



A STORIED PAST

The Dallas Cowboys are not only "America's Team," they're *my* team. I'm no bandwagon fan—obviously. Despite their rich history, it's been decades since they've been dominant in the postseason. In fact, no student reading this has seen the Cowboys in an NFC Championship game—and maybe not even some of your coaches!

Like the Cowboys, Israel had a storied past—heroes like Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth, and David. But in the period we're studying, Israel was deep in a drought of its own: a time of spiritual adultery and arrogant rebellion. Judgment was coming, culminating in the Babylonian Exile.

In seasons like that, it's hard to believe a better future is possible. But that's exactly what God promised through His prophets. Sin would bring suffering, but God's victory was still ahead. And the glory to come would far outshine even Israel's greatest moments.

JOEL 1:2–6; 2:1–2, 6, 10–11

² Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? ³ Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.

⁴ What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. ⁶ For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

^{2:1} Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, ² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

⁶ Before them peoples are in anguish; all faces grow pale.

¹⁰ The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. ¹¹ The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The book of *Joel* adds to many of the key themes of Scripture. Namely, that God is just and brings judgment on sin. He can even use sinful people to accomplish his righteous purposes. Additionally, we see God's mercy, and his desire for repentance instead of wrath. Finally, the book points to the great hope God's people await—some already fulfilled, some yet to come, even for us. Scan the QR code for more.



DISCUSSION

Describe a time when someone told you to do or not to do something that you should have listened to.

1. What devastation is Joel calling to mind for the generations of listeners? (4-5)

2. What second event is being compared to the first and what similarities does he mention? (1:6, 2:2, 10)

3. Describe their results and God's response (10-11)

4. Describe the message of devastation Joel warned his audience about in your own words.

5. How do the closing verses shift the perspective of the audience from Babylon's might to God's sovereign power?

6. How does sin relate to the Gospel message (see Romans 6:23) and how does God want you to respond to it?

God is both merciful and just. In his justice, he punishes sin. In his mercy, he has sent his Son to take the punishment we deserve. For questions, talk to your

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



STUDY NOTES

WARNING SHOT

Like the book of *Obadiah* last week, the book of *Joel* is hard to date—arguably the most difficult in the Old Testament. The key thing to understand chronologically is that God spoke through Joel between two major events. In Israel's recent past, they suffered a locust plague that devastated the land. God used this natural disaster as an object lesson, pointing to an even greater disaster to come.

He warned that an invading army—like the locusts—would devastate the land and bring ruin. But the story doesn't end in Israel's destruction. Next Week, we'll see God's rescue plan—if the people are willing to listen. The locust plague was the warning shot. Israel must wake up.

And in Week 6, we'll finish *Joel* seeing that even with judgment on the horizon, God still offers hope and a glorious future for his people. Like sunshine piercing storm clouds, hope breaks through the haze of turmoil.

HOPE LIVES FOR THE WARNED

In ancient Hebrew, they didn't have bold or italicized text, instead they used words like *hear* and *tell* to grab the reader's attention. The prophet asked, "**Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?**" But what happened? Apparently, Israel had suffered a devastating **locust** attack. Actually, they suffered multiple attacks from **the cutting locust, swarming locust, the hopping locust, and the destroying locust**. We're not sure if this refers to different species of locusts, or if it represents the life-cycle of locusts, but what we can say is that each phase of locusts consumed anything left behind from the previous swarm.

Although swarms of locusts still happen today, it's hard for us to imagine the impact that ancient Israelites faced. For most of us, it may mean less produce from a particular region and higher costs at the grocery store. For the ancients, it meant food would be scarce and people will starve to death.

Instead of focusing on staple food production, the prophet called out the winos. The locusts destroyed all the grapes, so he said, "**Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.**" Whereas wine makes a person laugh, the prophet urges them to mourn. Whereas wine causes numbing slumber, the prophet shouts at them to "**Wake up!**" Drunkenness, by its nature, wastes

life's most precious commodity—time. And Israel has no time to waste! ***For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.***

In chapter 2, the prophet builds on the locust swarming metaphor to describe the vast innumerable army that will one day bear down upon them. He warned, "**Blow a trumpet...sound an alarm.' Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near.**"

That day ***is near*** and it will be ***a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!*** Like the locust hordes, the Babylonians will come in such numbers, they will remind the Jewish inhabitants of the sky-darkening, insect invaders. However, this ***blackness, spread upon the mountains*** will be ***a great and powerful people***, not insects.

Nobody can withstand them. ***All faces grow pale. There are so many feet marching, the earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble.***

In ancient warfare, it wasn't just one army facing off against another. The assumption was that the nation with the more powerful god would win. The prophet makes clear that Israel's coming destruction isn't a testament to Babylon's human achievement or the power of the Babylonian gods. Instead, ***the LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?***

GOD'S WARNING SHOULD BRING REPENTANCE

Remember Week 2 and our study of Jonah? Jonah preached a message of judgment and they enacted national repentance such that even the livestock were made humble. Why did Jonah angrily say, "**O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.**"

We'll see it clearly next Week, but what response to the warning shot do you think the Lord might have hoped for based on the Joel's warning? Here's the question you can start thinking about for next week: with everything you've read and studied so far, what response do you think the Lord might hope for from you? Although the word "gospel" means "good news," it's only good if you receive it; if you surrender to it. It's pretty terrible news for those that don't.