

Joel Chapter 1 - John Karmelich

1. For those of you who were with me as I went through the book of Hosea, you might recall when I started that book that God made it clear to me He wanted me to teach all the Minor Prophets. To make it simple, that is the last 14 books of the Old Testament. Anyway, the next book after Hosea is Joel. Ok, you might say, I'm, not even sure where that book is in the bible, let alone understand why I'm supposed to study it with you. Just because you believe you've been called to teach those books, why do we have to follow along? You don't have to. I've just learned that the best way to grow as a Christian and grow closer to God is to study His word. Whether or not you're aware of Joel, it's part of the bible and there's a lot of wonderful things for Christians to learn from it.
 - a) The easiest way to find Joel in a Christian bible is to find the big prophet books like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. After those is Hosea, and right after that is this little 3-chapter book of Joel. Now that you know where to find it, let me discuss the book briefly.
 - b) The first thing to know about Joel is the phrase is "The Day of the Lord". For those of you who'd like to run in some other direction when you hear anything "Revelation like" let me start by saying that phrase isn't just a reference to the great judgment. Which reminds me, let me explain why The Great Judgment is necessary and why it's such a big topic all over the bible. The easiest way to explain it is just as our world had to have a beginning, it also has to have an ending. To make us aware when that ending takes place, the bible tells us about how to recognize it when it occurs. Two of the four gospels discuss it and obviously the book of Revelation spends a lot of time discussing it. If our world will one-day begin a new era with Jesus ruling over it, it'd make sense that such a major change would be such a big event the entire world would be aware when it occurs. I'm a Christian who believes, "If the literal translation of the bible makes sense, seek no other sense". That's why I like to argue that "The Day of the Lord" is a literal event.
2. OK, enough of all of that. What does it have to do with Joel? For only a three chapters book, that phrase appears five or six times depending upon your translation. My point is whatever it meant to Joel, it was important enough to repeat a lot. The book of Joel was written over 2,500 years ago. If he's talking about "the" end, why write it so far in advance? Why focus on an event that has not occurred in the lifetime of most people who argue for the existence of God? One reason is what I call the "keep us on our toes" motivation. (By the way that that "toe phrase" is my lesson title.) If you're working at a job and you knew the boss could walk in the room at any moment, wouldn't that be a motivation tool to keep us focused? Knowing that Jesus can return at any time is a good reason to keep Christians "on our toes". I'm convinced the apostles and Paul believed Jesus could return at any moment. The point is God wants us Christians to be living as if Jesus can return to come rule over this world anytime!
3. Even with that speech out of my system, there is a lot more to the "Day of the Lord" than that key moment in "future history". In Jewish thought, "The Day of the Lord" can be anytime or anyplace where God is working in a mighty way. The horrid destruction of the land of Israel that occurred several times in history can be correctly described as the "Day of the Lord". What I am saying is a biblical concept is that God works in patterns. That means that a "small scale" type of destruction like how the Nation of Israel was destroyed is a model of "large scale" destruction that will occur when God radically changes the world as we know it. We may not see the "Revelation Show" in our lifetime, but we are to live as if it can begin at any time. If that is not enough of a motivation for us, the other reminder is the "Day of the Lord" can be a series of really bad things that occur in world for reasons bigger than any of us can imagine.
 - a) What I'm getting at is that as tough a concept as "The Day of the Lord" means, God wants us to keep that thought in mind if for no other reason, then the fact that's the way our life and our world will end one day whether we like it or not! No it doesn't mean we have to go build a bomb shelter. It just means we live as if Jesus can return at any moment!

- b) That means we use our lives to make a difference for Him as I've been lecturing a lot over the last bunch of lessons.
 - c) Getting back to Joel, does that mean he was focusing on "the" end times? Don't think so. I do think it's a "parallel" prediction as I said earlier, God loves to work in patterns. What I suspect was Joel's immediate focus was getting the Israelites around Him to focus on God and not just go through the motions of say going to synagogue once a week.
