

A Holy and Just (Fair) God (Joel)



SABBATH—APRIL 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joel 1; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:1–21; Joel 2:31, 32; Romans 10:13; Matthew 10:28–31.

MEMORY VERSE: “The LORD thunders with his mighty voice as he leads his army. He has so many forces they can’t [cannot] even be counted. Those who obey his commands are great in number. The day of the LORD is great and terrifying. Who can live through it?” (Joel 2:11, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God can use times of trouble to lead His people to Him and help them to feel their need for spiritual renewal and reformation.¹

DURING THE TIME OF AMOS AND HOSEA, A GREAT LOCUST PLAGUE (INVASION) AND A DANGEROUS DROUGHT (DRY PERIOD) WERE DESTROYING THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH. The prophet (special messenger) Joel sees that these events are a sign of judgment (punishment) from God (Joel 2:31). So, he calls all people in Judah to renounce (turn away from) sin and return to God. He describes the locusts as the Lord’s army. He sees their coming as God’s punishment upon unfaithful Israel.

Joel prophesies (foretells) that God’s future judgments will be far worse than the locust plague. But that same judgment will bring unequalled (without an equal) blessings to those who are faithful to the Lord and who obey His teachings. In other words, no matter how serious the judgment will be, it will lead to salvation for people whose hearts are open to the leading of the Lord.

¹ reformation—the act or process of improving something or someone by removing or correcting faults or problems.

SUNDAY—APRIL 14**A NATIONAL DISASTER (SUDDEN MISFORTUNE) (Joel 1:1–12)**

According to Joel 1:1–12, what is happening to the land of Judah?

The prophet Joel lived in a farming society. He told the farmers that they should be upset over the loss of their grain and fruit harvests. The destruction of the land could upset the nation's economy² (money system) for many years. But food, shade, and wood were lost. And there was a threat of topsoil erosion (wearing away). Some fruit trees in Palestine took 20 years to grow before they could produce fruit. So, the enemy army destroyed the land as a way of punishing the people it conquered. This was because the land could not recover quickly.

How does Deuteronomy 28:38 help us to understand what is happening to Judah?

Joel describes the locusts³ in four different ways (Joel 1:4) to explain how terrible the plague was. The destruction caused by the locusts is made even worse by a long dry season. All of the crops that the farmers expected had dried up and died. The farmers become very sad because they had nothing to eat or sell. They did not even have seed for replanting.

A terrible disaster such as this had never happened before.



The plague of locusts was made worse by a dry season.

Joel also announces the destruction of food crops, such as grapes, grain, and oil (Deuteronomy 14:23; Deuteronomy 18:4). Wheat and barley are the most important grains in Palestine. Vines and fig trees in the Bible are a symbol of God's blessings in the Promised Land (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). People in Bible times often pictured peace and success as being able to sit under one's own vine and fig tree. But this is threatened now by God's judgment (punishment) because of the people's sins.

Harvest was a time of celebration and happiness (Psalm 4:7; Isaiah 9:3). The land in Israel was a gift from the Lord. But it still belonged to God. Israel was expected to be a faithful steward (caretaker) of the land. Above all, the people were expected to worship and obey God because He

2. economy—the process or system by which goods and services are produced, sold, and bought in a country or region.

3. locusts—a type of grasshopper that travels in very large groups and that can cause great destruction by eating crops.

was the One who had given them the land in the first place.



Vines and fig trees are a symbol of God's blessings.

MONDAY—APRIL 15

BLOW THE TRUMPET! (Joel 1:13–20)

When natural disasters (sudden misfortunes) come, people ask many questions. The questions are: “Why did God let this happen?” “Why have some people lived, while others have died?” “Is there a lesson here that we could learn?” Joel had no doubt that the locust plague could help people better understand God’s plan for the universe. In chapter 1, with the Holy Spirit’s leading, Joel makes a comparison between the national crisis and the spiritual situation in the land. The locusts have left nothing that could be offered as sacrifice to the Lord. The grain offering and the drink offering were part of the daily offering in the temple (Exodus 29:40;

Numbers 28:5–8). The cutting off of the sacrifices was terrible. But it should have served as a warning to the people of their serious sinful condition. The loss of crops needed to offer the sacrifices was an example of the breaking of the covenant (agreement) between God and Israel. But, unlike many of the other prophets, Joel did not spend much time making a careful study of people’s failings. Joel was interested far more in the cure offered by God as Israel’s doctor.

