"The Day of the LORD"
The Minor Prophets Study: JOEL
Fall Core Class: Faith Bible Church – 2026
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The Purpose of this Course*:* To glorify God in the equipping of our people at FBC to better understand and learn from the Joel narrative – the key theme of which centers about the Day of the LORD which is immediately experienced through a massive locust invasion, yet points not only to the swift destruction of a future invading army but much more in the eschatological sense when the End Times are ushered in and the LORD passes judgment upon the world.

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NOTES FOR SESSION #8 OF THIS COURSE

I. Introduction:

A) Author: Joel is fully recognized by conservative scholars as the author of this prophetic text. Though there are a number of men named Joel in the Old Testament, this particular Joel is mentioned only twice in Scripture: Joel 1:1 and Acts 2:16. Little is known about this prophet beyond the fact that he wrote his text in Hebrew (i.e., as is the bulk of the OT) and that he was the son of an otherwise unknown man named Penuel (i.e., which is the only verse regarding his father). The name "Joel" means "Yah is my God."

B) Date: Despite the wide range of dates suggested by scholars, Joel is almost certainly pre-exilic. Note that the Old Testament "minor" prophets are generally ordered chronologically (i.e., see both the LXX and Hebrew Canon, which like our modern English Bibles, lists Joel as second among them). It is, therefore, likely to be *early* as compared to the other texts. In weighing further evidence (i.e., the reigns of certain kings), Joel appears to fit sometime between the 9th and 7th centuries BC with late ninth century dates ranging from about 830 to 800 BC yielding the

highest probability. Therein, the evil reigns of Jehoram, Ahaziah and Athaliah could explain the judgment of God through the locust plague of chapter one, followed closely behind by the much younger *good* king Joash (i.e., who became king at the age of seven; see 2 Kings 11:21). Also, an earlier date would provide a much better explanation for Joel's mention of Israel's more ancient foes Philistia and Phoenicia in 3:4, as well as Egypt in 3:19.

In regard to later enemies such as Assyria (i.e., who eventually sacked Israel in 732-722 BC) and then Babylon (i.e., who defeated Judah in what is called the Babylonian Captivity of 586 BC), the text only alludes to a "northern army" (2:20) during a future "Day of the Lord." 2 Kings 15:19 provides the first evidence of an Assyrian advance in about 744 BC (2 Kings 15:19ff) – which would have been several decades later than the text (i.e., given Joel's authorship during the 830-800 BC timeframe) and would, therefore, account for the lack of reference(s) to these powerful enemies. Note that the term "exile" refers to the latter of these two "captivities" in Israel's history – the Babylonian Captivity. Moreover, assigning particular dates for these events can be misleading as most of these ancient attacks were performed over a longer period of time in succeeding "waves" of attacks. In sum, Joel would almost certainly be one of the earliest pre-exilic prophetic texts.

C) Source Documents: Though the earliest "complete" Hebrew version of Joel dates back to 1008 AD in the Codex Leningradensis, several much earlier manuscripts exist in a number of languages. About 70% of the text has survived in Hebrew from the Dead Sea Scrolls including 4Q78 and 4Q82 from Qumran Cave 4 which date to the late 2nd century BC as well as other fragments from Wadi Murabba'at from the 1st century AD. Complete and nearly complete texts in Greek have also been discovered from the 4th and 5th centuries AD.

In Joel, there are four chapters in the Hebrew "Bible" rather than the three we have in our modern English translations. The modern version of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the TaNaK) and English Bible are essentially the same text with the same books. Some chapters have different divisions and numbering, however, as well as the order (or sequence) of the books as a whole. It should be noted that the source of these differing texts is from the same Masoretic tradition – with the 11th century Codex Leningradensis being the earliest complete manuscript in the original languages (i.e., Hebrew and Aramaic). Returning to the difference in chaptering, it was Stephen Langton who added them in the 12th century. Chapters didn't show up in the Hebrew Bible for yet another couple of centuries in the 14 century. Because the decision on where to place chapters can seem somewhat arbitrary – as they are left to the discernment of human judgment – is it any wonder why these differences have occurred? Jewish scholars undoubtedly found other breaks in the course of the text, and hence, occasional differences in chaptering. Note that verse divisions showed up in the text very early (i.e., 2nd thru 5th centuries AD), while verse numbering was quite late (by about the 15th century).