 - d) Which reminds me, it's time for my "who, what, when and why's" of Joel.
4. A problem with the book of Joel, is there is not a whole lot of background about him or even a lot of clues as to where and when he wrote. Here's what we do know and what scholars suspect:
- a) First, Joel doesn't give any family background other than his father's name (last name).
 - b) The text implies he was called to preach to the Southern Israelite Kingdom of Judah. That means this book was written when Israel was split into two kingdoms. It's possible it was written after the Israelites returned from captivity in the 6th Century BC, but the majority of scholars argue it was written when Israel was in two kingdoms. It gets complicated as Joel mentions the Temple a half dozen times in this book, but never any king of Israel.
 - c) Jewish tradition says he was from one of the Northern Tribes, but was called to preach in the Southern Kingdom. The key point is we don't know the exact date, but a majority of the bible scholars I read speculate it was written roughly around 800 B.C.
 - d) I've covered the where and when. I've stated the fact that nothing is known of his history within Israel. The last question is "why". Why did the Hebrew scholars include this book in the bible? By the time of Jesus, this book was accepted as being a part of the bible, and Peter quotes it in Acts 2:18. We'll get to that quote in the second lesson.
 - e) So why is Joel in the bible? Can't anybody state, "God's going to end the world one day as we know it?" What makes Joel's book so special? If he's giving an "it could happen at any time" set of predictions, how do we know he wasn't one of those crazy people who have a sandwich board around them saying, "The world will end because I say so!" I suspect it is because Joel wrote not too long before the Babylonians destroyed the Southern Kingdom. Just as Hosea was "one big warning" to the Northern Kingdom about the fact it was about to be destroyed by the Assyrians, Joel gives those in the Southern Kingdom a similar type of warning of how the Southern Kingdom will "get theirs on day if they don't repent".
5. OK John, this is all ancient history, and most of us know how the Israelites were conquered first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians. Even after all that, they were allowed to return to that land, the Romans did it to them again. This is all ancient history. Why should we care? The answer is because God works in "patterns". No it doesn't mean an army will destroy us 24 hours from now. It means that just as God wanted the Israelites to be on the look out that God wanted to wipe them out for failing to be a witness for Him, so He can and does wipe out ministries that fail to be a living witness for Him. Dead and dying churches exist all over the place as people do fail to go where God's leading them and they pay the price. Therefore, I ask you join me through this little three-chapter book as we learn about what to be on the lookout for, as far as our future as witnesses for Jesus to the world around us. Oh, my lesson title is "keeping us on our toes"!
6. Joel Chapter 1, Verse 1: The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.
- a) This is the "entirety" of the background we get on Joel. To state one's father's name is how they gave their last name. His name tells us he was not for example, the son of another of the famous prophets, or that he was part of any royal line. He was just someone who God picked to preach to the Southern Kingdom. Just as God can chose anyone willing to make a difference for Him today, so God picked Joel to give this message of "doom is coming".
 - b) The point is all believers should "be on our toes" for this to occur, but also tell our children and our grandchildren to live as if God can return at any moment to set up His kingdom. Think of the "Day of the Lord" as both a good news and a bad news message that all of us need to hear. The bad news is "The Day of the Lord" is a lot of horrible things that'll occur in the future, and its good new is "The Day" is when God will rule here!

- c) OK John, we get the idea the "Day of the Lord" has come on a semi-grand scale in that the nation of Israel was destroyed a handful of times in history. We also get the idea that this is a hint of "The" end time events coming. This was written a long time ago and we've got other things to do with our time. Even if we believe Jesus can return at any time, why do we have to interrupt our lives to learn these details? Ever stopped to consider that there is more bible text about "Jesus Second Coming" or "The Day of the Lord" as Joel calls it, then there is about all the time Jesus walked on earth! All I'm saying is if study the whole bible the Second Coming topic is bigger topic than all of the events that lead up to the cross and resurrection. What I'm saying is if God considers this topic to be "that big", that should be a motivation to us to take some time every so often to understand it and learn from it.
