

# Joel

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## Section 2 of: **The Minor Prophets**

(Ed. W. Kelly, Allan, 1870.)

The age of this prophet is not given to us. From this, we might say, it matters not when he flourished: but we may say the same also from the character of his prophecy. And thus the silence of the Spirit on that point is more than accounted for: it is justified.

He delivered the word of the Lord in some day of sore national calamity, when either again and again the adversary came in to waste and destroy, or year after year famine was in the land by reason of plagues upon it.

But through this present calamity, the great closing calamities of Israel are seen, as by the far-seeing eye of Him who knows the end from the beginning and in the grace of Him who would fain sound an alarm in the ears of the people, that they may prepare themselves for a day of visitation.

Nothing is more common than this in the prophets. They treat the present moment as the pledge of a future. Indeed, the Lord does the same — taking up, I may say, this style of the prophets in Luke 13; where, in the day of Pilate's cruelty to the Galileans, and of the fall of the tower in Siloam, He says to the generation, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

In Joel's day, the vine and the fig, the corn and the wine and the oil, palm-tree, pomegranate, and apple-tree, all are withered; and the priests and ministers are summoned to weep, and a solemn fast is proclaimed, that the elders and all the people may gather themselves. The services of God's house are suspended, the meat-offering and the drink-offering are withheld, and the joy and gladness that belonged to the house is no more. The seed is rotten in the field, and the garners at home are empty. Herds and flocks share the misery of the times. The prophet himself begins to cry to God under this sore sorrow. He leads the way, as it were, in the humiliation and confessions which suit such a moment in the people's history.

In the second chapter, we have again a detail of national miseries, but with, a near approach to that great, final, judicial day, which is to close, in righteous, wrathful visitation, the story of Israel in apostacy. The call to repentance is repeated with the hope of a turning of God's anger away. And however suitable to the calamity of that day these calls of the prophet may have been, we know that there will be this spirit of humbling and confession in the coming days of his nation, and on the eve of their deliverance. A spirit of grace is then to be poured out, and every one is to mourn apart. The punishment of the people's sin is then to be accepted. If the trumpet have blown "an alarm," to tell of the enemy at hand, it will be blown, but not as an alarm, to call the people in assembly to the mourning. So that in this feature of the prophet's day, we may trace again the *moral* circumstances of the closing day. Calamity comes as the judgment of the Lord in righteousness; repentance" comes as the fruit of the Spirit in grace. And then, as the fruit of this repentance, the whole system in Israel is revived; all fruitfulness is pledged to the land now wasted; times of refreshing and the restitution of all things are anticipated; and "my people," says the Lord again and again, "shall never be ashamed." The gift of the Spirit is promised, and the times of "the day of the Lord" are seen to end in the destruction of the enemies, and the deliverance of the Israel of God. In all this we have Matt. 24 and Acts 2 combined:

the one giving us a sample of the promised gift; the other detailing the terrors of that day which is to make an end of the confederated enemies of Israel, to deliver God's remnant who have called on the name of the Lord, and to bring in the elect for whose sake those days of terror are to be shortened.

Indeed, all the great characteristics of this coming day are clustered here. The pouring out of the Spirit - the deliverance of the elect brought to call on the name of the Lord — the judgment of the apostate nation by the hand of their great enemy, as in "the great tribulation" — the destruction of that enemy, the confederated Gentiles, by the Lord Himself, when sun, moon, and stars shall be disturbed — the peaceful reign and glory of the King in Zion, following all this; these things are together here, as we find them scattered through all the prophets. I say, we see them here clustered together. We may not be competent to settle them in their order, or to put them in the presence of each other, and in their relations, as they will, by and by, be the living materials of the scene around; yet do they contain rich principles of truth, which we can be edified in knowing, and in which we can justify the ways of that wisdom that has ordered them, which is now revealing them, and will in due season accomplish them.

Here I must turn aside for a moment, and observe that the gift of the Spirit in the day of Acts 2, according to this prophecy, was not followed by those judgments on which the darkened sun and moon and the falling stars are thus solemnly to wait and to give witness. Such was not the history in the Acts after the gift of the Spirit there. Why? Israel was not then obedient. These judgments will be in favour of Israel. They will light upon the head of the oppressor, and close the day of Israel's tribulation. But they did not follow the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2, as they are spoken of in Joel 2, and again I say, because Israel was not then repentant and obedient. "If ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established" is a standing oracle in the case of the nations. (Isaiah 7: 9) And being then unbelieving, refusing (even to the slaying of Stephen) the testimony of the then given Spirit, the nation was not delivered nor established.

