

Small Group Materials, Joel 1

Pray for your time together!

Background Information

All that we know about Joel comes from the book of Joel itself (he's not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament). We can neither pinpoint who he was nor when he lived, however this does not detract from the significance of the prophecy. Rather, it speaks to the importance of the message over the messenger. The only place Joel is referenced is in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:17-21.

The book places a strong emphasis on judgment and a call to repentance.

Read passage out loud as a group. Option: Give group 5 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

This Week's Passage

Scripture Reference:

¹ The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.

An Invasion of Locusts

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?

³ Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. 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.

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.

⁶ A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. 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.

⁸ Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.

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.

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 Call to Repentance

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.

¹⁵ Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 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. ¹⁸ How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering.

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. ²⁰ Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.

Discussion

Leaders note: Joel 1 naturally breaks into 3 sections, this week there is one overarching question per section with multiple sub-questions. This is designed to help you both follow the passage and relate it to today's context.

Ask the Group: What about this passage stood out to you?

Leaders' Note: This question gives your group the opportunity to explore their own ideas before leading them down specific discussion.

Ask the Group:

The first seven verses focus on destruction and devastation. Imagine you lived in an agricultural society how would the invasion of the locusts in verse 4 impact you?

How could you translate this into our context today? (Leader's note: This question is designed to emphasize the importance of agriculture and its effect on everyday life in ancient Israel. A plague of locusts represents extreme hardship in the year to come and beyond)

Ask the Group:

Verses 8-13 proscribe the response to the devastation of verses 1-7. What are some of the words that Joel uses to tell the people how to respond? (Leaders note: Answers may include mourn, grieve, despair, wail, etc.)

What are some of the recent disasters you may have heard about either around the world or in the US? (Leaders note: Possible answers could include Katrina, 35W bridge, 9/11, Japan quake/tsunami, etc.) What are some of the reactions to these tragedies that you've observed? (Leaders note: Possible answers could include monetary donations, blame government or individuals, anger, demand policy changes, taking advantage of the situation for personal gain, etc)

How do our modern responses show our reliance or lack of reliance on God?

Ask the Group:

One of our natural tendencies is to immediately try to fix the situation. Read verse 14. What does Joel call the people to do in response to the situation? [Leaders note: Throughout the history of Israel the people have been called together to reaffirm their dependence on God as His chosen people in times of trouble (e.g. Nehemiah 8)].

Application

Ask the Group (small or large):

Today we've seen the difference between how people respond to situations and how God calls us to respond. Think about your upcoming week, how will this study change how you respond to the challenges you encounter?

Suggestion: Send these application questions and challenge out through email or text during the week to encourage your group.