 - d) Bottom line, it's worth taking a little time to understand what prophets like Joel are trying to tell people like you and me who believe Jesus is God and He will return one day to set up that kingdom. With that said, let's start getting into the heart of Joel's message.
7. Verse 2: Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers?
- a) The first and logical question is what is the "this" in the second sentence. Whatever it was it must have been recent, unique, and significant enough to be seen by everyone that Joel's addressing. The "this" is explained in Verse 3. My point is Joel wants everyone to focus on a major event that has probably just occurred. All I'm saying is this is not a prediction of a future event, but a big description of something that just happened.
 - b) With that said, let me clue you in on the "this". The "this" was a big locust swarm I believe is now come and gone. We'll get to the specific's in Verse 4. I'm convinced it was a literal event and Joel's going to use that event to warn of the future "Day of the Lord". Just as the insects did horrible damage to the land of Israel so another great event will occur. All I'm saying is because catastrophe struck, one can see that as a Day of the Lord and Joel wants to use that catastrophe to teach of "The" Day of the Lord. Before I can get to "The" big one that will be hinted at in Chapter 2, we need to discuss what did happen, which is the story of Chapter 1.
 - c) Shorter version: Joel uses a recent catastrophe that occurs in Chapter 1 to describe even a bigger one that is future. It's Joel's way of saying, "Hey you think that was bad, you have no idea what "The Day of the Lord" is really like until this future event occurs."
 - d) Let me pause to address the issue of what about all the people that suffered and died due to the catastrophe that occurred in this chapter? Didn't God care about their lives? What popped in my head is when Jesus was asked to comment on a recent tragedy in His time, (when a tower fell on some people and another event when Pilate had some people killed due to a building project, but that's a separate story). The point is when Jesus was told of those disasters where innocent people died, He said, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Story from Luke 13:1-5). The point is not that all people will die due to some form of a tragedy. His point is unless we repent and turn to God, we'll all die in our sins if we don't turn to Him for the forgiveness of sins.
 - i) In other words, everybody has to die sometime. In many cases, some horrid thing occurred to bring an end to life. Jesus point is whether we die young or old, if we don't trust in His payment for our sins, it doesn't matter how long we live.
 - ii) The reason I bring that up here, is we're about to study how many people died due to a horrid tragedy in Israel's history. The point isn't to feel sorry for a large group of people who died over 2,500 years ago. It's a reminder of no matter how long we get to live, our time is short, and the best use of our time is to make a difference for Jesus in this world. That's Joel's key underlying point in this chapter.
 - e) Meanwhile, I left Joel describing this "unnamed" event as of yet. All he is saying so far is whatever "it" is, nothing happened like it in recent Israel history. As to the specifics of it, I'm going to discuss it in detail over the next page or so, so bear with me.

8. Verse 3: Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.
- a) Whatever "it" is, Joel encourages those listening to him to tell of "it" to their children. Also to tell it to their grandchildren and great grandchildren. Let's be honest, passing a story to our children of a horrid disaster where a lot of people die is not a happy bedtime story. It is not meant to scare people and prepare for another disaster. This event occurred to warn God's people that just as God has worked in a mighty but horrid way in the past, so there will be another "great movement" of God to bring about a world wide change where He'll rule the world one day.
 - b) In other words this event is not meant to scare people about a locust plague (coming up in the next verse) but to teach our children to have a healthy fear of God and the fact He will judge people both individually and collectively one day.
 - c) Before I get into a discussion of locusts in the next verse, let me quickly discuss the debate over whether or not Christians go through this horrid time to come. This debate has been a part of Christian history for millenniums. Those of us who believe in this literal event to occur, debate whether Christians are out of here before it occurs or have to live through it. I hold the "out of here before it starts" view, but if I'm wrong, I'm wrong. Without starting a big debate over this issue, I'll just say there are bible scholars on both sides of this issue. I hold the view as do most of the scholars I respect that "we're out of here" before the great "Day of the Lord" ever begins. The point here is it is essential to teach our children about all of the aspects of this event, which is a reason why Joel was written. In the meantime, I have jumped ahead of the story and it is time for us to learn about locust plagues.
