

OBADIAH, JONAH AND JOEL

Week 2

OBADIAH The betrayers are betrayed – a prophecy against Edom

- *Obdiou* in the LXX (Vul. *Abdias*) = 'servant of Jehovah'
- ~ 12 Obadiah's in OT...none exactly fit.
 - e.g. An Obadiah lived during the time of Elijah who helped hide prophets from Ahab & Jezebel (1Ki.18).
 - Babylonian Talmud identifies him as a steward of King Ahab.
 - Pseudo-Epiphanius believed him to be a high military official in King Ahaziah's army (2Kg.1:12ff).¹
- There is lots of conflict between Judah and Edom during this time
 - Edom (aka Idumea) derived from Esau, Jacob's brother (Gen.25)
 - Israel had a great deal of control over Edom during the united monarchy.
 - **Judah continued to control Edom after the division.**
Judah didn't let Edom tax trade passing through its borders from the port of Ezion-geber to Palestine.²
- **There were many military confrontations (2Sam.8:13f; 1Ki.11:14ff; 2Ki.14:22; 16:5f; 2Chron.20:1ff; 21:8ff).**

Edom was happy to see Jerusalem fall prey to the Babylonians (March 15-16, 597 BC and again in 586/7 BC)³ and, in fact, assisted the Babylonians.⁴

- These predictions of Edom's demise came true.
 - They were beaten down by Babylon, Greece, Israel, Judah and Rome.
 - **By the late 500's - early 400's they were supplanted by Arabic nations.**⁵
 - Some persisted (i.e. Edumeans or Idumeans) in southern Judah.
 - The Edomites were forcibly converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus.⁶
 - Herod was an Edumean and did much to enlarge and improve the 2nd temple
 - The last of the known Edumeans died supporting Israel when they fought Rome in AD 70.

Dating 854 or later

The date of this prophecy has been the subject of many disputes because of similarities between Obadiah and Jeremiah and because of historical problems concerning the fall of Jerusalem described in vv. 10-14.

So, some see it being written around or after the fall of Jerusalem in the late 500's BCE.

However, consider the following points:

- **Obadiah is grouped with the pre-exilic prophets**
It is the 4th book of the Book of Twelve; situated between Amos and Jonah.
- **While Jeremiah & Obadiah both describe a fall of Jerusalem, they don't seem to be describing the same fall and so they don't have to be dated together.**
 - The fall of Jerusalem is a past event from Obadiah's perspective.

Obadiah 1-9

¹ In, *Lives of the Prophets*

² This was a city of Edom on the coast of what is now known as the Gulf of Akabah

³ Lam.4:21; Ezk.25:12

⁴ Ezk.35:10; 1Esdr.4:50

⁵ The Babylonian king Nabonidus (556-539 BC) is believed by many to have destroyed Edomite cities in 552 BC; the records of a war between Antigonus Cyclops against Petra indicate that by 312 BC the Nabataean Arabs were long established in Edomite territories.

⁶ A Macabean leader of the revolt against Seleucid control of Palestine by Antiochus. He was in power from 134 BCE until his death 104 BCE, having built a Palestinian kingdom that rivaled Solomon's in geographic size.

- **Jeremiah (49:7-22) does describe the fall of Jerusalem using the same language as Obadiah but it is a future event from Jeremiah's perspective.**
 These first two bullets might seem to reinforce the idea that Obadiah was written after Jeremiah and after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians BUT...
- **Jeremiah appears to be quoting Obadiah not vice versa**
 1. **Jeremiah tended to cite other prophets**⁷
 2. **Jeremiah's version has linguistic features of Obadiah but the reverse is not true** (see the handout)
 - Obadiah's description in 1-6 is a unified description whereas Jeremiah uses snippets of the same sentences interspersed with commentary.
 - Jeremiah 49:7 Edom's foolishness is an unsupported statement but not in Obadiah
 - Obadiah's description of Edom is more elaborated than Jeremiah suggesting that Jeremiah intended Obadiah to provide the context for his citations.⁸
 3. **Jeremiah's version is interspersed with apparent elaboration and commentary,⁹ something more typical if Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah.**
- Given these points and the fact that the fall of Jerusalem was a future event to Jeremiah and a past event for Obadiah, the two prophets must not be describing the same fall.
- Additional points:
 - Only one campaign fits the description found in vv. 10-14. Philistines & Arabs attacked Judah when Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:8-10) was king of Judah.¹⁰
 There's nothing in the 2 Chron.21 account to show that Edom was complicit in this attack but silence can't argue either case.
 They had the motive to participate (i.e. their historical animosity toward Judah; don't forget that they were complicit when Babylon invaded, Ps.137:7)
 - A comparison of 2Chr. 21:8-10, 17; Joel 3:3-6,19; Amos 1:6-9, 11 and Obadiah 10-14 shows many similarities suggesting that these prophets were describing the same event and we can date Amos to 775-750 BC.
 - Also, Joel appears to draw from Obadiah (i.e. compare vv. 10-18 with Joel 2:32; Joel 3) and Joel can be dated to 875-750 BC

Obadiah's Message

Predicts a 'Day of the Lord'. As far as Edom is concerned that means only judgment.