II. The Current Disaster:

A) The Locust Plague: Immediately following the identification of Joel as author, the text plunges its audience into a calamity that had struck the land of Israel in the form of a massive locust plague. Joel 1:2 begins with the words "Hear" and "give ear" in reference to the elders of Israel who were to heed the significance of the event. Joel used parallelism between the phrases in verse 2 for added emphasis. The scale of the plague was further accented through a

comparison to anything that the people had ever experienced – to the elders or even to their fathers. So great was this calamity that these leaders were told to pass this story along to generations to come.

Now Joel continues to develop the emphasis of this locust plague in verse 4 as he writes of the chewing, swarming, crawling and consuming locusts. Here are the original Hebrew words:

גזם	=	'gazam' (to devour);	ארבה	=	'arbeh' (to increase, many of)
ילק	=	Yel'ek (to lick up; devour);	חסיל	=	Khaw-seel (ravage)

Evidently, Joel used these different words describing locusts to help portray the utter destruction of this massive swarm of insects. What one type of locust might potentially miss – the other locusts would surely not miss – which ultimately led to a complete and utter destruction. This appears to be the reasoning for the different "types" mentioned. As noted by Dr. Dwayne Garrett, there are some 10+ different names for 'locust' used in the Old Testament alone, not to mention a total of 20+ names found in the Jewish Talmud.

Of course, this type of plague would most certainly create severe consequences on an agrarian-based culture. Devastation of the land would quickly lead to famine. The rest of chapter 1 details the destruction done and the ensuing response of the people. The destruction-laced verbiage used by Joel can hardly be missed as words such as "cut-off" (v.8), "laid waste," "ruined" and "stripped bare" (v.7) are used. Moreover, the intensity of the lament-filled response finds words such as "sackcloth" (v.8 & 13), "wailing" (vv.11 &13), "mourning," etc. To be sure, God had clearly warned the people in Deuteronomy 28 about the blessings which would come from obedience and the curses that would follow disobedience – especially in verses such as 38 and 42 which warn that "the locust shall consume it" and "locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land." All of this powerfully communicated the enormity of the land's devastation and revealed the reality of the disaster in Joel 1:15 which states that "the Day of the Lord is at hand."

B) <u>The Day of the LORD</u>: These words are at the core of Joel's message. They must be fully understood to grasp what the Old Testament prophets wrote – especially in the eschatology that they conveyed. The Day of the LORD refers to a day or time period in which YHWH – either directly or indirectly and through His great power – intervenes into the course of history with either judgment and/or punishment of the wicked and either salvation and/or deliverance among the faithful and righteous.

This powerful phrase is found 26 times in Scripture; and 19 of those are found in the Old Testament. But nowhere else in the Bible are these words used more than Joel, which references the Day of the LORD a total of five times: 1:15, 2:1, 11, & 31, and 3:14. At its foundation, Joel is about the Day of the LORD. (Note that this reference is to God's holy name: YHWH and not

Adonai, the latter normally being spelled 'Lord' in most English translations rather than 'LORD.') Though both are of God, LORD – transliterated YHWH is His name.

For reference, the 19 occurrences in the OT include: Isaiah 2:12, 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; **[Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31, 3:14]**; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14 (twice); Zechariah 14:1; and Malachi 4:5. The remaining 7 occurrences are in the NT and include: Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10; and Revelation 1:10. It should be further noted that other indirect references can be found in Scripture with similar phrases such as "in that great Day" or "In that Day …" – commonly used in Isaiah and others – including Joel 3:18.

Now the first use of the phrase in Joel 1:15 almost certainly references the current day in which God had sent a plague of locusts (chapter one). The rest, however, look forward to a day to come about in the future. The second reference, for example, appears to look forward toward a conquering nation in days/years ahead (2:1ff). The exiles of Assyria and/or Babylon (from the north) likely fit. In contrast, references in chapter 3 are clearly eschatological. That Day of the LORD points toward the End Times as much of the language appears to coincide with Armageddon (3:9ff). In each case, The LORD's name is to be magnified and His majestic power revered in all the earth.

