

# ***SOUNDING THE TRUMPET: STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JOEL***

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## ***SESSION 1: WHY STUDY THE BOOK OF JOEL?***

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### **I. THE DAY OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2): UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF JOEL**

- A. On the day of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were gathered together in one place, eagerly waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit as they tarried in Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Acts 1:4). For ten days they had been together, seeking the Lord with ardent intercession and, undoubtedly, dimensions of fasting (Acts 1:14).
1. Suddenly a sound like a mighty rushing wind filled the house and each disciple beheld tongues of fire resting on everyone (Acts 2:1-4). As they began to speak in other tongues, their sound was heard throughout the surrounding area and God-fearing Jews from every nation who were gathered in Jerusalem began to hear the sounds of their own languages being spoken.
  2. Though there were many different nations and languages represented, each one began to hear the wonders of God proclaimed in their own tongue from the mouths of these Galileans! A bewildered and amazed crowd gathered around the followers of Jesus. They were extremely perplexed by what they were hearing and seeing.
- B. Peter, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, declared to those gathered that what was happening was certainly not due to wine, but to the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Joel—that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:29). Drawing a connection between their continual prayer and the sudden release of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with signs and wonders, Peter announced, ***“This is that which the prophet Joel spoke of!”***
- C. We are familiar with this story of Pentecost and the early Church. We know its events—the Holy Spirit’s out-pouring upon His Church—to be the very core of the glory of the New Covenant; His indwelling and the anointing to bring the Kingdom of heaven to earth is the glorious gift of God.
- D. Yet, what we must consider about this gift the early Church received that day was that it was just the ***down payment*** of something that God is going to do widespread before His Son’s return. What began with three thousand believers gathered in Jerusalem two thousand years ago ***will escalate to global dimensions at the end of the age***. What started in one location will culminate in a mighty breakthrough of the Holy Spirit that will extend to the fullness—***touching all flesh***.
- E. When Peter attributed the events of Pentecost to the prophecy of Joel, he was giving witness that God had begun something in his day which was only the beginning, for the context of the prophecy he quoted concerns the generation that the Lord returns. Pentecost was a ***down payment*** of the fullness of Holy Spirit power that God will pour out worldwide at the end of the age.

- F. As we see modeled by the early Church, God’s Spirit will be poured out in response to night and day prayer. This outpouring will not just be upon a portion of the body of Christ, but upon the **entire global Church**—extending also to unbelievers who call on Jesus’ name. Joel prophesied of the Holy Spirit encountering and drawing people from all nations to Jesus as He brings His Church to fullness. *That hour, in its entirety, is yet to come.*
- G. In Joel’s prophecy that the Spirit would be poured out upon **all flesh**, we are considering something unprecedented that the Church of Jesus has yet to witness. In all of human history its comprehensive fulfillment has not yet been seen. And this principle is not only true of the prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit described in Joel 2 but Joel 3 also points to a *literal judgment of nations* at the end of human history. The events that Joel foresaw, including Israel’s attack by many nations and subsequent judgment, were given to us so that we might take heed as they begin to unfold. The unfolding of the future historical realities of Joel 2-3 are God-given road marks yet in the future—culminating in unparalleled proportions in the generation of the Lord’s return. What Joel spoke of did not fully happen in Peter’s generation.
- H. Pentecost was only the beginning. There is coming an unprecedented breaking in of revival far surpassing what happened in the Book of Acts. What will happen at the end of the age in the realm of glory, signs and wonders, and power-demonstrations will be the fullness of what Jesus prophesied to those who believe in Him. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works than these he will do**, because I go to My Father” (Jn. 14:12). This prophesy of Jesus was not completely fulfilled in the Book of Acts.
- I. Alongside this wondrous revival Joel also describes the **ultimate crisis**. There is an hour of calamity coming to the planet of which God’s prophets throughout history have spoken of. Jesus called it the “**great tribulation**” such as has not been nor shall ever be” (Mt. 24:21).
- J. The three chapters of the Book of Joel work together as a beautiful mosaic or tapestry of divine wisdom, containing an intricately connected message for the greatest hour of human history, when the Lord pours out His Spirit across the whole earth and simultaneously shakes everything that can be shaken by His judgments.
1. There will be a global *outpouring* and a global *shaking* that will crescendo to the pinnacle of fullness at the end of age.
  2. This two-fold eschatological crescendo, including both the great and the terrible dimensions (Joel 2:11), is the premier message of the book of Joel—a message of utmost significance to the Church of our day.
- K. Going deep in the Book of Joel is essential for the Body of Christ today because of the undeniable relevance of its message for the critical hour of history in which we are living. Although we are not yet in the thick of the crisis, it maybe but a minute before we are (referring to some years, possibly several decades, because time passes so quickly – Jas 4:14).