- **they are complicit in Judah's devastation¹¹ and**

⁷ Isa.14:28-32 & Jer.47; Isa.15-16 & Jer.48; Isa.13-14:23 & Jer.50-51; Am.1:13-15 & Jer. 44:1-6; Am.1:3-5 & Jer.44:23-27

⁸ See Caspari, C. P. (1842), *Der Prophet Obadjah ausgelegt*, pp.7ff.

⁹ Jer. 49:7,9,10,14-16

¹⁰ Jerusalem was attacked by Philistines & Arabians (2Chr. 21:16f) after the Edomites overthrew Jehoram's rule.

Joash (Israel) counterattacked Jerusalem (under Amaziah king of Judah) (2Ki.14:13f; 2Chr.25:23f) but this is not likely the one Obadiah describes b/c verse 11 says that strangers and foreigners not Hebrews did the attacking

Jerusalem was attacked by Shishak (1Ki.14:25f; 2Chr.12:2) but the Edomites were controlled by Judah at that time;

Babylon (Chaldeans) attacked Jerusalem during Jehoiakim (2Ki.24; 2Chr.36:6f) and a second time under Jehoiachin (2Ki.24:10; 2Chr.36:10) but this and the previous attack are not the ones described by Obadiah if the arguments against Jeremiah/Obadiah contemporaries are as sound as they seem to be.

This leaves the attack by the Philistines and Arabs as the one addressed by Obadiah.

- **they are arrogant.**¹²
God's judgment of a nation is independent of his treatment of any individual within that nation (e.g. Lot, Noah).
- **A Warning to Edom (1-14)**
 - Edom will Fall (1-4)

**Lit "I have made you small,"
a prophetic past tense - it was as good as done.**¹³

They think that their geography protects them (vv.2-4); that Yaweh is not relevant – Big Mistake!
 - Edomites to be destroyed (5-9)

v.7 ironically¹⁴ they would be destroyed by their allies...just as they, allies of Judah, were betrayers of Judah.
 - **10-14 Three reasons: unjust violence (*chamas*); aloofness and delight in the destruction of Jerusalem**
 - **Three warnings: don't gloat; don't plunder; don't add trouble to their trouble.**
These are either contemporary imperatives or a warning against future acts.
The Babylonians (Chaldeans) diminished Edom (Jer.25:9,21; Mal.1:3) Archeological studies indicate their settlements were demolished by 500 BC.¹⁵
The Greeks further diminished the Edomite people.
A series of Jewish leaders defeated, destroyed and subjugated them.
Judas Maccabeus (1Macc.5:3,65; Jos. *Antiq.* 12:18,1),
John Hyrcanus in 129 BC (Jos. *Antiq.* 13:9,1),
Alexander Jannaeus (13:15,4).
The Romans utterly destroyed them as a nation (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 4:5,1,2; 4:9,7) by AD 70.
Any remaining Edomites were absorbed amongst the Jewish or Arabic people.
- **Universal Judgment (15-16)**
The Day of the Lord is near.
Nations will drink from my cup of wrath¹⁶
- **Israel's Restoration (17-21)**
There will come a time when Israel will be restored under God's leadership.

Problem: If Edom is destroyed, what is the meaning of those passages referring to their defeat by the messiah (Nu. 24:18 – the ruler from Jacob will destroy Edom), the risen house of David (Am. 9:11,12 – Edom defeated in connection with the rise of Israel) at the end of the day of Yahweh (Ob.15-18)?

Applications

- God is sovereign

¹¹ They participated in three ways according to vv.10-14: *chamas* (unjust violence), aloofness & rejoicing in Judah's downfall.

¹² They were arrogant because they thought their mountainous terrain was protection enough to insulate them from God's retribution for their behavior toward Judah according to vv.2-4.

¹³ In Romans 8:30 Christians are described as already glorified. Although it is a future event, it is as good as done.

¹⁴ Romans 1; Ps.35:8 tangled in their own net; Ps.64:8 turn tongues against 'em

¹⁵ The activities of the Arabian tribes during this time were recorded by Ashurbanipal; In:*Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, J. B. Pritchard editor, pp.297ff.; Inscriptions discovered at Tell el-Kheleifeh (a.k.a. Ezion-geber) indicate that the governor of the city was an Edomite around 600 BC but 100 years later the prominent names are Arab according to W. F. Albright in Alleman and Flack (eds.) *OT Commentary*, p.167.

¹⁶ God's cup of wrath Ps.75:8; Isa.51:17; Jer.25:15f; 49:1f; Rev.16:19

God decides → He doesn't ask permission and He doesn't apologize.

...there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.... "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker-- An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands'?..." "Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. "Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. "They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him shall be put to shame. Isaiah 45:6b-7, 9, 21-24

Don't be deceived God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Gal.6:7

- The calamity of others should provoke mercy, repentance and a longer view of life
Where is God when disaster strikes?

November 1, 1755 an earthquake several miles offshore of Portugal and the resulting tsunami devastated the cities of Lisbon, Fez, Morocco and Algiers.

