

DECEMBER 9

Joel 1-3

Hang on to your hats. When you get to heaven and meet Joel, you're probably going to look at him and say, "Dude, really?" No one knows when this sermon was written. So we don't know the historical timeframe, the situation, or who the listeners were. Adding to that, you have prophetic references and real references mixed together like salt and pepper on your potatoes. This bugs people about Joel; in fact, there are lots of bugs, real ones. Then, adding only to my confusion, Luther decided to make four chapters out of Joel in the German Bible, where the English Bible has only three. O Weh! For our endeavor today, I will, as most Germans do, not pay attention to the German Bible.

But we know that this is not Joel's problem. The Spirit did it. I wouldn't recommend going up to Him and saying anything about "dude," or "really." I can only think that, like the book of Esther, God wants us to seek Him and put it together using all of our knowledge of the OT and the NT. There is nothing wrong with having to think, and to use what we've learned. It's sort of like "wax on, wax off," if you know what I mean. I am going to suggest a time/event framework for Joel that is only my opinion, but is in the timeframe of when the smart guys guess Joel wrote. Then I'll make some suggestions as to what I think the future prophecy is pointing to.

Just to give you a road map, I think the message of Joel goes like this:

A sudden storm of locusts stripped the land during the reign of Hezekiah. Joel stood up and said this was only a taste of what would happen with the coming Assyrian army. In shock and deep repentance the people of Judah and Jerusalem came before God and humbled themselves with prayer and fasting, and repented. Because of that act of faith of this remnant of Judah, God destroyed the army of Assyria and promised to restore the land.

All of this foreshadowed the sudden days of danger for Israel during the Tribulation before the coming of Christ. A nation from the north will unexpectedly invade the land and strip it bare. This will be the army represented by Magog from Ezekiel 38-39, but there will also be looting bands from North Africa and Egypt. Jerusalem will be the final target. The people will repent, believe in Christ and cry out, *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*. (Matt. 21:9) The Spirit will be poured out on the nation, and God will destroy this army near the Dead Sea. It will be an obviously divine judgment. After this, when the antichrist breaks his treaty with Israel and desecrates the temple, those who flee Jerusalem will live in those mountains and live off of the supplies of that army. Later will come that final battle of Armageddon, north of Jerusalem. During this battle, the Lord will return to Jerusalem, gather those in hiding and then go on to the battle. He will finally restore Jerusalem and set up His millennial reign on earth.

In Joel, we are entering into the last days, and by beginning in Revelation today, this will all work toward God preparing us to enter His harvest today and in this coming year with renewed hearts.

Joel 1

Vs. 1-4 Apparently this plague of locusts had just happened. These people lived from their fields, not from Walmart ©, and they were in utter shock that something this devastating could come so quickly, destroying their economy and changing their lives. God used it to wake up the people to an approaching army that would make this look like a picnic.

Vs. 5-20 Now, for the fun of it, look at the different groups of people who God is shaking up and calling out to. List the different responses He expects to happen right away. There is a dire immediacy to this warning. It sort of reminds me of Jesus saying to the people in Jerusalem who

hear that the antichrist is in the temple, immediately to head for the mountains without going back home to get stuff.

V. 15 There is something in the suddenness of the locusts and the approaching army that mirrors what will happen in the future to Israel. Very clearly here, and throughout this message by Joel, *the day of the Lord* is being focused on. There are present events that the people must respond to, but in the time of the Tribulation those Jews will need to pay close attention to what is being said in Joel. They'll need to respond to the Lord quickly.

If men couldn't stop the devastation of locusts, what would they do if something bigger happened? It is amazing how easy it is for God to humble man. With our technology we see storms forming in the oceans weeks in advance, yet in spite of all our preparations, when the storms hit, we are devastated and for a short time become very "third world." Imagine what will happen in the Tribulation. You'll be seeing this in a few days in Revelation.