III. Call to Repentance 2:12ff

A) Faithfulness of God: As is consistent throughout Scripture, God again demonstrates His faithfulness, forgiveness and everlasting mercy here in chapter two. Despite the failure of Israel to honor and worship the LORD God – which has resulted in His judgment through the locust plague (chapter one) and the sending/allowing of a destructive army (chapter two) – God still offers them mercy. He entreats the people to "turn to [Him] with all [their] heart" (2:12). This everlasting mercy reveals the depth of the LORD's loving kindness (i.e., Hebrew 'hesed'). His appeal to Israel even uses a poetic repetition for emphasis saying: "Turn to Me with all your heart," "rend your heart and not your garments," and "return to the LORD your God" (2:12-13). He further assures them of His great patience and kindness, reminding them of His "slow[ness] to anger and great kindness," and how "He relents from doing harm" (2:13) – an attribute which He had demonstrated time and again throughout history.

B) Problem of the Heart: But the people of Israel needed a change of heart. God demanded that they turn their hearts. It was not something up for debate. They *must* change their heart. They, honestly and sincerely, *must* repent. As opposed to the traditional tearing of clothes to portray their great distress or grief, God warned them to tear their hearts instead (2:13a). There was to be no insincere act or fraudulent ritual but rather, a *real, true repentance*. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly" (v.15). God called the people to an honestly repentant heart rather than one of empty ritual – of sincerity and not sacrifice.

IV. Complete Restoration:

The awesome response of our God to a truly repentant heart is something to behold in Scripture. Praise God for His everlasting mercy! Because His character remains perfect and unchanging, He will always be utterly consistent with His divine response. He has always been, is, and will always be a merciful God. Though His holiness demands judgment for sin, His mercy endures

forever. And here in Joel, the LORD promises His people that He: "[would] remove far from [them] the northern army" (v.20), that He would rectify the destroyed fields with "open pastures … springing up" and "tree[s] that bear fruit" (v.22). God would *fully restore* the "former" and "latter rain" that their land so desperately needed to produce food (v.23). In other words, God would not just bring back the land from its destruction but would fully restore that which had been lost. That which the locust plague destroyed – He would replace in full (v.25). There would be more than simply replacing that which was lost. Rather, God would provide bounty and the people would "be satisfied" (v.26).

Moreover, the LORD promised that which would "come to pass afterward" (i.e., in the future). He would "pour out [His] Spirit on all flesh" (2:28). Of course, up to this point, the Holy Spirit had been active throughout the Old Testament – in creation (Gen 1:2), in empowering certain individuals, inspiring the authors of Scripture, and so on. But Joel 2 spoke of a time wherein the Spirit of God would actually reside in the hearts of His people (see Ezekiel 36:27). Pentecost – as recorded in Acts 2 – fulfilled this prophetic text at a perfectly assigned time after Jesus would be taken up in His Ascension (Acts 1) and the Jews would be gathered together in one place (Acts 2:1; Lev. 23:18ff; Deut. 16:16) for Shavuot (i.e., the Feast of Weeks).

Now this "pour[ing] out [of the] Spirit" was to be universal (i.e., all flesh) to all who belong to God. It would not be limited to a certain gender, age or social status as indicated by the text: "your sons and daughters," "your old men … your young men," and "menservants … maidservants." All would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who would put their faith in God. Right here, in the Old Testament text, we read that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (2:32a). All of mankind was to have the opportunity to put their faith in the Living God and make up "the remnant who[m] the LORD calls" (2:32b).

V. Judgment:
Finally, as the core theme of Joel continued to proclaim the coming day of the LORD, the fact of a coming judgment comes into focus (3:2, 12). In perfectly aligning with the rest of the eschatological texts of both the Old and New Testaments, we await the coming Day. The language of chapter three speaks of "gather[ing] all nations" to "enter into judgment" (3:2) and "let the nations be awakened and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations" (3:12). Undoubtedly, the Day of the LORD will indeed entail judgment and all will know that He is LORD.

In that day, "the sun and moon will grow dark; and the stars will diminish their brightness" (3:15). God's voice and power "will roar from Zion" and "the heavens and earth will shake" (3:16). Various nations will be called out as adversaries to God's people. Yet, in regard to the people of God: "[He] will acquit them of bloodguilt, whom [He] had not acquitted" (3:21). In this passage, whatever bloodguilt here is referenced, there is clearly *vindication* (i.e., as Garrett puts it) for the people of God in the end. The LORD is faithful. The wicked will be punished, while the faithful will be rewarded with an everlasting fellowship with Him.