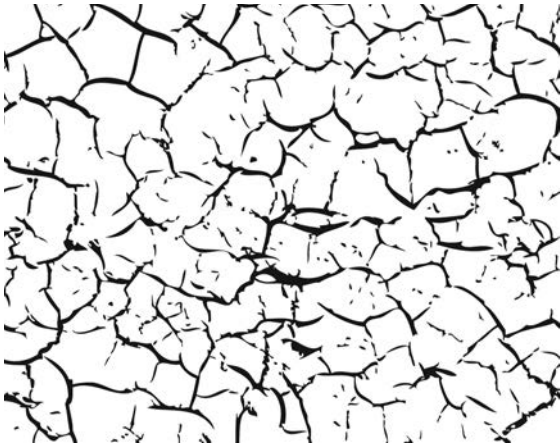
What is Joel saying to the people in Joel 1:13–20? The situation here applies to Israel. But how is this plea very common throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments?

Joel encourages the spiritual leaders to call a nationwide day of prayer and fasting. In this way the people can search deep within their hearts, turn away from their sins, and return to their God. Then they will leave the experience with a renewed trust in God’s love and justice. In the end, this misfortune might lead the believers into a deeper relationship with their Lord.

Throughout the Bible, God is described as the Lord of Creation. He created the earth, continues to support it, and also uses it for His purposes. In this time of “natural” disaster, the prophet Joel says that the people should tear open their hearts instead of their clothes. This will open them up to God’s grace⁴ and mercy.

4. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

Misfortune may hit us in many ways. When it does, what Bible promises can we hold onto for hope and strength? What promises are very meaningful to you?



The locusts left nothing that could be offered as sacrifice to God.

TUESDAY—APRIL 16

THE GIFT OF GOD'S SPIRIT (Joel 2:28, 29)

Read Joel 2:28, 29 and Acts 2:1–21. How is Peter interpreting (explaining the meaning of) the prophecy⁵ of Joel here?

On the day of Pentecost,⁶ the apostle (teacher and leader) Peter announced that the Lord had fulfilled (completed) His promise. It was the promise given through Joel about the outpouring (pouring out) of the Holy Spirit. Following the outpouring of the Spirit, God will make many unusual things happen in nature, both on

earth and in the sky.

“In connection with the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special showing of His Spirit (Joel 2:28). This prophecy was partly fulfilled by the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. But it will reach its complete fulfillment in the outpouring of God’s grace which will follow the closing work of the gospel.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, page 11.

Joel says that repentance⁷ will be followed by a great outpouring of God’s Spirit. This will bring a wonderful renewal. Instead of destroying people, God will shower them with blessings. The Lord promises His people that His creation will be restored (established again), and the nation will be set free from its enemies.

The Spirit is poured out upon God’s people. It is done in the same way the anointing oil was poured upon the heads of the people who were chosen to do God’s special work. The Spirit is also a gift of power given to the receivers so that they might do a special work for God (Exodus 31:2–5; Judges 6:34). Only this time the work of the Spirit will be worldwide. At that great point in history, salvation will be available to all who want to accept God. God’s Spirit will fall on all the faithful men and women, no matter how old or young or rich or poor they are. It is a fulfillment of Moses’ wish

5. prophecy—a special message from God, often explaining what will happen in the future.

6. Pentecost—the time when Jesus’ followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was after Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

7. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

that all the Lord's people become prophets and that the Lord put His Spirit upon them (Numbers 11:29).

What are things you can do in your own life that can make you more open to receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?



The Spirit is poured out upon God's people.

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 17

PREACHING GOD'S NAME (Joel 2:31, 32)

There will come a day when the sun becomes dark and the moon changes to blood. These should not be looked upon as natural disasters (misfortunes). Instead, they should be looked upon as signs of the Lord's coming. In Bible times, many pagan⁸ nations worshiped heavenly bodies as their gods. This is something that Moses said the Israelites should never do (Deuteronomy 4:19). So, Joel's prophecy is saying that the idols of the nations will begin to fade away when the Lord comes in judg-

ment. Joel 3:15 adds that even the stars will lose their power and will no longer give their light. This is because the presence of the Lord's glory will outshine (have a stronger light than) everything.