Lisbon was particularly affected by the tsunami.

12,000 buildings were destroyed and 60,000 people were killed.

Many were killed while in church celebrating All Saints Day.

"Why did God cause this?" Was the question being asked.

Protestants → God punishing Catholics.

Catholics → God punishing Catholics for tolerating Protestants

Atheists → There is no God (Notably Voltaire in his work, *Candide*)

Without revelation...what are we to think?

Job's friends → The one who would speak for God's motives without God's permission is on very dangerous ground.

When calamity strikes we should:

- offer mercy

They may have been wronged by Judah but that was not justification for their betrayal.
2 Peter 3:9 God doesn't want anyone to perish; Ro.5:9 we were enemies when Christ atoned;
Ez.18:23; 33:11 God does not delight in the death of the wicked but would rather have them repent.
Prov.17:5 indicates that whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished & Prov.24:17 explicitly forbids gloating over the fall of an enemy

Ezekiel.25:1-11 God metes out punishment when the Ammonites & Moabites gloated over Israel's demise;

1Cor.13:6 makes it clear that love (*agapeo*) never delights in evil which can be moral evil or calamity.
David was concerned for his enemies yet they wrongly gloated over his troubles and for this reason, David calls on God to vindicate him (Ps.35:11-26).
- repent of our own sins

Jesus¹⁷ challenged listeners to focus on repentance ("where am I rejecting God?") rather than forensics (i.e. "what caused it?").
He apparently denied that God was judging in particular by saying, "No, they were no worse than you."
- adopt a longer view of our lives.¹⁸

¹⁷ Luke 13:1-6 The falling of the tower in Siloam killed 18; Herod's soldiers killed a group of Galileans.

¹⁸ It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart...the mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure. Ecclesiastes 7:2,4

- God keeps his promises (this promise was in process for 500 years if taken to the Babylonian destruction of the region OR 1000 years if you take it all the way to the destruction of the Idumeans by the Romans in 70 AD)

Jonah God is merciful

- **Jonah, son of Amitai (2 Kings 14:25)**

A prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II (of Israel 790-750 BC).
From Gath Hepher...East of Sea of Galilee, in or near Zebulun.¹⁹

- Predicted Jeroboam II would restore the borders of Israel to those of Davidic times.
- A time of great stability for Israel and for Judah.
- **This is in the form of an historical narrative.**

When Christ cites it in Matthew 12:39-42 he claims the inhabitants of Nineveh will condemn the religious leaders of Christ's time. This is not something that could be said of artificial characters.
It would be nonsensical for me to say, "Homer Simpson himself will condemn you on the day of Christ for being a worse pleasure seeker than he was."

Also, the form of the book is **not allegorical²⁰ nor is it parabolic²¹ as some have suggested**

- **Is Jonah a myth?**

Those who think it is a myth cite three features of the story that they find incredible: being swallowed by a sea creature; a plant growing up overnight and an Assyrian city coming to repentance the way it's described.

It seems like we have several options available...

- **Possible conclusions:**

- Naturalistic
 - **These events are legends**
 - **These rare natural events occurred & Jonah felt they had spiritual significance**
- Supernaturalistic
 - **These rare natural events occurred b/c God Caused them for his own reasons**
 - **These supernatural events occurred b/c God caused them for his own reasons**

The first two positions are naturalistic and the last two are supernaturalistic.

Apart from metaphysical preference there is no compelling reason to accept the first two positions and once the existence of God is affirmed there is no real difference between the last two positions.

If we become squeamish over the supernatural, then what kind of being do we claim God is?

Is he a being that superimposes meaning on fortuitous natural events or

Is he the creator God that stands apart from his creation and intervenes as he sees fit?

It seems that granting the existence of God is sufficient to plunge us into the notion of such an open universe regardless of guffaws from proponents of metaphysical materialism.

- **Surviving 3-days in a large sea creature**

It just says God prepared or appointed a *ketus*.²²

It could be a naturally occurring species or a special creation.

In the great laryngeal pouch of a Sperm whale?²³

In the stomach of a Sperm whale or a Rhineodon (a.k.a. Sea Dog; Whale Shark; a large toothless shark²⁴)?²⁵

¹⁹ A tribal territory; see Joshua 19:13

²⁰ In an allegory each element of the account represents a feature of the history or religion, in this case, of Israel. This story does not have the form of any known allegory (e.g. Ecc.12:3ff; Jer.25:15ff; Ezek.27:3ff; 19:2ff; 24:3ff; Zech.11:4ff).

²¹ Formal names are not part of parabolic writing; parables are, in all other places, short and followed by an explanation whereas Jonah is complex and lacks an explanation (see 2Sam.12:1ff; 14:6ff; 2Ki.14:9 and etc.).

²² lit. "great fish" but it's a general term for a huge sea creature.

²³ Breathing would be easier here.