## II. WHY STUDY JOEL

- A. As I attempt to teach the Book of Joel to others that they might also proclaim it, the question that may be asked is *why study Joel?*
1. What relevance to our day are strange phenomena such as locust plagues and military invasions? We study this three-chapter prophecy because ***God has uniquely designed it to prepare the End-Time Church for the Day of the Lord crisis ahead.***
  2. Why would we want to spend a lot of time and energy pouring over this Old Testament book of the Bible? The reason is because ***it was meant in the mind of God to be a prophetic book to equip end-of-the-age forerunners to prepare the people of God.*** I have no doubt that when the Lord released this Book to Joel, that He was thinking of the End-Time Church and giving the truths necessary to prepare us.
  3. Joel's is a dynamic instruction manual to prepare the Bride of Christ for *such a time as this*. The message of this book is immensely relevant and needed to inform us *of* and prepare us *for* the very real events yet ahead for the Body of Christ.
- B. In the Lord's kindness, He has given this book as a preparatory tool to equip the generation of the Lord's return for the heightened scope of glory *and* crisis they will encounter.
- C. Though the Book of Joel was written for Joel's day, the larger scope of the value of this message is for this current time in history. This message serves to open the eyes and ready the hearts of the Body of Christ for what we will experience before the Second Coming of Jesus—including the wide scale of its *greatness* and its *terribleness*. We cannot neglect this provision from the Lord. We cannot allegorize this book away as a message meant only for another day, losing the *strength* of its meaning and purpose in the process. It is absolutely critical that we go deep in it.

## III. THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF JOEL: LITERAL EVENTS IN THE FUTURE

- A. I begin this study on the Book of Joel with the qualifier that my interest is not to give a lot of details related to the different issues debated by scholars. My purpose is not to enter into all speculations that are seemingly enjoyed by some scholarly types. Rather, ***I focus on giving the conclusions*** that I believe are consistent with what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in our time. None of the positions or insights to which I hold are particular to me alone. Rather, they are shared by various commentators who see the ***ultimate fulfillment*** of Joel's prophecies as occurring in the generation the Lord returns.
- B. I interpret the Book of Joel in a way that has a dynamic "literal" fulfillment through future events.

- C. I appreciate human scholarship that does not deny the revelation of the Holy Spirit and the power of His activity being manifest at the end of the age.

