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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages: Joel - A Day of Judgment or Salvation?

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the Tanakh—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

Today, we are looking at the Book of Joel. Let’s dive in.

Joel: An Overview

We don’t have much information about the prophet Joel. We know his name means “YHWH is God.” We also know that he was the son of someone named Pethuel (Joel 1:1) and that he prophesied to the people of Judah (Joel 3:1, 6, 8, 18-20). That’s really all the information that Scripture gives us.

It is also uncertain when exactly the Book of Joel was written. Although some scholars argue that it was written very early—sometime before the Babylonian exile—others say it was written after the Babylonian exile. The fact that Joel seems to draw from several of the other prophetic books that were written in exilic and post-exilic times, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, may point to a later date. As J. Gordon McConville remarks:

[T]he fact that Joel has echoes of a spectrum of other books may suggest dependence on them, and therefore a relatively late date (i.e., post-exilic).

— J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 154

In any case, Joel addresses a community that is in the land of Israel, and the temple appears to be in full operation (Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17). The Book of Joel describes a devastating plague of locusts that has come upon the people of Judah. With this plague in mind, Joel reminds the people that the “Day of YHWH” is coming, where YHWH will bring judgment upon the people for their sin. Joel calls upon the people to

repent and turn back to God:

Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD [YHWH], “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and **rend your hearts and not your garments.**” Return to the LORD [YHWH] your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

The word of YHWH through Joel is to return and to “**rend your hearts and not your garments.**” In other words, God wants his people to have an honest transformation of their inner selves. He does not just want an outward display of sorrow, but for the people to have genuine repentance.

In response to his people’s repentance, God will have compassion on his people (Joel 2:18). The coming “Day of YHWH” will change from a time of judgment to a time of salvation and restoration for Israel (Joel 2:18-27; 3:17-21), and God will instead direct his judgment toward the nations for their violence toward God’s people (Joel 3:1-16). Additionally, Joel draws upon the prophecies of Ezekiel that one day God will pour out his Spirit upon his people (Joel 2:28-32), enabling them to be obedient to God’s Torah (cf. Ezekiel 36:23-28).

Joel’s Major Message

The major message of Joel is that the “Day of YHWH” is coming. Whether it will be a day of judgment or salvation for God’s people depends on whether they repent. As this “**great and very awesome**” day draws near (Joel 2:11), believers today are faced with the same choice that Joel’s original audience had: will we repent and receive salvation, or continue in our disobedience and receive judgment? The warning of coming destruction has been issued, but there is hope for salvation. God will have compassion on those who return to him.

Significantly, however, like Joel told the people of Judah, you must “**rend your hearts and not your garments.**” God is not interested in a mere outward display of sorrow. You must seek him with your whole heart. This involves coming to grips with the severity of your sins against God and the harm you may have caused others. It means being broken. As James writes:

James 4:8-10

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Interesting Connections

God’s appearance in the Book of Joel is reminiscent of his appearance at Mount Sinai, where God revealed himself to Israel in a profound and *terrifying* way! Joel seems to be intentionally drawing upon this Sinai narrative to describe God’s appearance at the Day of YHWH.

For instance, God’s appearance in both accounts involve a loud shofar blast (Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18; cf. Joel 2:1, 15). Both accounts involve the imagery of clouds and darkness (Exodus 19:9; 20:21; cf. Joel 2:2). Both accounts involve fire (Exodus 19:18; cf. Joel 2:3). Both accounts involve an earthquake (Exodus 19:18; cf. Joel 2:10). Finally, both accounts involve God himself speaking (Exodus 20:1-21; Joel 2:11).

How did Israel react when they encountered God at Mount Sinai? They were terrified and thought they were going to die (Exodus 20:19). Similarly, the Day of YHWH described in Joel will be a terrifying experience.

Nevertheless, even in the midst of such a frightening encounter, Joel reminds us that God does not wish to destroy us. He wants us to repent and be saved:

Joel 2:11-12

For the day of the LORD [YHWH] is great and very awesome; who can endure it? “Yet even not,” declares the LORD [YHWH], “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

Ultimately, God comes in frightening glory so that his people will stop sinning. He wants us to know that judgment is real. Wrath is real. Our relationship with God is not something to be taken lightly. As Moses told the people at Mount Sinai:

Exodus 20:20

Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”

Again, God does not give these terrifying displays because he wants to destroy us. No, it is just the opposite—he wants us to live, and so he wants to protect us from sin and death. That’s why he gave us his law, that’s why he sent his Son to die for us, and that’s why he will come in power and judgment at the end of the age.

How Joel Points to the Messiah

Joel’s message of salvation is ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah Yeshua. In the first few chapters of Romans, Paul wrote extensively about how all have sinned and will face God’s coming wrath. However, Paul also wrote that God has provided a way for us to be saved. According to Paul, when we confess that Yeshua is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, we will receive salvation instead of wrath. The apostle Paul quotes from the prophet Joel in support of this truth:

Joel 2:32

And it shall come to pass that **everyone who calls on the name of the LORD [YHWH] shall be saved.** For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD [YHWH] has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD [YHWH] calls.

Romans 10:9-13

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus [Yeshua] is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

Additionally, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit promised in Joel 2:28-32 is cited by Peter in Acts 2:16-21 as being fulfilled on the Feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the

disciples. This event was also foretold by Yeshua prior to his ascension. He said that the Holy Spirit would descend upon his disciples and empower them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth:

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

So, Joel's prophecy about the Spirit being poured out is being fulfilled in the Great Commission, as all Yeshua's followers proclaim the message of salvation to the ends of the earth.

And that is Joel's major message, and why it matters today. The day of YHWH draws near. Will it be a day of judgment for us, or a day of salvation? Will we be punished for our disobedience, or will we call upon the name of YHWH and be saved? And what about those around us? Do they know about the day of YHWH? Do they know about the salvation that he has provided? May we walk in the Spirit and be witnesses for the Messiah. May we proclaim to the ends of the earth that the day of YHWH is at hand, and everyone who calls upon his name will be saved.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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