While Christ's coming will make sinners afraid, how will the saints welcome their Lord? What is the very important difference? Read Isaiah 25:9; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; and Romans 10:13.

In the Bible, the expression to "call on the name of the Lord" means to call oneself a follower of the Lord and to accept His promises. But it also can mean to preach (announce) God's name. This means witnessing to others about the Lord and what He has done for the world. Abraham built altars and preached God's name in the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:8). God announced His goodness and grace to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 33:19; Exodus 34:5). The writer of the psalms calls on the faithful to give thanks to God and call on His name by telling the nations what He has done (Psalm 105:1). And the expression is found in a song of salvation that was written by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 12:4).

So, to preach the Lord's name means two things, at least. It means to be a messenger of the glad tidings (news) that God still rules the world. It also means to tell everyone about God's gift of salvation that is offered to every human.

8. pagan—having to do with people who worship many gods or goddesses, the earth, or nature.

What do you think it means to “call upon the name of the Lord”? How do you do it, and what happens when you do?

THURSDAY—APRIL 18

THE REFUGE (PROTECTION) IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (Joel 3)

Biblical prophets picture the coming judgment from God as the roaring of a lion, a sound that makes everyone afraid (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2; Amos 3:8). In the Bible, Zion means the place of God’s earthly throne in Jerusalem. From this place, God will punish the enemy. But at the same time, He will save His people who patiently await His victory. They will share in His victory when He renews creation.

It is difficult for some people to understand the Bible’s pictures of God’s final judgment. It is good to keep in mind that evil and sin are very real. And their forces are strong as they try to oppose God and try to destroy every form of life. God is an enemy of evil. That is why Joel’s words call us to examine our lives so that we can be sure that we are faithful to God. If we are, we can be sheltered (protected) on the day of judgment.

Read Matthew 10:28–31. How do these verses help us to understand, even during terrible times, what Jesus has given us?

The Lord supports (helps) those persons who remain faithful. God

may bring destruction (ruined conditions) upon the earth (Joel 3:1–15). But His people should not fear His acts of judgment because He has promised to protect them (verse 16). He has given them His word of promise. His merciful acts show that He is a faithful, promise-keeping God who never again will let the saints be put to shame (Joel 2:27).

Joel’s book ends with a vision of a renewed world where a river flows in the middle of the New Jerusalem. This shows that the eternal God is there among a forgiven people (Joel 3:18–21).

Joel’s message challenges us to do three things: (1) to walk in the Spirit, (2) to lead a faithful Christian life wholeheartedly (without doubt), and (3) to reach out to all who have not yet called on the name of Christ. As we do, we accept Christ’s promise that He remains with us through the Holy Spirit, who dwells (lives) in the hearts of His faithful people.

“We must know our real condition. Or we shall not feel our need of Christ’s help. We must understand our danger. Or we shall not seek Christ who is our protector. We must feel the pain of our wounds. Or we should not desire healing.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 158. How do you understand your “real condition”? What pains are you suffering? How have you experienced the “refuge” (safety) promised to us in Christ?

FRIDAY—APRIL 19

ADDITIONAL STUDY: The name Joel was common in Bible times. It means “The Lord is God.” This name fits well with the theme of the book of the prophet Joel: only God is completely holy and just. His work is to rule the earth. The history of His people and of the nations is in His hands. The same is true about the life of every person.

“The very important issues [problems] of eternity require us to go beyond a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God asks for a revival [receiving new life] and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power. And the result is that Christians have weakened spiritual lives. In many sermons of today there is no preaching that awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. People who listen to sermons cannot say, ‘Did not our heart burn within us, while He [Jesus] talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures [Bible]?’ (Luke 24:32). There are many who are crying out for the living God. They are wishing for His presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only

false teachings hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 626.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In what ways is Joel’s message especially important to us, the ones who are living at the end of time?
- ② Read through the whole book of Joel at one time. Then answer the following question: How much does Joel’s message speak to people of his time, and how much does it speak to us?
- ③ Joel’s book describes different kinds of blessings poured upon God’s people. Does this prophecy make a difference between earthly and spiritual blessings? If so, what is that difference?
- ④ How does understanding the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) help us to understand the terrible sufferings that we face in the world today?
- ⑤ The Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s study discusses a “religion of words and forms.” What might that mean? How can we know if our religion is serious or just “words and forms”?