#### **IV. THE TIMING OF JOEL AND THE BABYLONIAN INVASION**

- A. The main debate of Joel has been in dating the time in which he wrote it. When did Joel live? There are **three main views** on this debate and each of them has some credence and validity. Yet after much research and prayer, I believe that this entire book was written in **the generation just prior to Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC** (many scholars agree on this dating). One of the most important dates in Old Testament history is 586 BC. Why? It was at this time that Israel underwent the darkest and most devastating period in its history in the Old Testament. This *Babylonian invasion* is described by the prophet possibly several decades before it occurred (Joel 2:1-9). The Babylonian army, under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar, marched across the desert and in a horrendous invasion, entirely decimated the nation of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar took the vast majority of Israel's population into Babylonian "slave camps" for seventy years (Jer. 25:9-14; 29:10).
- B. The significance of this time period in which Israel was in Babylon is foundational in properly understanding the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Many of them were either preparing Israel for the military invasions of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army, or they were looking back and interpreting them as a picture of *future judgment* at the end of the age.
- C. Living in the time frame just before the Babylonian captivity, Joel was chosen to write a prophecy that helps prepare God's people for the greatest disaster in Israel's national history that is still in the future. In the same passage (Joel 2:1-9), Joel described an invasion of Israel that would have two fulfillments. The first one related to Joel's generation (by Babylon) and the second, the invasion by the armies of the Antichrist just before Jesus returns (Zech. 13:8-14:2).
- "It shall come to pass in all the land," Says the LORD, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: 9 I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined they will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your (Israel's) spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. (Zech. 14:1-3)***
- D. God's full purpose for Joel 2:1-9 is more than giving us a historical record of a past calamity; it is a picture of the greatest shaking in Israel's history that will happen at the end of the age. Babylon's military invasion in 586 BC was a down payment foreshadowing a greater invasion coming in the final generation to the nation of Israel by an evil world-wide empire, a coalition of nations (Zech. 9-14). The greatest hour of anti-Semitism is yet future in a globally unified attempt to liquidate the Jewish population (Rev. 12; Zech. 13:8).

- E. God chose Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Israel as a focal point in the Old Testament to give understanding of His judgments of His people. Just as God repeatedly showed Israel that the exodus from Egypt was a picture of His deliverance, He points to the Babylonian invasion of 586 BC as a picture of His judgment. Both of these are standards in Old Testament theology and are significant today because they both have a future application.
- F. God will once again deliver His people just as He did in Moses’ time; and He will once again use an evil leader to refine those who are called by His name, as He did through Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 1. ***This final realization of Joel’s prophecy*** will be far more severe in its devastation than the Joel 1 locust plague (agricultural and economic crisis) and the Joel 2 Babylonian invasion. It will be an evil worldwide empire (Rev. 13) beyond anything the world has yet to see. Also, the victory over the Antichrist will be more glorious than Israel’s victory over Pharaoh and the plagues of Egypt.
  - 2. The Book of Joel will also have a dynamic application to the nations of the world ***in the End-Times agricultural and economic crisis along with military invasions*** that will be a reality in many nations. These nations will also witness the release of the Holy Spirit in a way more glorious than it was in the Church in the Book of Acts.
- G. God’s people in the final generation will know the greatest heights of victory in the midst of the greatest hour of pressure and persecution. ***It will be our finest hour.***

**V. OTHER PROPHETS WHO PROPHESED THE BABYLONIAN INVASION OF ISRAEL**

- A. God raised up other prophets who prophesied in Israel around the time of Joel’s generation, they were ***Habakkuk and Zephaniah***. They also prophesied of the Babylonian invasion soon to come. They were preparing the people of God for what I call “the great pastoral crisis” coming to Israel in their time.
  - 1. The three small prophetic books (Joel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) are very similar in language and message. With one voice, they all urgently cried, “Trouble is coming around the corner and fasting and prayer is your only way out!” Their description of God’s coming judgment is much the same.
  - 2. The testimony of these prophets together confirms the overall message. I wonder if these three were friends, each personally participating in a very unpopular job. To warn a prosperous and religious nation that immense trouble is around the corner is a difficult and taxing assignment. Almost nobody listened to them. ***Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel*** came soon after them, possibly a decade or so later, yet preceding the Babylonian invasion.

