

“Calamitous Corporate Covenant Call” (Joel 1:1-14)

1. Concise Consideration of Context (1)
 - a. Firstly, we know little of *Joel* and the time of his prophesy. No consensus in commentaries re: timing of *Joel*.
 - b. Furthermore, commentaries vary on which side of the metaphor is the “nation” v. 6 and which side is the “locusts” v. 4.
 - c. Finally, we see no accusation of guilt in the introduction, rather a clear call to mourn their losses.
2. **Context** of Contemporary’s Covenant Claim (Amos 4:9)
 - a. “Joel and Amos appear to have been placed together for literary reasons. Links between the two books are the shared themes of Joel 3:16 and Am. 1:2, and of Joel 3:18 and Am. 9:13. An earthquake, mentioned in Joel 2:10 and 3:16, reappears in Am. 1:1; 8:8; 9:5. The locusts of Am. 4:9 recall Joel 1–2, while the day of the Lord theme in Am. 5:18–20 connects with the whole of Joel. Placing the books together served to shed light upon each, though more than 300 years of history separate them.”¹
 - b. Although no date is firmly established for *Joel*, his prophesy is often linked with *Amos* (dates notwithstanding), and *Amos* mentioned a locust plague which was intended to urge repentance (Amos 4:9). “Return’ refers to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. This concept underlies the whole of Joel’s prophetic ministry. It is evident in such phrases as ‘your God’ (2:13, 26–27; 3:17), ‘my people’ (2:27; 3:2–3) and ‘his people’ (2:18; 3:16). Moreover, while the political name of the community is Judah (3:1, *etc.*), Joel also uses its covenant name, Israel (2:27; 3:2, 16).”²
 - c. Therefore, we could deduce the same w/ regard to *Joel*. In fact, both *Amos* and *Joel* presuppose, by their employment of terms, that God’s covenant with Israel was violated and that they needed to return (repent) and trust Him.
 - d. As mentioned, there is no explicit accusation of Israel’s guilt in the opening 14 verses but they were still commanded to “cry out to the LORD.” Trusting the covenant LORD is what all creatures are called to do. Jesus was without sin and only did what was righteous and yet He demonstrated perfect faith in the Father. Salvation from ultimately any plague – and particularly the plague of sin – is only remedied by turning to the LORD!
 - e. “God’s displeasure does not always lie behind human misfortune, as within the OT the book of Job clearly shows. But the NT sometimes sees Joel as relating believers’ misfortunes to divine judgment (1 Cor. 11:30–32; Heb. 12:5–11). The warning passages in Hebrews (*e.g.* Heb. 10:26–31) and the letters to the churches in Revelation, especially to Laodicea (Rev. 2:5; 3:3, 14–22) sound like Joel, as they speak in strong terms of the perils of spiritual treason. Yet, if Joel had to speak harshly to hardened sinners, he knew too when to speak coaxingly of the tender love of God (2:13), rather like Heb. 6:9–12 (*cf.* 2 Pet. 3:9).”³
3. Consider the Calamity (2-4)
 - a. Sore Subject. I was recently told that I shouldn’t talk about negative stuff – only positive... And this was in the context of preaching! It’s as if the soul who said it had no idea of a greater portion of Scripture. Most of the Prophets began with a call to repentance and those who didn’t ended and or concluded with such a call. In fact Jesus began His preaching the same message (Mat. 4:17).

¹ Allen, L. C. (1994). *Joel*. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 781). Inter-Varsity Press.

² *Ibid.* 780.

³ *Ibid* 781–782.

