

PERSPECTIVE

journal for growing ministries

profiting from Joel | condensed book

"It's a fact that 20,000 people will starve to death today . . . and most of you don't give a damn. Furthermore, you are more distressed at my use of the word "damn" than you are about the 20,000 people who will die".

That's how one man introduced a sermon on Christian involvement in society. It's a real attention grabber isn't it? It shocks you and gets you listening. Joel describes a very effective attention grabber that Yahweh, the God of Israel, used to get the attention of His people.

Centuries before Joel's time, Yahweh had assured His people that if they obeyed Him and followed His commands they would enjoy His blessing in the Promised Land. Their prosperity in the Land would be a visible indication of His blessing (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). The flip side was that if they ignored His commands they would be overcome by curses: diseases, drought, enemy invasions, locust swarms etc. (Deuteronomy 28:15ff). While we cannot be sure of the exact historical situation into which Joel was speaking, we do know that the prophet was addressing Israel in the Land.

In his first chapter, Joel makes it evident that Israel had drifted from Yahweh. The resulting disaster that befell them was God's attention grabber (1:1-4). As dreadful as these events may have been, however, they pale when compared with the future Day when the Lord's final judgement will be meted out (1:15; 2:1-2). The crisis Joel describes (locust swarm, invading army etc.) is but a foretaste of the future crisis (Day of the Lord) and the only appropriate response for Israel was repentance - to genuinely turn back to the Lord, the One *"who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Who knows?"* says Joel, *"He may turn*

and have pity" (2:12-14). Towards the end of the second chapter Joel conveys a number of staggering promises on behalf of Yahweh. Firstly, those who truly turned back to the LORD would enjoy life in a restored land - Israel would undergo a remarkable reversal of fortunes (2:18-27, 3:1). More importantly, the repentant would be part of the new age in which God's Spirit is poured out upon all His people (2:28-32). In the final chapter, Joel broadens his focus to include all nations. He exhorts them to prepare for war, for Yahweh's wrath will be loosed on His enemies as thunder, but *"the Lord will be a refuge for His people"* (3:16). Let's take a look at some of Joel's prominent themes.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

For Joel this is a future day of destruction (1:15), a day such as never before that will prove to be unstoppable and irresistible (2:1-11).

THE LORD OF THAT DAY

Joel also provides us with great insight into the LORD of THAT DAY. A number of significant truths about God emerge.

1. Yahweh is in Sovereign Control of the world. This truth dominates the entire book. Yahweh is able to bring locusts and drought, fire and nations against Israel because all of nature and all of the nations are under his control. There is no power, no person that does not and will not answer to Yahweh, the God of Israel. He alone rules and Joel makes that abundantly clear. This is a great encouragement for those who are His people and yet live in a hostile world. However, there are serious implications for those who resist His rule.

Yahweh is the Judge of the world. All the nations of the world will be called upon

to give an account to Him (chapter 3). Rebellion will not be tolerated forever.

Yahweh is the Saviour of the world. He didn't send these disasters upon Israel because he was fickle and nasty. He did it because he loved them and wanted to confront them with their rebellion. He sent these warnings to Israel out of grace and compassion that they might wake up and return to Him before it was too late (2:12-17).

Joel speaks an even more powerful word to those of us who live this side of Jesus' death. Joel explained that the sun would be turned to darkness as a sign of *"the great and dreadful day of the Lord"* (2:31). We see that the sun was darkened as Jesus died on the Cross (Mark 15:33). This is an indicator to us that the death of Jesus is the true Day of the Lord. That was the moment the decisive battle was won for

(Continued on page 2)

joel - continued

at that point God's wrath was diverted onto Jesus, in the place of those who have called on Him for salvation. Joel assures us that those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:32) and the NT confirms that Jesus is the Lord (Acts 2:22 -39). We are also pointed to Jesus as the One who ushers in the New Age of the Spirit promised in 2:28-29 (see Acts 2:15ff).

Naturally, there's more to come - the Day of God's wrath remains a future reality for those who don't turn to the Savior. In 2 Peter 3 we are warned not to forget about the future aspect of the Day of the Lord. It will come like a thief and it will be a day of judgement or salvation. That will be the day when all things are restored - when we will see *"a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:8-13).

It was on the Cross that Yahweh did the most radical thing to grab our attention. When Jesus shouted *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* Yahweh was shouting to us that He loves us and wants to save us. He continues to shout that message to the world as the Gospel is proclaimed. He continues to say "Pay Attention to me! I made you, I love you, I alone can save you. Turn back to me". Or in the words of Joel *"Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls"* (2:32).

Lee Marshall
*Lee is the pastor of
St Paul's Stellenbosch*