9. Verse 4: What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.
- a) There are only two verses in Joel (this one and 2:25) that mention locusts. Some scholars argue it's a metaphor for an army attacking Israel, but I'll argue it was the real thing. The clue is Joel will mention the priests doing their duty at the temple, and if it was describing the end of the Southern Kingdom (where Joel preached) then the temple would be gone as the Babylonians destroyed it. My simple point here is that Joel's description of a plague of locusts is literal. Since the priests were still "doing their thing after this attack took place", I read this as a literal locust attack and not Jerusalem's destruction which took place some time after Joel was written. All I'm saying is I'm convinced Joel's describing a literal locust plague. Remember the bible interpretation rule: "If a literal interpretation makes perfect sense, seek no other sense".
 - b) OK then, whether we like it or not, time to describe locusts. The first thing we need to get is that locusts have multiple growth phases. Just as a frog begins its life as a little creature that swims and then grows to live above the water and just as a caterpillar changes to turn into a butterfly, so the locusts have multiple growth states. The point is full grown locusts will swarm (like grasshoppers in very large numbers), so they are babies start by crawling on the ground and then growing wings to hop. Other bible translations will describe it as a four-step growth process and that's what this less literal translation is trying to convey.
 - c) The other thing to grasp is the huge numbers of locusts that can swarm. They will literally eat everything in their path. An attack of a swarm of locusts literally means starvation as they destroy all crops and trees in their paths. Swarms of locusts can travel for hundreds of miles and can be dozens of miles in scope. The last major locust swarm recorded in the history of Israel was around 1915 if memory is correct. You don't have to remember all of these details about locusts. All you have to realize is that in large numbers, they are a big threat to one's life and whatever grows out of the ground.
 - d) Now that you know more about locusts than you ever care to consider, realize that having a horrid plague of locusts is something Joel wants Israelites to keep in mind as an army is going to come one day to destroy Israel just as the locusts destroyed all in it's path!

- e) Therefore, whether Joel was describing a literal locust plague (which I believe he was) or if he's describing an army acting "locust like", either way the point is the same. That point is the fact that despite the horrid damage done by that swarm, God still has a plan for our future to survive and thrive despite all the damage caused. That's a key point coming up in the book of Joel as we go through it. Speaking of moving on, let's do that.
10. Verse 5: Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips.
- a) Well, if Verse 4 wasn't strange enough, we're now moving from locusts to drunkards. It's a strange transition. Let me explain: From this verse through Verse 15, Joel explains how the damage done by the locusts affects life in Israel. It's like saying, everyone will be hurt from the bad to the good people. Joel starts off by picking on drunkards as if to say, "even those people who are wasting their lives away getting drunk all the time are affected by this plague."
- b) Let me explain this verse literally before I get into the issue of "drunkards". If a swarm of locusts destroyed all the farmland around us, that would include destroying grape vines. Grapes grow well in Israel and is one of the major crops there then, as is the case today.
- c) There are all sorts of fears of those in the grape industry and one of them is any insect that can ruin their crops. Anyway, Joel is saying even the drunkards in Israel will be affected by this horrid plague.
- d) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me give a few words on Christians and drinking. I've met some very devout Christians who argue that Christians should never drink alcohol as it makes us a bad witness for Jesus. I know other devout Christians who don't think twice about having a glass of wine with their friends. While the bible definitely condemns being drunk, there are a couple of occasions where people have a drink. I've always argued that Jesus drank wine at the Last Supper simply because that holiday is in the spring and fresh grape juice (with no refrigerators) was only available in late summer. My view is that we should always be a good witness for Jesus and if having a drink can cause someone to be uncomfortable, we should avoid it. Obviously some people do struggle and they can't be around any setting where there is alcohol. For others, it is no big deal. Now that I've said my peace, and obviously this verse is condemning drunkards, time to get back to the text.
