

Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, II

Joel on Profitable Plagues

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CLASSIC PROPHECYING

- The book of Joel is the stuff of classic Minor Prophets.

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes ... Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste – nothing escapes them. – Joel 2:1-3 NIV

Q: Do you know who this mighty army was? Have you ever sung this tune:

Blow the trumpet in Zion, Zion; sound the alarm in Thy Holy Mountain ... They rush on the city, they run on the wall (Joel 2:9)

A: It was a swarm of locust; a big swarm; a plague.

- I'll bet you didn't know you were singing about grasshoppers.
- Joel is only has 73 verses and 32 of them focus on the locust.

Q: Why is God into plagues, invading armies, and natural disasters?

Q: Why does Japan have so many earthquakes?

Q: Why does Oklahoma have so many tornados?

Q: Why do evil people get to destroy twin towers?

IN THE FIRST PLACE

It's interesting that Joel makes a reference to the Garden of Eden; because in order to understand why these things happen in the first place, we have to go back to the "first place". The world is not functioning in its original condition:

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. – Genesis 1:31 NIV

There was no suffering; pain; disease; earthquakes, floods, famines; invading armies; or swarms of locust. Then came sin, followed by God cursing the ground (Gen 3:17).

Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. ... right up to the present time. - Romans 8:20, 22 NLT

The mechanism of nature is being governed by a new set of rules.

Q: Does God curse when He gets mad?

Q: Did He curse and kick Adam and Eve out of Eden because He was ticked off?

And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden ... - Genesis 1:22-23 NIV

Man not only had acquired the ability to adopt evil; he suddenly had the opportunity to make it an eternally permanent situation.

- So He banned Adam and Eve for their own benefit.
- We know that God is neither fickle nor spiteful.

We can't comprehend everything He does, but we know that he's not senseless. He acts according to our best interest.

Q: So, what possible benefits could plagues and disasters bring?

Another way Adam became like God that day, is that he realized a level of self-sufficiency and self-direction he'd never known.

- We really like self-sufficiency and self-direction.
- No one's gonna tell me what to do! I'm my own boss!
- I am all American ... independent and self-governing!

I drive my car, to my office, to work at my computer station; I go through the drive-through for lunch, if I have to pick up milk I scan it myself; then I'll go back to my house, shut the door, and watch my TV.

- I can get along just fine
- I don't need other people.
- And I sure don't need God.

Q: But, have you noticed what happens when disaster strikes?

A: Everyone comes out of their little self-sufficient holes.

We join hands; we pray. We work together. I'll hold the sandbag, you fill it; make a chain! I'll cook up some food.

Humility, servant-hood, renewed appreciation for the fragility of life; the very mechanism of nature keeps us mindful of our lack of self-sufficiency and our indispensable dependence upon God.

And we tend to question our existence:

- What does it all mean?
- Why did this happen to me?
- (Or) Why did it happen to them and not me?
- Were they worse sinners?

That's a really good question. Sometimes we get this idea that God rains disasters down upon only the wicked. He allowed evil men to destroy the twin towers.

Q: were those victims worse sinners than us? Of course not. A tower fell in Jesus' day, and killed 18 men:

And what about the eighteen men who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will also perish." - Luke 13:4-5 NLT

God uses unfriendly forces of nature to wake us up to the reality of sin in our own lives. There is great profit in a plague that serves to recalibrate our relationship with God.

JOEL'S AUDIENCE

Joel makes it clear who his intended audience is – who this message was crafted specifically for (not just the sinners):

Hear this, you elders ... - Joel 1:2 NIV

... listen, all who live in the land. - Joel 1:2 NIV

Wake up, you drunkards ... - Joel 1:5 NIV

Despair, you farmers ... - Joel 1:11 NIV

Put on sackcloth, O priests ... - Joel 1:13 NIV

It's for the elders, the inhabitants, the drunkards, the farmers, and the priests. That pretty much sums up everyone.

Q: And what was Joel's message?

A: In the middle of his 73 verses, we're given a 2-verse message:

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. – Joel 2:12-13 NIV

Q: This is his message: “Rend your heart and not your garments.”

Tearing of clothes was a ritual gesture. There were four reasons people rended, or rent their clothes in the OT.

1. Fear and alarm.
2. Anger and frustration.
3. Grief and mourning.
4. Sorrow for sin as an act of repentance.

And it could be any combination; remember when Reuben returned to the pit and found Joseph missing? He rent his clothes.

- Joel’s saying to make sure this plague is profitable.
- Don’t just respond out of robotic religious reaction.

Search yourself; examine your heart; ask the tough questions; and allow the fear, the anger, and the grief to result renewed relationship with the Lord.

- The final 35 verses detail the promises of God.

If Hosea’s message could be summed up as: “Don’t add on to God.” Joel’s message could be: “Don’t take God for granted.” But sadly, the better off we are, the more likely we are to live for our own glory instead of His ... the effects of the fall.

This is why Joel wanted the story of this plague passed on:

Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. – Joel 1:2-3

We have TV, radio, newspapers, and the internet to remind us, to center us, to ground us, and to rein in and control the effects of reckless self-sufficiency and self-direction.

We were created *by* His purpose and *for* His purpose; and that purpose is to reveal, to demonstrate, and to share His glory: The essence of His nature; the radiance of His splendor; and the atmosphere of His presence.

To miss out on this, Joel reminds us, would be the greatest disaster of all.