 2:32). The blessings described in chapter 2 indicate that Judah is counted among those who are calling on God's name. That is, they have repented and come back to God. In light of this, God's promise is to eternally establish His people (those who call on His name) but to punish the enemies of His people.

The language is strong and displays how serious God is about defending His "inheritance" (v 3:2), His children whom He deeply loves. God threatens to return in kind the mistreatment of Judah by its enemies (v 2-8). In verses 9-13 God calls for those enemies to prepare for war and gather before God to be judged. The Lord's judgment will be fierce: "The Lord will roar from Zion" (v16) and it will be felt throughout the earth

and the cosmos (v15 and 16). But through all these terrifying events "the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel" (v16).

The second essential theme is then boldly proclaimed: "Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill." God avenges and protects His people because God wants us to know who He is. When we know who God is and God is dwelling in His rightful place, our lives flourish just as "all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias." (v3:18) This imagery of abundant water is significant as the Bible often uses water to illustrate the Spirit of God. This passage, then, strongly reiterates Joel's vision of the Spirit of God being poured out on us (Joel 2:28) and connects us inextricably with these promises.

RESPOND

In each chapter, Joel declares that the day of the Lord is coming. His vision cautions us to take stock of ourselves, as individuals and as a corporate people of God. In whatever ways we need to return to the Lord, we would do well to gather with wise leaders, fast and cry out to God for help. Joel declares that God will listen to us and respond by restoring our relationship to Him. We will indeed know the meaning of Joel's name: the Lord is God.

PRAY

God of the past and future, I cry to you for the humility we need.

- Andrea Tych