11. Verse 6: A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.
- a) Remember I said earlier that some scholars think the locusts were literal, while others will argue they represent an invading army. Verse 6 is the argument for the non-literal. Those like me who still say the locusts are literally will argue that the "nation" refers to locusts.
- b) Let me argue my case. One way that locusts are like lions is that their teeth structures are surprisingly similar (to a different scale of course). If you're ever out in the wilderness in a situation where locusts are around, you actually can hear them chewing at night. All I am saying is I believe the "lion like teeth" are another reference to literal locusts.
- c) I'll argue that Verse 7 proves my case, so let me add that one here:
12. Verse 7: It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.
- a) Realize the "it" refers to this invading army. An army of locusts will eat all plant life that's in its path. That obviously includes vines and fig trees which were both common there.
- b) Let me pause and ask the important question here: Why should we care? OK, locusts did a lot of damage to Israel over 2,500 years ago. Why would God want us to remember this event? Obviously there have been many other tragedies in history. What's so special that this is part of the bible? Glad you asked! Part of it is a warning to the Southern Kingdom of Judah where Joel preached. It's the idea that just as this locust army destroyed all, so it will be sometime in the not too distant future, that a human army is going to destroy all in the path of the Israelites. Those that survived were relocated in the Babylonian Empire.

- c) OK John, again, a sad story that happened about 2,500 years ago. Why should any of us care about this ancient history? If for no other reason, than to keep up on our toes, which is why I picked that phrase as my lesson title. I am not saying that we don't have to deal with our issues at hand. I'm saying we have to keep our issues in a perspective that God's still working on His timing and one day the "Day of the Lord" will be a real event. So how do we prepare for it? Easy, trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior and use your life as a witness to Him. People need to realize that we're all living in a lost and dying world and our only hope of surviving "The Day of the Lord" is to be "In Him".
- d) There, now that I've scared everyone, time to get back to Joel.
13. Verse 8: Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.
- a) First question here: Who's the one mourning? The next verse is about the priests working in the temple so it could be about them. The last "group" reference was to drunkards who were wasting their lives accordingly. Either way, the point is things are bad. The idea of the locusts ruining all crops, is that there is no food, meaning starvation. Here in Verse 8 we get a picture of a grieving virgin because apparently her husband just died. The point is to wail in frustration for what's gone wrong.
- b) Remember from a few verses back Joel told everyone to make sure they tell their children and their grandchildren about this catastrophe (Verse 3.) The idea is to realize this was so bad, hopefully they never go through it again. It's a little like us older people living today who've heard stories of the great depression and to do what we can to avoid having to go through something that horrid ever again. In both cases, Joel is essentially saying, things are so bad, make sure you never forget it, and pass this lesson on to your children!
- c) The modern application is to make sure our children understand "The Day of the Lord" as we pass on what that means to our children.
14. Verse 9: Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD.
- a) Speaking of bad news, things don't let up here. The next focus is on the priests who work at the "house of the LORD". (When that word is in all capitals, it represents the most holy name of God, that we sometimes call "Jehovah"). If nothing else, this verse is a big clue of when this book was written. It was not after the Babylon captivity, as the temple did not get rebuilt until a good time after some of them returned. All I'm saying is this verse is a big clue that Joel was probably written long before the destruction took place.
- b) Anyway, the "drunks" weren't the only ones hurt by this food shortage. The offerings that the priests were require to give had to cease, due to a lack of food. If the locusts ate all the grass, that means the animals died off next. Anyway, it shows how it affected the priests.
- c) All of this is showing that not only is there a lack of food, it meant a lack of what God did require the Israelites to do even if they did want to honor Him as God.
- d) Let me give a few more "woe for them" verses and then I'll talk about how it affects us.
15. Verse 10: The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. ¹¹ Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. ¹² The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree-- all the trees of the field--are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.
- a) We have to admit, Joel is not the happiest book in the bible. The obvious point here is due to the locust eating everything in site, the farmers lose all their crop. These verses describe different trees and plants that grow in Israel. The short version is those locusts completely ate everything that grows out of the ground. If one wants to know what a huge swarm of locusts can do to a farm or a large area of land, these verses do give us a big clue.