- B. The Church today should note how unpopular the message of the prophets has always been. These prophets of old, with their seemingly irrelevant message, are much like the forerunner messengers today that are called to prepare the way for the Second Coming of the Lord. These forerunners are in a similar position as Joel was in his day.
- C. We are possibly several decades away from a global drama that culminates with the Second Coming of Jesus. If this is so, then ***we are at the beginning of the beginning of the greatest devastation of all human history***, and over the next several decades this drama will intensify as the nations are stirred and military conflicts escalate. The Body of Christ of many places in the earth is already being persecuted. The drama has already begun for them.
- D. The Lord gives the same ***warning to the western church*** He gave to His people in Joel's day.
  - 1. The Lord often gives a prophetic warning several decades ahead of time to prepare the people. This is the role that forerunners have regarding the final drama. The trumpets warn of the coming shaking and help equip the hearts of people with the understanding of God's purposes in these events.
  - 2. The Church in the western world is currently experiencing considerable degrees of economic prosperity and a level of increase in religious activity. The Lord's message to us is that things are about to change. In a moment there will be a great shifting as He shakes all that can be shaken and seeks to remove all that hinders love. Suddenly even the Church in the western world will discover their great need for supernatural deliverance in order to endure.
  - 3. When this happens, the message of the forerunner will seem anything but irrelevant. Just as when the Babylonian army approached Israel and the words of Joel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah suddenly held tremendous weight for the Jewish people, so the Lord will cause voices to arise before the great glory and crisis in the generation of the Lord's return and their message will begin to be heeded as the Second Coming draws near.

## **VI. GOD USING EVIL LEADERS AND MILITARY INVASION TO DISCIPLINE AND JUDGE**

- A. One of God's common methods, as seen through the Old Testament prophets, is to discipline His people and judge the wicked through a *divinely orchestrated military invasion*. God often raises up wicked men and evil nations as His instruments to do this.
- B. Our religious thinking is shocked by the idea of a military crisis sent by God. "He removes kings and raises up kings..." (Dan. 2:21). Satan takes full advantage of the permission given him by God to act, but even Satan cannot act outside of the perimeters that God sets for him. God ultimately sets the boundary lines that hem in the actions of earthly rulers.

- C. This principle is illustrated so clearly in the life of Job. God initiates the terrifying storm around Job's life (Job 1:8), but He does so with the full knowledge that Job will end up more blessed than before, including experiencing deep encounters with God. Satan wanted to exterminate Job and his faith, but God put boundary lines on Satan.
- D. The testing is severe; it is not a game to God, Satan or Job. However, the righteous ends up with a radiant heart and often more physical blessings than before.
- E. Job's story is consistent with the prophets' message: God Himself *raises up* the evil empire to be His tool of chastisement to the redeemed and His tool of judgment to the unredeemed. God uses these pressures as instruments to kick out the props that allow both the Church and the unsaved to be dependant on wrong things. No matter the cost, He is determined to help the Church be purified and grow in love and He is determined to bring the lost into receiving His amazing love.
- F. The reality that God orchestrates some military invasions to shake what can be shaken is biblical. You cannot honestly read the Word of God and miss this idea. Even so, throughout much of Church history this truth has been a very bitter pill for the Body of Christ to swallow.
- G. Though this is a truth about God's ways that is trumpeted throughout Scripture, the Church today has almost no receptivity—if not tangible resistance—to this message.
- H. Some admit that God "allows" but does not cause these military invasions. The people of Joel's day did not receive Joel's interpretation of God's leadership in actually causing the Babylonian invasion because of Israel's sin. This message confronted the people in Joel's day and will confront the people in the final generation when God raises up a worldwide coalition of evil nations to do His bidding.
- I. It is this alarming truth about God's zeal for righteousness to prevail that will cause a severe pastoral crisis in the Body of Christ as three primary questions, demanding immediate answers, rise to the surface.

## VII. THE COMING PASTORAL CRISIS – THREE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

- A. When God's judgments increase in the land, an automatic pastoral crisis emerges in the earth. This crisis has to do with the judgments of God being manifest that dramatically affect the lives of believers and unbelievers. In the wake of the coming end-time judgments, the earth has **three questions that leaders in the Body of Christ must have answers for**. These questions are not new; God's prophets have always had to answer them for the people to whom they prophesied. The questions relate to how God disciplines His people and judges the rebellious.  
Question #1: If God is a God of love, why will He allow this?  
Question #2: What can the righteous do to either stop or minimize the judgment?  
Question #3: What do the righteous say and do before and after God's judgments?