Joel 2

Vs. 1-2 Notice that Zion, the city of Jerusalem, is the focus here. What will be happening now and in the future is bringing the judgment of the Lord. *The day of the Lord* is always associated with judgment. Someone is going to get whacked, now and in the future. Keep this impending judgment in mind, because I think it helps pinpoint the historical time and event that is referred to here. The army of locusts is still in view, but it is being likened to both the coming Assyrian army and an army in the last days of Israel.

V. 2 The description of this army is clearly for the Tribulation. The locusts would have darkened the sky, and during the Tribulation it talks about the sky being darkened.

In the immediate future for Joel, I would suggest that the army that was about to come against Jerusalem was probably the largest army that ever assembled against it. The Assyrians came with a huge army, numbering well over 200,000 men.

Vs. 3-11 This army would give us a look at the future army that would come against Israel. There will be similarities, but obviously many differences. Notice in v. 11 that this imagery is for the end times.

Now, although this army looks like another plague of locusts, I think they are only being compared to locusts in that they will cover the land and loot it. Just like the army of locusts from chapter 1, they will be totally irresistible. Only God will be able to halt them. The only thing that will be left for them to take is Jerusalem, or Zion. This is exactly what happened when the Assyrians came against Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the only city that was left. Everything else had been stripped. Also, that's why the Assyrian camp was full of goodies.

So, thinking about the future of Israel, there are two armies we know of that will come against Israel during the seven-year Tribulation. Remember that during the Tribulation, from the outset, there will be such natural disasters upon the earth that resources will be scarce and our global infrastructure of communication will probably have collapsed or will have been severely damaged. This will be good for those trying to stay under the radar of the antichrist.

In Ezekiel 38 and 39 we are told there will be an army from the far north that will also be joined by Egypt. This action will probably take place sometime in the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. From the outset of the seals being opened in Revelation 6, the world will become traumatized. The world will encounter one "9-11" experience after another, and within months the earth will be full of wreckage and paralyzed governments, yet it seems that Israel will have been spared much of the devastation other places in the world have seen. If you read the description of this army in Ezekiel 38-39, they will ravage the land and there is some very similar imagery to the locust plague. They will be encamped near the Dead Sea, just a few miles east and south of Jerusalem, and there God will miraculously strike them down in such a visible way that the

entire world will see that God is for Israel. It will make no one happy, least of all the antichrist. Either this event will cause the antichrist to make a peace treaty with Israel (the beginning of the Tribulation) or this event will cause him to snap and break the treaty with Israel (the middle of the Tribulation).

The other battle that we all think of will be the battle of Armageddon. This battle will take place about 75 miles north of Jerusalem and will be a stage for the rebellion of nations against the antichrist. We'll be reading about this in Revelation. The rivers to the east in Iraq and Iran will dry up and the King of the East, who everyone thinks is China, will walk there with 200 million soldiers. I'm sure there will be other nations gathered there too. But this battle will never threaten Jerusalem per se, and the Jews will not be the primary object of this aggression. The antichrist will have set up shop in that region; and so, lacking smart bombs and cruise missiles, the nations that want to fight with him will have to walk to the battle. It is during this world event at Armageddon that Jesus will return to Jerusalem, gather a few friends, and head north to the battle Himself.

Now, both of these battles could be in view in Joel (remember what I said about salt and pepper), but I think the primary future battle being mentioned in Joel is the coming of Magog in Ezekiel 38. Back to Joel 2.

Vs. 12-17 Because of this new impending threat against Jerusalem, everyone is to drop everything and immediately humble themselves before the Lord. In v. 16 the situation is so dire that even the groom and bride will forego the wedding night so that they can humble themselves and seek the Lord's help.

Apparently, the people of Israel in the future will also find themselves in this dire necessity. Possibly as a result of this prophecy, they will know to drop everything and seek the Lord.

Vs. 18-20 God heard. So that means that in the past at some point in Israel's history, the people cried out and God heard and saved them. What event might this have been? Here are a couple of candidates.