The Spirit, therefore, given at that Pentecost, led on in a very different direction. He became the baptizer of an elect people, Jewish or Gentile, into a body destined to heaven, and to be the bride of the Lamb in the day of the glory, when again the Spirit will be given. The remnant in Israel, under that gift, will be go led in faith, repentance, and obedience, as to let the full amount of this prophecy of Joel spend itself in the behalf of the nations.

But I must say a little more on Joel 2 and Acts 2

In what a profound and interesting manner the Spirit in an apostle fills out the word of the Spirit in a prophet! Many an instance of this might be given, as we generally know. But I am now looking only at Peter's commentary on Joel: that is, at Peter's word in Acts 2 on Joel's word in Joel 2.

Joel tells us. of the Spirit, the river of God, as we will call it. He traces it, in its course or current, through the sons and daughters, the old men and young men, the servants and handmaids, of Israel; he speaks of it in its rich and abundant flowing, and the fruitfulness it imparts.

Peter admits all this. In the day of Pentecost, as he was preaching at Jerusalem, he looks at that same river of God, charmed, as it were, at the wealth and fruitfulness of it, as it was, at that moment, under his. eye, taking its course through God's assembly. But. then, he does more than this, and more than Joel had done. He traces this river backward and forward — backward to its source and forward to its mouth.

He traces it to its source, and does so very carefully. This occupies him in his discourse on this great occasion. He tells us of Jesus — ministering, crucified, risen, and ascended; how He had served in grace and power here on earth; how men with wicked hands had crucified Him; how God had raised

Him from the dead; and how He was now exalted at the right hand of God in the heavens. These things he proves diligently and carefully from Scripture. And then, having thus followed the Lord Jesus through life and death, and His resurrection up to heaven, there, in Him — the ascended and glorified Man — he discovers the source of this mighty river.

He traces it, likewise, onward to the end or issue of its course. He tells us that it is to reach to the children of that generation, and also to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord shall call.

What a commentary by an apostle on a prophet is this! What enlargement of heart and understanding in the ways of God is given to us by it! In what an affecting, and yet in what a wondrous and glorious way, is Jesus brought in as having connection with the river of God! He becomes the source of it as soon as He, who had once been the serving, crucified, rejected One, became the ascended One.\*

\*Just as we learn from John 7. This same river is there tracked in its course through the bellies of the saints. But it is declared that it could not then begin to flow, for Jesus was not then glorified. Here, in Acts 2, it has begun to take its course, because Jesus has now been glorified.

And now we reach Joel 3. The Lord comes with a recompence. Other scriptures speak of this, and tell of the Lord's recompence of the controversy of Zion — the recompence, too, of His temple. But the same idea fills the mind on reading this chapter. Now, as the end is contemplated, things are changed. The last axe first. The captive is the spoiler. Israel is the head, and not the tail, as was pledged in the patriarchal age of the nation, when Abraham was sought by the Gentile, and he, in the presence of the king of Gerar, the chief man of the earth in that day, prepared the sacrifice, made the covenant, and gave the gifts. (Gen. 21)

God has taken the whole of the interests of His people upon Himself. He is summoning the hosts of the nations to the battle, as once He did the host of Sisera, captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitudes, to the river Kishon, (Judges 4) to meet, their doom. The ploughshare must become a sword, the pruning-hook a spear, until the Gentiles, in the height of their pride, and in the strength of their resources, like Egypt at the Red Sea, meet the day of the Lord — the judgment of God in the valley of Jehoshaphat,\* at the hand of his descending mighty ones. And the sun and the moon and the stars shall then be in darkness — not in the light, for which they were formed, and by which they were filled; and the heavens and the earth shall then be shaken, instead of pursuing their even, steady, staid course, in which they had been making their rounds for thousands of years: and all this to witness the terrors of that day.

\*The judgment of God.

For the end is come. Judgment is to clear the scene. and then glory to fill it. The Lord is to dwell in Zion, and Judah and Jerusalem to be at rest and in safety. The days of Solomon the peaceful are to be realised in their millennial fulness, and the earth itself be a quiet habitation.