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- b. The truth is that unless we acknowledge the bad news – and it is vital to our salvation – we will experience the ultimate tragedy of eternal separation from our Maker, which makes the locust devastation seem insignificant.
 - c. V. 2a inclusio of “elders” ending at v. 14. Elders were the **earnest representatives** of covenant Israel for many of their Kings were terrible.⁴ Furthermore, the elders (spiritual leaders) should be the first to seek the Covenant LORD (CL).
 - d. V. 2b is an idiomatic phrase used by different Prophets (including Jesus) and other writers of historical narrative. [For a few examples of hyperbole reused see Exod. 10:6, 14; Lam. 1:12; Nu. 31 cf. Judges 6:5 re: Israel “killed every man of Midian” If this were *literally* true, why later in history does Judges 6:5 record Midianites as “swarms of locusts” and “impossible to count them of their camels.” And in Matt. 24:29, 34-35 (cf. Mark 13:24-27) we see the pinnacle of progressive apocalyptic metaphors from Babylon to the entire world (Sun, moon, stars): Isa. 13:6-10 (lights out Babylon). Isa. 34:4-5 (lights out Edom). Ezek. 32:4-8 (lights out Egypt). Amos 5:18; 8:9 (lights out Israel). Joel 2:31 (lights out world).] But here, it seems hardly hyperbolic as we know that locusts literally consume entire multiple crops. “One swarm can contain up to ten billion individual locusts. As many as a thousand newly hatched hopping locusts can occupy one square foot. A single locust can travel 3,000 miles during its lifetime, stripping vegetation wherever it and its swarm land. A swarm can devour in one day what 40,000 people eat in one year. In a 1958 visitation Ethiopia lost 167,000 metric tons of grain, enough to feed more than a million people for a year. (Most of these facts are taken from *World Vision*, Dec. 1986–Jan. 1987.)”⁵ Another commentary offers this: “These destructive creatures have been seen in hordes that blackened the sun as far as 1,200 miles out at sea. In 1889 a host of these insects covered a 2,000-square-mile area with an estimated 120 million insects per square mile. In 1881 a locust egg-mass was uncovered that weighed 1,300 tons.⁴ One report on locust activity notes that ‘One female grasshopper that lays eggs in June ... may have eighteen million living descendants by October.’”^{5 6}
 - e. Vv. 3-4 Poetic lines: somewhat preserved in the NKJV. Children to grandchildren’s children = don’t forget! V. 4 employs the same sort of repetition using **four terms to describe the locusts**. The #4 is often used re: complete coverage esp. w/ regard to the earth.
 - f. The fact that there were nine different terms used to describe and identify locusts tells us that they knew of the different phases of growth and varieties of the devastating insects. In an agrarian culture, when the crops are devastated so too the nation.
4. Comprehensive Call to Contrition (5-14)
- a. Overview: in the poetic phrasing (organizing), we see the comprehensive call to all covenant people to turn to the CL. We see the solidarity of their community in the call to all. Not only

⁴ The *elders* were ever a force in Israelite government, whether in the context of the local, tribal, or national community. A clue to their importance in the postexilic period is found in Ezra 10:8, where they appear as a legislative council or parliament alongside “the officials.” What concerns the elders is naturally the interests of the rest of the community for whom they bear responsibility. Allen, L. C. (New International Commentary of the Old Testament) p. 48.

⁵ Allen, L. C. (1994). [Joel](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 780). Inter-Varsity Press.

⁴ Raymond B. Dillard, *Joel in The Minor Prophets. An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, Baker Book House, 1992, p. 256, citing Stanley Baron, *The Desert Locust*, Scribner, 1972, p. 32.

⁵ David Allen Hubbard, *Joel and Amos. An Introduction and Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1989, p. 45, n. 1. Hubbard is citing an article by S. Kraft in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled ‘Africa Girds for New War on Locusts’ (issue for 13 October 1986). Cf. also the informative article by John D. Whiting, ‘Jerusalem’s Locust Plague,’ *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 28, no. 6 (Dec. 1915), pp. 511–50.

⁶ Robertson, O. P. (1995). [Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel](#) (p. 24). Evangelical Press.

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was the catastrophe utter in destruction of crops, it was total in that all parties (or groups) w/in Israel were affected and hurt by it.