- b) Ok John, we agree this is horrid. Why put the picture in our minds of lots of people who did starve to death. I can see why they wanted their children to know about this to warn them of future occurrences, but why have it as a bible lesson for us? Glad you asked!

- i) First, this story has been used for millenniums as a source of comfort. I know of a few people who've personally told others in times of tragedy that despite what the "locusts" have done to their lives, God still has a wonderful plan for our eternity as He wants us to trust Him through such times. I'm not saying we can't get help. All I want to say is that God is well aware of our own "locust" times and He still wants to guide us through such situations so we can glorify Him through it all.
 - ii) The other reminder is about our eternal future. The bible makes it clear all through the book that "The" Day of the Lord will come and that fact has to be past on to all future generations until it happens. That's what we Christians are called to do be a witness for Jesus that "The Day of the Lord" will come and our only hope to get through it is by our trust in Jesus in spite of the damage caused by that day.
 - c) Well, this sure is an upbeat lesson. Let's go back to Joel so he can throw more at us!
16. Verse 13: Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴ Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.
- a) Joel is back to the priests. If you don't know, "sackcloth" is an uncomfortable garment that was worn when people mourned. My only rough equivalent today is when we wear black clothes to a funeral as a sign of mourning. Anyway, the priests who worked at the Temple were mourning because the damage done by these locusts. One can read these verses as a prediction of what will happen in the future, or as describing a recent tragedy.
 - b) Either way, Joel reads here as if he's a news broadcaster reporting a horrid tragedy.
 - c) Notice what Joel requests of the priests in Verse 14: Cry out to God for help. Since all of the food is gone anyway, Joel requests that everyone fasts as a way of seeking God. This is Joel's way of saying, "OK, everything is really bad right now. What do you say we all pray to God collectively and see if He'll do anything to help us in this tragedy."
 - d) One has to remember that the primary mission of priests in general and the prophets in particular is to encourage and help people draw closer to God. Joel's essentially saying here, "Instead of just sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves, or blaming the locusts or worse, blaming God, what do you say we actually turn to Him for help as God loves to help those who are truly seeking Him."
 - e) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me give a quick lecture on "fasting". This has nothing to do with fasting to lose weight or for health reasons. Fasting as a form of prayer is how one show's God we are serious about seeking Him. If you've ever been in a situation that you are so upset you can't even think about eating or food has lost it's taste, that's close to the idea of God's fast. It's the idea that God is so important to you right now, that the idea of eating doesn't appeal to us. Fasting can be giving up all food or it can also be giving up one's favorite food. The type of fast isn't as important to God as the fact you're willing to give up something that's important to us in order to grow closer to Him. Again, this has nothing to do with wanting to lose weight or even show people how "religious" we are. I hold the view that fasting should be done privately as to not let others even be aware of it as we go through that ritual at times. Obviously there are other ways of showing God we are serious about our prayer life, and fasting is just one of those methods.
 - i) So does this mean God has to react to our prayers because we're fasting? I always held the view that "God is God" and He can do what He wants when He want. He can't be forced into a corner because we're praying hard or even fasting. When we fast, it's a way of showing God we're serious about seeking Him. By drawing close to Him it helps us to see the world from His perspective. That's it.
 - f) In the meantime, Joel is requesting both the spiritual leaders and civil leaders around him join Joel in fasting as to help them see this tragedy from God's perspective.

- g) Let me ask another tough question: Does the suffering of God's people mean He wants to punish at times? I believe God doesn't punish His people, but He does discipline us so that we'll be a better witness for Him. It's a little like God saying, "I haven't heard from a lot of you for awhile, let me 'turn the heat up' to get your attention!" Why does God allow His people to suffer and die if He claims He loves us so much? As the old saying goes, if this life is all there is, this life would be very unfair. However, if there is a next life and if we get to enjoy that eternity forever based on our trust in what Jesus did for us, then if He chooses to use some of us as martyrs for Him, that's a way of leading others to Him.