My second guess would be the battle Jehoshaphat "fought" in 2 Chronicles 20. There will be a reference to Jehoshaphat in Joel 3:2. Also, Egypt will be punished in Joel 3:19 and they were a part of that battle too. Egypt will be a part of the situation with Magog in Ezekiel 38. The problem here is that none of the attacking nations came from the north and none of them challenged Jerusalem. It could be that God only mentions Jehoshaphat because of the area of where this took place, near the Dead Sea.

However, my first guess would be that this coming threat in Joel's day was the coming of Assyria against Hezekiah and Jerusalem. Here are some reasons. When Assyria swept into Israel they took everything but Jerusalem. Zion is the focus of the arrogance of the Assyrians. The Assyrians came from the north. When Rabshakeh stood outside the walls of Jerusalem venting his arrogance and ignorance, the entire city was absolutely obedient to King Hezekiah and they humbled themselves before the Lord. It looks like they could have heeded this call to repentance and seeking God. In God's promise to Hezekiah, He mentions a restoration of their fields and crops, giving the idea that everything had been lost and destroyed. And, the army of the Assyrians was destroyed by God's own hand, exactly like the army of Magog will be judged.

V. 20 Although Egypt and some group from northern Africa will be part of this group that participates with Magog in Ezekiel 38, Magog is the main nation and they come from the far north. As the Lord destroys them in Ezekiel 38-39, it will take months to bury their corpses, and therefore, the stench.

Vs. 21-27 This kind of agricultural restoration was promised to Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:29-30.

Vs. 26-27 Notice that this is addressed to present and future Israel, mixed together here, but really dealing with the future generation that will have to endure these threats in the Tribulation. The future will be the only time they are not put to shame.

Vs. 28-32 The German Bible makes this block a separate chapter.

V. 28 Now we are focused on the future. The "firstfruits" of this happened at Pentecost when the Spirit came and the church was birthed. Peter mentions this, but the church is simply enjoying the spiritual blessing promised to Israel. Paul says this in Romans 15:27.

There will be an event in the Tribulation, probably at the beginning, but possibly near the end of the first 3.5 years, when the nation of Israel will believe. In that moment, the Spirit will be poured out on them. Again, that won't make anyone happy, especially the antichrist.

Vs. 30-31 The Tribulation will be no picnic.

V. 32 Here is a famous verse quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13. This verse in Joel is very cool. Notice that it looks like the people in Jerusalem are fleeing. You can imagine the Jews fleeing Jerusalem, obeying Jesus, as the antichrist moves in with a vengeance. As mentioned when we were doing Ezekiel, it looks like the people who run from the antichrist will do this around the Dead Sea and Jordan. There, they will find plenty of resources because the army of Magog brought provisions that they won't need anymore.

Joel 3

Vs. 1-13 This, I think is the demise of Magog from Ezekiel 38-39. In that fight, looting bands from the south, comprised of Egypt and as far as Libya, will ransack Israel; but the main force of this northern army will be near the Dead Sea, which is only about 15 miles from Jerusalem.

Vs. 2 & 12 No one knows exactly where this *Valley of Jehoshaphat* is. I would suggest it is referring to the valley in 2 Chronicles 20:1-25, where God destroyed the army that came against Jehoshaphat. The reason I think this valley and this event are mentioned is that it is right about where the armies of Magog will camp, near the Dead Sea, near Engedi. The Lord fought this battle for Jehoshaphat and the result was that it took them months to collect the vast supply of goods from that destroyed army. I think that is a picture of what will happen in the future.

Vs. 14-17 I would say this is the final battle of Armageddon and the Lord's return. Zion will be totally secure and at peace, and the Lord will dwell there.

V. 18 Not only will the land be fruitful, but there will be a fountain from the house of the Lord that will become that stream we read about in Ezekiel 47. It will run to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. From Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, there will be trees on both sides; and when it enters the Dead Sea it will make the waters of the sea fresh and alive.

Vs. 19-21 This ends in judgment for Egypt and its neighbors, but there will be a happy ending for Judah, Jerusalem and for the world.

Revelation 1

What a way to end the Bible and the year. Prepare to be blessed.