- **Overnight, a plant grew tall enough to provide shade.**
The term used *kolokuntha* (lit. ‘son of the night’ in the LXX) could be a reference to the plant name rather than to its growth rate.
∴ It may not have grown up overnight.
- There is an indigenous plant, a large leafed shrub that is known to grow over 1 foot/day (i.e. the castor-bean plant; a.k.a. the palm-christ; Lat. *Ricinus communis*)
It can reach heights of over 12 feet in height.
- **The People of Nineveh abruptly repented of their evil as a result of Jonah’s ministry** (more about this later).

Dating (c. 800-750 BCE)

- If we’ve dated it correctly, it was written during the reign of **Jeroboam II who ruled from 790-750 BC**
∴ it could range anywhere from 800-750.
- **This was a period of general decline in Assyria. There were four Assyrian kings: Adadnirari III, Shalmaneser IV, Ashur-dan III and Ashur-nirari V.**
- **Why do some say that an anonymous author seized on the name ref. in 2 Kings and wrote ‘Jonah’ sometime after the fall of Nineveh?**
 - **Supernatural Elements (dealt with earlier)**
 - **Linguistic Features like *mallah* (sailor), *s'pinah* (ship), *se* (which) and *ribbo* (ten thousand) are of Aramaic origin.**
Actually, recent scholarship shows that these terms are Phoenician ∴ part of an eighth-century vocabulary.
- **The use of the plural word *goralot* (lots)** was thought to be evidence for a late date because the singular form is used before the exile and the plural form after the exile.
However, Hebrew men were not casting lots thus the evidence cannot stand - pagans may have used more than one lot.
- Most scholars view the linguistic arguments as inconclusive.
- **Some think that the size & population of Nineveh is exaggerated²⁶**
He may be referring to the time of the journey rather than its distance.

'the great city of Nineveh' might mean 'Greater Nineveh'²⁷

²⁴ In the book, *Kon-Tiki*, Thor Heyerdahl reported one following him for several days. Also, there are some reports of men being swallowed by these as well as sperm whales.

²⁵ A whaler from the ship, Star of the East, James Bartley was reported swallowed by a sperm whale he was attempting to harpoon in February 1891 off the coast of the Falkland Islands.

The veracity of this account was investigated and confirmed by Sir Francis Fox and two French scientists (see Wilson, A. J. *The Sign of the Prophet Jonah and its Modern Confirmations*, Princeton Theological Review (1927) vol.25, pp.630-642.

However, the widow of the captain of the whaling ship later claimed the story was false (see Allen, L. C. (1976) *The Books of Joel, Obediah, Jonah and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament.

See, *Neue Lutheranische Kirchenzeitung* (1895), p.303 and A. J Wilson (1927) Princeton Theological Review, p.636, respectively.

²⁶ If Nineveh was a city of three days journey (3:3) it would be 60 miles around or in diameter but we know from the annals of Sennacherib and from modern excavations that it was about 7-8 miles around.

Nineveh is said to hold 120,000 people, yet a city half the size of Nineveh (Calah) is estimated to have held only 18,000 by some.

However, others estimate Nimrud a city of less than half the size of Nineveh held 69,574 people. Thus, some argue that the walled city could have housed up to 175,000 people.

²⁷ Genesis 10:11-12; See Keil, C. F. (1864) *The Pentateuch* p.167 and Alexander, T. D. (1988) *Obadiah, Jonah & Micah*, In: *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol.23a., IVP, p.57-58.

- Critics say that the title, 'king of Nineveh' never occurs in Assyrian annals.
but, Jonah is not an Assyrian document.
Some Hebrew writings refer to kings by their capital city even when they rule over a much larger nation (e.g. 2Chron.24:23 of Damascus rather than Aram; 1Ki.21:1 of Samaria rather than Israel).
If the author wrote much later than these events, he would certainly have drawn data from 2 Kings 19-20, Isaiah 37-39 or even Nahum where the expression 'king of Nineveh' is never used.
- 'Nineveh was a very important city' is past tense.
The sentence literally reads, 'a great city to God'
Thus stressing its importance to God, not its status amongst cities.
Even granting that it's 'glory' was in the past, doesn't mean the author was writing after the demise of Nineveh via the Babylonians.
Perhaps during this time of Assyrian weakness the king's power was limited to the capital city and surrounding regions.
Perhaps the fact that the king was housed in the city Jonah was preaching in inspired that particular description.
Perhaps Nineveh was so diminished its former status needed to be mentioned
- There's no archeological evidence that a Yahweh revival ever occurred in this city.
This is an argument from silence.
We have little to no information from this period.
It would not be surprising for a Yahweh reformation to be suppressed by a later king during a time of Assyrian renaissance.
There is a record of religious reforms instituted by Adad-nirari III (803-782) that are monotheistic in flavor although focused on Nebo.
The conditions were right for reform during this period.
During this time the mountain tribes of Urartu, the Mannai & Madai had pushed to within 100 miles of Nineveh. This might have made the audience more receptive.
During the reign of Ashur-dan III a total solar eclipse (June 15, 763) and a famine (765 - 759) occurred.
This, taken together with the political troubles, may have produced a very open population.
- The narrative records some customs typical of the Persian (late 6th to 4th centuries) rather than Assyrian period:
 - ✓ **Issuance of a decree by the king and his nobles rather than by the king alone (3:7)**
But, it is very foolish to presume clear understanding of these customs, particularly at a time of Assyrian decline when surrounding provincial rulers could have weakened the monarchy.
Also, it is known that the king temporarily vacated his position during solar eclipses because of the danger they were thought to present.
 - ✓ **Participation of animals in mourning (3:7-8).**
Against this, it is an argument from silence.