- i) As I've been taught, being a martyr for Jesus is a relatively easy thing as the pain is over fairly quickly. The real challenge is to live for Him daily!
- h) Anyway, Joel is working hard to get the attention of anyone around him willing to listen to Him that "tragedy has struck" (or is about to strike) and the best thing we can do in this situation is seek God and ask Him to help us deal with this tragedy. That's the main point of this text. Now that I've beaten that point to death, it's time to move on!
17. Verse 15: Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.
- a) Here is one of those places where we get the "Day of the Lord" quoted. Reading this verse in context, we get the idea that the "Day of the Lord" isn't just an end time event. Anytime that God "moves" in a mighty way, can be called a "Day of the Lord".
- b) So are you saying that if a hurricane, tornado or earthquake strikes to do a lot of damage, it should be considered a (not "the") Day of the Lord? I can't explain all tragedies. I know we live in a fallen world and horrid things happen all the time. All I'm saying is when we see tragedy strike in big way, besides asking others for help, we should seek Him to help us with our perspective of the tragedy and ask Him to give us the strength and courage to be a good witness for Him through whatever we're dealing with! God never promises us that life will be good all the time! He promises that He will be with us all the time. That's what Joel and the bible as a whole is trying to remind us through such tragedies.
- c) The point is one of those tragedies is about to strike Israel and Joel is warning those close to him that God's about to "move" in a mighty but tragic way.
- d) With that said, let's get back to Joel's tragedy to see what happens next.
18. Verse 16: Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes-- joy and gladness from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up.
- a) Here we see more of the results of this disaster. The food supply has been cut off. There's no more joy even in God's house as the priests have nothing to sacrifice to God because all of the food has been eaten by the locusts. Apparently the locusts managed to eat their way into the storage facilities as they eat the walls of it first, the whatever is inside of it.
- b) Bottom line the locust plague is really bad news as it destroyed the food supply they need to survive upon.
- c) Let me pause to say, the entire book of Joel is not like this. Chapter 1 sets up the story of a past tragedy to remind us of "the" great tragedy that will occur in the distant future. One thing I've learned from studying the bible as a whole, is God loves to work in patterns. It's the idea that "Event A" is a short term fulfillment of an event, but it's also warning us of a bigger "Event B" to occur in the future. The point is to realize bible predictions aren't just a major single event, often there are short and long term fulfillments.
- i) The classic example is the Israelites returning to the land. The "short term" way it happened is after the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites were allowed to return to that land, but as part of another empire. The prophesy was completely fulfilled in 1948 when they returned there as an independent country. Even the first president in 1948 cited Ezekiel as to tell the world that God has fulfilled His promise to bring Israel back as an independent country as predicted in that book!

- d) What I'm getting at here is the reason Joel wants the Israelites to remember this tragedy is not just to learn ancient history. It's to realize God works in "patterns" and just as He did allow this horrid tragedy to occur way back then, so it'll occur again "on a larger scale" as He will work on a grand scale in the future to change the world so that His Messiah, Jesus can rule over the world one day as implied here in Joel (coming up) as well as throughout the entire bible.
- e) In the meantime, we left Joel describing the tragedy in his day. He's not done yet:
19. Verse 18: How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering.
- a) Time to discuss locusts a little more whether we like it or not. My point here is that locusts are vegetarians. While they don't eat cattle or sheep, they will eat all the vegetation on the ground, so that animals have nothing to eat. The point here is it is not only humans that'll suffer due to this plague, but animals as well. If those animals also die of starvation, it is another way the people will suffer as they literally will have nothing to eat.
- b) Anyway I've beaten to death the point that this is bad stuff. No reason to pound the point anymore. Yes, the description of this tragedy continues in Chapter 2, but Joel has another related point to make about that tragedy in the next chapter. That is the reason why bible scholars put a break between Chapters 1 and 2 over a millennium after Joel wrote this.