**B. Question #1: If God is a God of love, why will He allow this?**

1. In all of human history, the biggest philosophical and spiritual crisis the people of God have had to grapple with is: How can a God of love *allow* and actually *purposefully raise up* evil power bases to be the rod of discipline in His hand against His own people and the mechanism of punishment against those who resist Him? It is a giant crisis and a very difficult question. Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Joel all grappled with this question. Though not always asked overtly, it was a question in need of answer nevertheless.
2. It was this very tension that Habakkuk was wrestling through when he cried to the Lord, ***“Why do You look on those who deal treacherously (Babylonian armies), and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he? (Hab. 1:13).***
3. In essence Habakkuk prayed, “Lord, I do not understand! How can You say that You are righteous and use the evil power base of Babylon to judge Israel who, though in need of discipline, is not nearly as wicked as the ones You are using to judge them?!” The question is answered understanding the heart of God. This understanding is what forerunners must gain as they are full of love without any offense towards Jesus in the wake of His end-time judgments.
4. Forerunners must know that the God of love has ***no contradiction in His personality*** when He brings judgment and chastisement in this way.
5. ***His goal is to remove everything that hinders love*** and because of His all-consuming love and His uncompromising jealousy, even this troubling method of chastisement is somehow not outside of His holy nature. There truly is no darkness in Him at all (1 Jn. 1:5), not even an ounce of an evil motive, not even the slightest capacity to go a little “too far” in meting out justice.

**C. Question #2: What can the righteous do to either stop or minimize the judgment?**

1. This question arises from sincere believers about what we can do to stop God’s judgments, or at least minimize them from coming in full strength. In other words, what role we are to play after knowing that God’s judgments are about to increase, and even that God’s agency for discipline will be through an evil power structure. The question that has to be answered is: ***What can we do?***
2. This question is the *right* question, and the answer has to do with our God-given role as intercessors in prayer before God. Joel describes the necessary role of intercessors who fast and pray (Joel 2:12-17). God calls us to stand in the gap and ask Him to minimize judgments that *can* be minimized (Joel 2:13-14), and for those that He will not minimize, we pray that He will cause them to serve as a redemptive force that enhances the release of the harvest.

**D. Question #3: What do the righteous say and do before and after God's judgments?**

1. There is another critical question that arises in the wake of God's judgments. Moving from our role before God in times of judgment, we ask about our role before man. What do we say and do before and after these judgments come to pass? What definitions and reasons do we give to the redeemed and to the unredeemed? A careful, diligent study of the Book of Joel, combined with a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, will help us in this.
2. It is inevitable that God's judgments create a pastoral crisis. Joel was given answers by God to these three questions. The most sincere believers become severely troubled in hard times, and they ask, "How can I trust You, God?" ***Satan waits for the hour of God's judgment to fuel accusation against God in our hearts.*** Though he despises the judgments of God in the sense that when they are on the earth, the people learn righteousness (Is. 26:9), he loves how they create an open door for accusation against God in the human heart. We see this offense embodied in Job's wife when she looked at Job in the wake of God's chastisement and encouraged him to curse God and die.
3. God has answers to these questions and the accusations against His character. He will strengthen His people with understanding about Himself. Such knowledge will settle the human heart in the time of crisis as Isaiah said, "***Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times...***" (Isa. 33:6).