Here are some fun facts about the background of the book. It was written by the Apostle John in 95-96 A.D. Apparently John was working in Ephesus and was exiled to the island of Patmos to work in the mines during the Domitian persecution. After Domitian died in 96 A.D., the next emperor, Nerva, allowed John to return to Ephesus. John was probably the only living (on earth) apostle.

The book was questioned by some men like Luther because it teaches a literal 1000-year reign of Jesus on the earth. There are many issues not raised in this book because it is a message from the

Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem isn't mentioned, not only because it was old business from 70 A.D., but also because this is Jesus' message and deals with the future.

Revelation breaks down like this: Chapters 1-3 are to the seven churches. Chapters 4-18 are the Tribulation. Chapters 19-22 are the Millennial Kingdom, and then, the final, eternal world.

V. 1 The word *soon* doesn't mean that the events would happen immediately, but that once they happen they will happen quickly. That means that it might take time for them to begin, but once begun, they would rapidly be fulfilled. The bulk of the book, chapters 4-18, will take only seven years.

V. 3 I think this blessing is still in force. Why do you think God would promise this? Why would you think He thinks it is important to read this book? What do you think the blessing might be? Remember that back in that day, not everyone had a Bible. Bibles were rare. So if you had portions of Scripture, the church gathered and it was read aloud. Everyone who read the book of Revelation aloud, in order for people to hear it, would be blessed. All who heard and "kept" what was read were blessed. That would now be the same for you by reading and heeding what is written in this book. The blessing still applies, even if it is not read aloud.

Vs. 4-8 What an introduction. Notice that not everyone will be happy to see the Lord.

Vs. 9-11 Since it says that John was *in the Spirit*, it suggests that this wasn't Sunday when it happened; but rather, it is saying something like, "in the Spirit I was brought to the day of the Lord." Daniel and Ezekiel were never in the Spirit prior to a vision. It was in the Spirit that they were shown the vision or taken to a certain place. John is being brought to see the day of the Lord, from its beginning in heaven to its conclusion with a new heaven.

Vs. 12-20 The Lord appears and gives John his orders. As you read through this, what do you think Jesus was trying to emphasize by appearing to John (and us) like this? Since the book is written chronologically, and since the judgment of the earth in the Tribulation begins in chapter 4, it is no accident that Jesus' first words are to the church. After chapter 3 there is no more church in the book of Revelation. The Tribulation begins, and it is all about the Jews and the judgment of the earth. This isn't a conclusive argument for the pre-Tribulation rapture, but in the entire scheme of the Bible and God's revealed plan, it makes such good logical sense.

V. 17 It is interesting that Jesus touched John. It had been a long time. I wonder what it was like after over 60 years for John to hear the Lord speak again.

V. 20 Some people understand the *angels of the seven churches* as the elders or head elder of these churches. The word in the Greek is messenger or minister and can mean angel or messenger/representative. The letters are written to the *angels of the seven churches*. Surely heavenly angels don't need letters, and since there are rebukes and warnings given to the churches, those certainly wouldn't apply to God's holy angels. Everything said in these letters is directly from the Lord to the leaders of these churches.

Psalm 128

Vs. 1-2 As the worshipers came to Jerusalem, singing this psalm, it reminded them what God's true blessings were. Prosperity and blessing are only from the Lord. And it was a reminder, in reverse, that these things are given by God, not Apple or Sony, or by working long hours. Following the Lord in His Word directs our hearts to what He says is good and true and right.

Vs. 3-4 And true blessing is relational, not in stuff. It begins with our relationship to God and flows to those closest to us. This reminds me of what Jesus said to the disciples when they realized that following meant leaving some blessings behind at home. In Mark 10:28-30 Jesus said that working in the harvest would lead us to hundreds of new relatives, including sons and daughters.

Vs. 5-6 This blessing was to come from Jerusalem because that was where the temple and throne of God were.

Proverbs 29:18

Boy, are we getting *prophetic vision*. Maybe that's why God is giving us this strong dose, so that as we walk on earth, we will keep our hearts focused on the Lord, on the harvest, and on the joy before us.