Jonah's Message

- Structure
 - **Jonah flees from God's task (1:1-17)**
 - **Jonah repents (2:1-9)**
 - **Jonah engages God's task and Nineveh repents (2:10-3:10)**
 - **Jonah dislikes God's mercy (4:1-11)**

Note: There is no evidence at the outset that this prophecy was conditional (3:4).

Perhaps some other prophecies are conditional too (e.g. Hezekiah's imminent death prophecy in Isaiah 38 or David's reaction to the judgment against Bathsheba's firstborn in 2 Samuel 12).
Which ones are conditional? We cannot know.

Application

- **Serving God is fruitful** rejecting him is not.

We learn that human responsiveness to God can have a remarkable impact on us but we also learn that God will accomplish his goals regardless of that response.

If we reject the commandments of God, what does he do about it? One approach is found in this remarkable book - he circumstantially inhibited Jonah's disobedience.

Note: I wouldn't count on it thought because mostly, he doesn't²⁸

If we obey God, what will come of it? One result is here too. **The people of Nineveh repented.**

We must love those who are different from us, foolish and even those who are evil.²⁹

We are not called on to submit to exploitation but we are called upon to offer reconciliation with God.³⁰

- **God is merciful** 2 Pet.3:9

- **Jonah & the end of Micah are integral to traditional Jewish rituals on the Day of Atonement...why?**
 - When Christ is asked for a sign (Mt.12:38f; 16:1-4; Lk.11:29-32) he says the only sign they will get is the sign of Jonah.
What is this sign? One thing is the call to repent as Lk. 11:32 suggests...the other resurrection.

- **To serve God is to have our views challenged.**

- **Why was Jonah reluctant to go?**

Was he worried about the difficulties of convincing a large population of foreign people long committed to idolatry and wickedness?

Was he afraid for his own safety? No! He was afraid God would **not** destroy them.

How often do we reject God's way saying to ourselves, "I knew I shouldn't obey because I ended up not getting what I wanted"?

We don't obey because we don't want what God wants. Perhaps we are right. Perhaps obedience will mean we don't get our way. If we're open to it, though, we get God's way and learn it is far superior (Rom.12:1-2).

We find in Jonah's life that God wants us to make room in our hearts for people we do not like.

He wants his representatives to represent his mercy to others.

Are you anxious to see people change their minds or anxious to see them get the grief they are due?

Is your compassion legalistic?

We must love those who are different from us, foolish or even evil.³¹ We are not called on to submit to exploitation but we are called upon to offer reconciliation with God.³²

- **Why did Jonah feel bad about the shade plant?**

Is your affection self-focused or other-focused? Jonah had pity for the shade plant not for the people of Nineveh.

His pity was self-pity – not focused on what they needed but what he needed.

God had pity for the people of Nineveh not for the shade plant. God's pity was based on the needs of the people of Nineveh.

Are your feelings about people rooted in your desires or in their needs?

"If you love those who love you, what good is that? Even the heathen do this." Luke 6:32

²⁸ Clearly, there are times God simply plows through all resistance (e.g. Pharaoh) and other times he lets people go their own way for good (baby Moses..Ex.2:9 the result of Jochebed's obedience) or ill (Romans 1:18-32; Gal.6:8; Hosea 10:12).

²⁹ Mt.5:43-46; Rom.12:14-21;Rom.5:10

³⁰ 2Cor.5:16-21

³¹ Mt.5:43-46; Rom.12:14-21;Rom.5:10

³² 2Cor.5:16-21

- **What were Jonah's good points?**

Jonah was honest

Jonah was responsive to God's mercy toward himself.

If we are honest & grateful³³ God can change our minds toward our enemies³⁴

Will you receive God's mercy and extend it to others through forgiveness.³⁵

Joel 'The Day of the Lord'

▫ Joel's identity is unclear. He was the son of Pethuel but we have no other references to Pethuel in the OT.

▫ Joel = 'Yahweh is God' (c.f. 2:27).

▫ From Jerusalem or thereabouts?

▫ A priest ? (1:13; 2:17).

▫ Joel the work of a single author according to nearly all.³⁶

▫ **Joel uses a lot of simile & metaphor (e.g. 1:6; 2:2-7,9,11,20,25; 3:13,16) and recapitulation (e.g. 1:4 & 2:25; 1:5 & 3:18; 1:6 & 2:2; etc.) as literary devices.**

▫ **A devastating locust³⁷ plague had descended on Judah. Joel called on Judah to repent.**

In 1915 a locust plague arose in the Palestine-Syrian region that was described by John D. Whiting³⁸ as remarkably similar to the description in Joel.

Initially adult locusts flew into the region in clouds so dense they obscured the sun.