**VIII. THE FORERUNNER MINISTRY**

- A. When trouble comes upon the people of God, the one who gets accused the most is God. Unless we have renewed minds that are filled with the truth of God's heart and His unconflicting nature, we will find accusations against God in our own hearts.
- B. Our prayer might be, "Lord, how could You discipline Your own people by an evil instrument and call Yourself a God of love?" We cannot afford to be out of touch with God's heart and His ways or our hearts will become defiled with accusation.
- C. ***The solution is to begin now to grapple with these tensions*** and face the emerging offenses in our hearts. These areas of accusation must be answered with the truth of God's heart in order for our own hearts to be free and *then* for us to lead others into freedom from accusation as well.
- D. The opposite of accusation is confidence. Confidence in love before God is the place where God wants to bring His Bride. He desires us to have a confident spirit concerning how He feels about us in all circumstances—prosperity, persecution, or calamity. If we understand God's heart, we will have confidence in our spirit and we will not be derailed, either by blessing or adversity. We will remain confident in His love in either dimension.

- E. ***Satan's premier goal is to plant lies about God in our hearts.*** He has a field day in the hour of God's judgments where can more easily convince people that God is not good or that He is a liar. Both accusations cause us to lose our confidence before God and keep us from worshipping Him freely. When our hearts are locked in fear or anger, we cannot be what we were created to be—lovesick worshippers of God. Knowing this reality, Satan first speaks accusations about God's heart to us.
- F. God's answer to these accusations that arise in the midst of His judgments are forerunner messengers like Joel. God will raise up forerunner messengers before His Son's return. Their burden will be to prepare the people ahead of time so they do not accuse God in the midst of the crisis.

## **IX. BEING IMMersed IN THE BOOK OF JOEL – EAT THE SCROLL**

- A. God is bringing forth those that understand His heart in judgment because in their secret lives of prayer they have done what Ezekiel and the Apostle John did; they ate the scroll (God's message of judgment) in its sweetness and its bitterness. The sweetness of this message is about the good that God sovereignly accomplishes. Yet it is also bitter because of the *real* human pain involved.
- He said to me, "eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. He said to me "fill your stomach with this scroll." So I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. (Ezek. 3:1-3)***
- I went to the angel and said, "Give me the little book (similar to Ezekiel's scroll)." He said, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it (meditated on it in order to understand it), and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. When I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. He said, "prophesy about many about nations and kings." (Rev. 10:9-11)***
- B. The Lord is raising up men and women like Joel, digesting the message thoroughly, including both the sweet and the bitter dimensions. We must clearly proclaim God's heart when the world looks for answers. We must not answer with empty babbling. Much of this happened in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001. The world turned for one moment to the Church for answers and found mostly meaningless talk without clarity. Instead of a trumpet sound resonating with the word of the Lord, there came double-mindedness and confusion.
- C. The point of immersing our lives in the message of the Book of Joel is two-fold.
1. First, to produce confidence in our hearts and dislodge all accusations against God.
  2. Second, to partner with the Spirit in proclaiming the truth of God's heart to others, thus exchanging Satan's lies for truth and replacing offense toward God with love for Him.

- D. In doing this *we become a voice rather than an echo* in the coming hour of crisis. Then with power and understanding we will help others to make sense of what is happening by speaking a word of light in a time of confusion and darkness. We can lead people out of the accusations of the enemy and into the truth of God's heart.
1. The greatest crisis of human history is just around the corner and the Church will be prepared with forerunners who have stood in the counsel of the Lord, those who have eaten the scroll and are strong understanding.
  2. We need to be those who know what God is saying in His judgments. Our goal is not to win a popularity contest, but to fulfill God's will in being a voice to our generation.
- E. Before the Lord returns, the Great Harvest will cause the Church to grow to a staggering one or two *billion* people. All these will need to be prepared for victory as God's judgments intensify.
1. In that day, we want to be as voices in the wilderness preparing His people. This is the role of the forerunner spirit, preparing the way of the Lord's return by dislodging the accusations against God in the hearts of others.
  2. The role of the forerunner is to establish hearts in confident love before a God of love who holds no contradiction in His personality as He releases the end-time judgments. God is now raising forerunners people all over the earth who will give themselves now to the digesting of His scroll of the prophetic Scriptures.