- c) Bottom line is I'm going cut this lesson "short a little" (10 pages versus my normal 12) as I figured 20 verses on this tragedy is enough for us to digest for one week. Speaking of the 20 Verses, we're on #18, so let's get through the last two.
20. Verse 19: To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field.
- a) Here we move from locust damage to fire. I don't know how fire is related to the locusts, but it is obvious that when disaster struck, it struck big and hard.
- b) Notice that Joel doesn't blame God for the disaster. He doesn't say, "Hey God, aren't these Your people? Why did You allow this occur?" We can't explain why God allows bad stuff to occur. We just accept the fact that He does allow it and we pray for His guidance as we have to deal with the "clean-up" operation. I'm reminded of an old expression, that a real change happens quickly, it's the clean-up operation that lasts a long time! Anyway, Joel is aware that the tragedy has struck and there is no reason to dwell on why. What has to be dealt with now is the clean up operation. Therefore, Joel "moans" throughout this chapter for the suffering done by this damage and realizes that the only way for those Israelites to deal with that tragedy is to ask God's help.
- c) It is a reminder to us that when tragedy strikes, asking God "why" doesn't change the fact that it occurred. The main concern is what do we do now? Learning to see those horrid things from His perspective (that it draws people closer to Him) is how He wants us to go deal with such tragedies. Doesn't it also mean we should help physically, emotionally as well as financially as we can? Of course. What we ask of God is the wisdom as well as an ability to deal with that situation and be a witness for Him through such times!
- d) Now if that doesn't put a positive spin on a horrid tragedy, nothing will!
21. Verse 20: Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.
- a) I'm not an ecology expert to understand how a locust plague can also destroy one's water supply. I'm sure there is a "cause and effect" of a lack of grass, that then a lack of water all of which started with a horrid plague of locusts. All we know for sure is we're reading of a major ecological disaster that affects all life in that region.
- b) So does this mean we should worry about "Global warming" to use a modern example? I would argue no, and that's a major topic all until itself. The short version is I'm not in any way impressed with the present evidence to indicate a global catastrophe will occur. They will always argue unless we're all taxed more now, we'll suffer down the road!

- i) I'm a big believer in "follow the money". One reason environmentalists want us to believe in all of this is they want to tax us far more to pay for it. Let me put it this way, I've read recently of the decrease in ice in the northern polar region as well as an equal amount of increase in the southern polar region. My point is I'm positive the world will exist until God says it's time to wrap it up! We can drop a bunch of nuclear bombs and wipe out most of life, but it'll still continue until God says so. A plague of locusts will do horrid damage to an area, but in a relatively short time, we will see life appearing again. All I'm saying is the world will end on God's timing. There is nothing we can do to speed up that timeframe.
 - c) The reason I'm getting on an "ecology rant" is that God allows horrid things to happen to this planet, but ultimately there is some purpose behind it. We'll never understand why He allows such tragedies to occur, but we must accept that they are a part of this world. We must pray for His guidance and His strength for us to be good witness for Him in the "clean up" operation and God calls on all of us to be a good witness for Him especially in such tough times.
 - d) Before I end this, a few quick words on Chapter 2. Part of it is the same, as Joel continues to discuss the effect of the locust plague. What the next chapter does is "expand the scope" of the plague to show how it ties to "The" Day of the Lord and why they tie together. The reason I'd like you to join me for the next lesson isn't just because "It is God's word so we must study it", but I'd like you to see how God explains to us in terms we can understand of why all this judgment is necessary.
 - e) Therefore, that's enough "tragic talk" for one lesson. Time to wrap this up in prayer.
22. Let's pray: Father, we are painfully aware that we live in a fallen world. We can daily read of all the tragedies around us and we can so easily focus on our own issues, we forget that those people are among Your people as well. All I'm saying is that we need to be aware that "Your Day" will be a significant part of our eternal lives whether we realize it or not. Therefore, we ask You help us to keep in mind that our world is itself doomed one day and our job is to be a good witness to people around us as keep in mind that this world is not our eternal home. Help us that we make a difference to that lost and dying world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.