These insects consumed vegetation, bred and the females laid eggs in a density estimated at 65,000-75,000/square meter.

The eggs hatched in a few weeks, the offspring, resembling large ants at this stage of development, moved forward at a rate of 400-600 feet/day stripping the ground of all vegetation and then molted.

When the pupae emerged from their molt they had encased wings and so continued consuming vegetation by walking along the ground. These early stage insects attacked vineyards so aggressively that in a very short time nothing but bare vines were left and even the bark from the youngest parts of the vine was consumed leaving only bleached white branches. The locusts would even gnaw off the branches so that the ground was littered with bark-less twigs.

In the final molt the insect wings emerged and they took to flight, their color changing from yellow to red in color. This stage insect consumed olive tree leaves, fruit and tender bark; cacti, palms and any other vegetation left from the earlier stages.

▫ He does not specify the sins of the people, it seems that they had walked away from God because in 2:12 God calls on them to return to him with their whole hearts (i.e. see also, 1:9,13-14,16; 2:13-19,23,26-27,32; 3:21).

▫ **The judgment foreshadows God's future judgment of Judah and the rest of the nations - the day of the Lord**

³³ We love because he first loved us 1 John 4:19

³⁴ Mt.5:43-46 – love your enemies; Rom.12:14-21 – bless those who persecute you; Rom.5:10 – reconciled while enemies; 2Cor.5:16-21 -

³⁵ Ephesians 4:32 forgive, just as God, in Christ has forgiven you

³⁶ See Harrison, R. K. (1969) *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 874-876.

³⁷ *Pachytulus migratorius* or *Acridium peregrinum* were species common to this region. B. P. Uvarov found Joel's description in remarkable accord with the actual events of a locust plague (*Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, p.33 (1944)); Also, see the End Notes section of this paper.

³⁸ *Jerusalem's Locust Plague*, National Geographic Magazine, vol.28, no.6, December, 1915, pp.511-50.

A mark of God's sovereignty (1:15; 2:1-4, 18,20,25-32; 3:1-21) mercy and grace (2:13).

Dating 875-750 BC

There are many views of the date of Joel that span nearly 500 years.³⁹

Since there is no external evidence for its date the book itself must give us guidance.

Certain facts present themselves:

1. The book is grouped with the pre-exilic authors in the dodecapropheton section of the Torah;
2. A temple exists (1:9)⁴⁰;
3. There is a reference to a scattering of the Hebrew people (3:1-8);⁴¹
4. There is no mention of a king⁴².
5. There is no mention of idolatry⁴³;
6. Edom still exists (3:19);
7. The empires of Assyria & Babylon are not mentioned⁴⁴ and Philistia (3:4), Egypt (3:19), Phoenicia (3:4) & Edom (3:19) are described as enemies;⁴⁵
8. An enemy to the north is mentioned in 2:20;⁴⁶ and
9. Many other prophets appear to draw from Joel not vice versa.⁴⁷

³⁹ Archer, c.875-848; Kaiser, c. 800's; Gaebelein, c.792-740; Stuart, c.700's (In:WBC v.21); Harrison c.590's; Hubbard, c.500's (In: Wiseman's TOTC); Beyer, c.500's (lecture 27); Allen, c.520 (In: NICOT).

⁴⁰ The temple was destroyed in 587 BC 10 years after it's capture by Babylon. It was rebuilt with a wall (2:7) after c.445 BC but the rebuilt temple cannot be in view because Edom did not exist then, so the book must have been written prior to 597 BC. This eliminates Hubbard, Beyer, and Allen's positions.

⁴¹ The people of Judah were scattered by the Philistine/Arab invaders (c.854); Israel was scattered by Assyria (c.721); Judah was scattered by the Babylonians (c.597), so this isn't helpful. Also, the scattering comments could be prophetic predictions making the information even less helpful.

⁴² Perhaps because Joel was written after the exile or perhaps it is a meaningless omission. Obediah, Jonah, Nahum, do not mention Israel or Judah kings either. Also, during the time of the boy-king Joash (835-796 BC) the priests & elders rather than the king would have ruled the land.

⁴³ It may be significant since idolatry is not an issue after the exile but to make the omission meaningful is an argument from silence. However, if Joel wrote during the early reigns of Joash or Amaziah or during the reign of Uzziah then idolatry may not have been of major concern. Although the latter is less likely given Amaziah's attack on Edom before Uzziah and Assyria's renaissance during the times of Uzziah.

⁴⁴ This could suggest Joel was written early, during the time of Assyria's decline (782-745 BC) or late, after the exile (500's or later) but this latter possibility is reduced because of the Edom material and because of a failure to mention Persia. This could be a meaningless omission but not likely in light of the discussion of the judgment & scattering of Jews.

⁴⁵ Philistia, Edom, Phoenicia and Egypt are not relevant enemies after the Assyrian & Babylonian empires came to prominence. These countries are prominent in the 800's BC.

⁴⁶ This could be Aram or Israel. If it refers to Aram then the book falls in the period c.900-803. If it refers to Israel then the failure to name Israel is an odd omission. Perhaps the book is written from the perspective of Israel rather than from the perspective of Judah but that still limits the northern enemy to Aram. However, it might be a prophetic forecast of a future northern threat (e.g. Rosh, Tubal, Gomer, etc.).