- b. Awaken! (5) The drunkards, who were not sober to see or care about threatening realities (or indeed actually partook of such in order to forget such realities) were to wake up. Also included are those who responsibly partook of wine. For both the dependent and the recreational drinkers had been cut off from such.
- c. Agency? (6) As mentioned above, there is certainly employed metaphor i.e. “nation,” “locusts,” and “lion.” Metaphors have sharp teeth (pun intended re: lion) and Israel knew the devastating destruction which came by a nation, plague, and lion.
- d. V. 7 Mixed metaphor takes yet another noun (pronoun) i.e. “He.” The “he” being either nation or locust (certainly not a lion), has left them without fertile “tree.”
- e. V. 8 Even the young and those full of promise are to lament for they are like a virgin whose betrothed is lost to sudden unexpected death. O. P. Robertson called attention to the unaware betrothed, due to no guilt of her own, who would be in dismay at the death of her beloved. He added: “Even though you may be unaware of any particular sin that might have precipitated a judgment by the Lord, come before him with your lamentation none the less. Remember that Job had to learn how to submit in dust and ashes before the Lord in his calamity even though he was not guilty of any particular sin that brought about his losses (Job 1:8, 20–22).”⁷
- f. Not unlike Israel the nation of God’s called out people, the whole Body of Christ suffers when one is wounded or disciplined. Each of us must mourn the sins of others as well as ourselves.
- g. V. 9 the devastation had cut off all provisions and thus brought a halt to corporate worship. It can be a mercy of God to cut off avenues of worship when they are simply sanctimonious at best or blasphemous at worst. Therefore, the priests are to lament for they are the ones who facilitated such corporate worship.
- h. V. 10 The land laments as she has been brutalized by the plague. She the very source of the crops was laid bare.
- i. Vv. 11-12 When a nation receives judgment, even the earnest blue-collar folk who are the heart and soul of the nation are prevented from doing their honest labor and providing for their families. I have seen six ways to Sunday how our civil authorities make it more and more difficult for the honest folk to make an honest living. There are so many mandated harmful policies, which if ignored, either put them out of business or have them compromise their virtuous values. From farmers to pharmacists, from distributors to doctors, and from police to soldiers; current laws have mandated that they ignore their oaths, contradict their Constitution, and even murder the newly born or be punished if they refuse! We should all lament the state of our State! For God’s judgment is now (Ro. 1) and we must turn to the CL.
- j. **Further Study:** Now Joel turns to the agricultural workers themselves, described as farmers and vinedressers (cf. 2 Chr. 26:10; Is. 61:5). He calls them not only to wail in mourning, as is customary, but to be ashamed in their failure to produce. Joel uses a play on words here

⁷ Robertson, O. P. (1995). [*Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel*](#) (p. 30). Evangelical Press.

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between “be ashamed,” *hōbîšû*, and the word for “dried up” or “withered” in verses 10 and 12, *hōbîš*.⁸

- k. Are we ignoring these things? Is the Church refusing or neglecting to address such evil laws which fly in the face of our God? God calls the Church, not Caesar to reform society.
- l. V. 13 Again the priests are called because they are the intercessors of sinful humans. The clergy must truly beseech the CL for they are the ministers of His revelation, w/o which no one would know how to repent.
- m. V. 14 End inclusio of elders/assembly. The collective group who will, must turn to the CL and hold a fast for the feast has been prevented. Today, we still feast although more and more are feeling the reality of abundance being swept away. God may allow or cause such as Joel described i.e. take away our feasting to induce fasting and repentance. Will we fast, gather a holy assembly in Christ, and call on Him to heal us first “For Judgment begins in the house of the LORD” (v. 14 cf. 1 Pet. 4:17) and then our land? “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” Deut. 8:3.

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As usually needed to get our attention, God used calamity and want to get His people’s attention. Israel had known her share of bad kings, plagues, and war. And Joel called Israel to heed her calamity and utter devastation as a prompting to return to Him. From the comatose to the committed, from the collective to the clergy, and from the consecrated to the cultivators; no one was left unscathed. Though compassionate, God does not treat all people and groups the same. “Blessed is the nation whose God is LORD” (Ps. 33:12), but cursed and under judgment are those who suppress His revelation and promote sin (Gen. 18-19 cf. Ro. 1). Furthermore, God expects more from His people as they have been delivered and thus e.g. He sends prophets to the Pagans who don’t know Him e.g. *Jonah*. The hand of God may be firm many a time, but it is because His heart is tender for us all of the time. Blessed be the loving God who chastens those whom He loves.

⁸ Ogilvie, L. J., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1990). [*Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*](#) (Vol. 22, p. 230). Thomas Nelson Inc.