⁴⁷ 27 of Joel's 72 verses have parallels in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah and Malachi; Few are willing to argue that half of Joel is taken from others, rather than they were alluding to Joel. In Joel 3:4-6 Tyre, Sidon and all regions of Philistia are condemned for looting Judah & Jerusalem and for enslaving the inhabitants - selling them to the Greeks; v.19 Edom will be a wasteland because of the

Taken together, it seems unlikely that Joel was post-exilic or exilic and while a precise date is impossible to ascertain the evidence seems to point toward the 125 year span between 875-750 BC.

If the reference to the northern enemy is a reference to Aram then it might narrow the date to 875-803 BC.

Joel's Message

- The Locust Plague 1:1-2:27

- The current plague 1:1-4

- 2 This plague is uniquely devastating...ask the aged men
 - 3 Recount it to the next generation...it's a testimony not only of God's current judgment but the coming *Day of the Lord* (v.15: 2:1)
 - 4 Some interpreters see these terms as referring to progressive stages of development...others see this and similar passages as using repetition for its rhetorical effect.

Gazam is a cutting or shearing locust from the Semitic root meaning 'to shear' or 'cut.'

Sexually mature

'Arbeh is a swarming locust from the Semitic root meaning, 'to multiply.'

Larvae

Yeleg means leaper or hopper from the Arabic root meaning, 'to hasten' or 'to walk swiftly,' in Nahum 3:16a this form is said to fly away.

Late Pupae

Hasil means 'destroyer' or 'finisher.' There are actually 9 different terms used for locust in the OT.

Sexually immature

National Geographic found Joel's account to be a remarkable chronology of the actual events of such a plague that occurred in the Middle East in 1915.

- The response 1:5-2:27

- Mourn because of the locust plague 1:5-20

5-7 Vines and Figs were often grown in the same fields.

The description of the white branches is not hyperbolic.

8-10 The libation and grain offerings cannot continue because there is no grain, wine or olive oil.⁴⁸

Minha, the cereal offering (Lev.2) consists of flour, oil and salt. Frankincense is poured on it, part of it is burned on the altar and the priests eat the rest.

The drink offering involved pouring wine on the altar prior to burning the cereal offering.

These offerings were given twice each day, in the morning & evening. These were symbolic of God's fellowship with Israel and their absence was symbolic of a rift in that fellowship.⁴⁹

Joel writes in a very poetic style using words that are only found in Hebrew poetry,⁵⁰ using personification,⁵¹ using alliteration and assonance.⁵²

violence done to the people of Judah. This passage sounds much like the Amos passage which is dated to c. 775-750 BC and so Joel must be c.875-750.

⁴⁸ According to Keil, *Israel could not suffer any greater calamity than the suspension of the daily sacrifice; for this was a practical suspension of the covenant relation - a sign that God had rejected His people*, In: Commentary on the Old Testament, vol.10 Minor Prophets, Keil & Delitzsch, p.184.

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11-12 Lament you farmers
13-14 The solemn assembly requires everyone to stop and focus on this issue before God.

15-18 Botanical destruction leads to livestock devastation.
Verse 15 introduces the Day of the Lord, a day that has not yet come and so cannot be this particular judgment.
Keshod misshadai, destruction from the Almighty, is part of the Day of Yahweh (2:1,11,31).

This expression is alliterative, like saying 'destruction from the Destroyer.'

Verse 17 *megr^eptehem* could mean clods or shovels; some find the imperfect tense of 'clods,' if that is to be the interpretation, clashes with the perfect tense of the other words and thus prefer to translate it 'shovels.'

Thus, an expanded translation would read, 'shrunk are the grains, disheartened are their irrigation spades.' While the translation is unclear the meaning is not.

19-20 A drought seems to be part of this plague

o **Prepare, repent & pray for the coming judgment 2:1-27**

In vv.1-11 interpreters take one of three avenues: 1. this describes the current plague in more apocalyptic terms; 2. this describes a future invading army or 3. the locust plague is a type of the Day of Yahweh, resulting in a narrative with both characteristics.

1. Those arguing for an apocalyptic reiteration of the locust plague note the following:

- Many simile's are used (e.g. their appearance is like...horses;⁵³ they run like mighty men, they climb like...soldiers).
- The devastation described is like that described by the locust plague in chapter 1 so they must be referring to the same event. Notice the destruction is of vegetation. However, some of the descriptions must be taken to be hyperbolic (vv.10-11).

2. For a prophecy of a future invasion, interpreters note the following:

- Chapter 1 distinguishes between the locust plague & the Day of Yahweh, which had not come (1:15) but here the prophet describes the actual day of Yahweh (2:1b-2).
- The reference in v.20 to the removal of a Northern Army is seen to be a description of the invading hordes of 2:1-11, not a description of locust invasion.⁵⁴
- This interpretation best fits the restoration and judgment in the remainder of the book that is clearly more global than warranted by a plague.

⁵⁰ v.2 *ha^azinu* is a synonym of 'hear' but is used almost entirely in poetry (like our word 'hark' or 'hearken'); v.6, *labi* - fangs is a word only used in poetry

⁵¹ v.10 'the oil he fails, new wine he is dried up, grain he is destroyed, indeed the ground because of the barley & vines, he mourns; v.11-12 the fig tree she is dried up, the vine he is destroyed, the apple tree, palm and pomegranate she is withered'

⁵² *suddad* & *sadeh* (ruined & mourns); *'abela* & *'adama* (mourn & the land), v.10; *hobisu* & *helilu* (be ashamed & wail); *Keshod misshaddai* destruction (*shod*) from the Almighty (*shaddai*), v. 15

⁵³ The head of locusts looks like the head of a horse according to these interpreters. In fact the common German word for locust is Heupferde (i.e. hay horses). The Italian word is cavalette (i.e. little horse). An old Arabic proverb describes the locust as having a face like a mare.

⁵⁴ Locust plagues blow in from the south not the north, in this region. Amos 5:18-20, 6:14 focus on an invading northern army.

- If this interpretation is correct, it is the similarity of the locust plague with a future invasion that prompted Joel to describe the Day of Yahweh, so the similarity cannot be used to argue they are the same event.
- The magnitude of the destruction (c.f. 2:10-11) exceeds that of a locust plague.
- Joel and other prophets connect the Day of Yahweh with military invasion (c.f. 3:9-12 {Mt.4:9-12}, Amos 5:18-20; 6:14; Zephaniah 1:16; Ezekiel 13:5; Daniel 11:41; Zechariah 14:1-2).
- The Day of Yahweh may itself be accompanied by a locust plague and thus 2:1-11 refers to both events as part of the same judgment. This would explain the use of simile to describe the locust infestation.
- Concerning the use of simile, Hebrew term *ke*, translated, "as" or "like" can be used for simile but also used to compare something with its ideal. In Ez.26:10 it is said that the army entered Jerusalem's gates, "as men enter a city that is breached." This use of *ke* does not intend to say they were not men entering the city but that they poured through the gates like the invading army they were. In this sense, *ke* is used of the perfect, true or ideal manner in which they entered the city. Is this use valid for vv.4,5,7, & 9? It's difficult to say. Most think such a use is stretching things a bit.

3. For the argument that Joel is referring to both the contemporary judgment as well as that coming at the end of time or that the contemporary judgment is a type & harbinger of the future judgment the only argument is that this interpretation does justice to both the earlier arguments.

- 1-2 These verses tie this entire passage 1-11 together as an extended description of the Day of the Lord.
Kesahar parus al-heharim - 'like the dawn spread out upon the mountains', this probably refers to the quickness of the onset.
- 18 This is in the past tense suggesting that they had repented. Is this about the Jehoiada reforms during the time of King Joash (2Chron.24)?
- 19 The northern army will be removed - which army? Aram, Assyria, Babylon, Persia...Gomer/Gog?
- 23 Some believe this should read, "for he has given you the righteous teacher" not "for he has given you the early (autumn) rains in righteousness."
The term used, *hammoreh*, is from *moreh*, which is translated in all ancient texts (Vulgate, Targum & the Greek translation of Symmachus) as 'teacher' everywhere it appears.⁵⁵
The term *yoreh* is the usual term for early rain.
While it is true *moreh* is used at the end of v.23, it appears to be used as a word play with the earlier *hammoreh*. The addition of the prefix *ham*, is a definite article conveying the idea of a single person, "the righteous teacher"
- God's Sovereign Plan 2:28-3:21
 - God will provide for his people 2:28-32
Is this a gap prophecy? See Acts 2.

Some see this as a split prophecy because some of it accompanies Pentecost and some will happen at the end times;

Others see this as fulfilled around the time of Christ's death and at Pentecost (i.e. vv.30-32 referring to the heavenly signs that accompanied Christ's death).

It could be a double reference prophecy.

⁵⁵ ...except in Ps.84:6 and in the latter part of this verse

Wolff shows that the word translated 'billows' derives from *tamar*, or the stone-pine form of the date-palm.

Since this is unfamiliar to most western audiences Wolff uses a similar shaped structure, the mushroom and thus he translates v. 30b mushrooms of smoke.⁵⁶

- God will triumph 3:1-21
 - The day of Yaweh 3:1-17
 - The restoration of Israel 3:18-21

Applications A reprise of earlier applications.

- God is sovereign
- God is merciful
- God will judge the rebellious and bless his people.

⁵⁶ Wolff, H. W. (1977) *Joel & Amos*, Hermeneia, E.T., SCM, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.56.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- **Read and annotate Amos & Hosea**
- **Memorize Hosea 10:12**
- **As you read through these three prophets, identify the principles that could apply to you. Which of these are the hardest to believe at this point in your life?**

- **Prepare answers for the following based on your study:**
 1. **Identify the kings of Israel & Judah during the activity of these prophets. Were any commended? Were any condemned?**
 2. **What nations posed a threat to Israel & Judah during this time?**
 3. **Identify one major theme for each of the two prophets.**