

God has allowed a terrible thing...

The plague of locusts went on for several years. It progressively ruined the nation. It destroyed the agriculture. There was no food for the people. It affected the temple-worship. The grain for grain-offerings and drink-offerings were 'cut off' ¹. Joel sees this as coming from God. God controls whatever happens. He had allowed this terrible thing to wake them up from their carelessness.

¹ 1:9

• To wake his people from carelessness

Do you know what it is to get careless with regard to the things of God? You cease to be careful about the way you live or think or act. General negligence creeps into your life. This had happened in Israel. Joel does not deal very often with specific sins. He deals more with general carelessness. Interventions in the routine of life are always significant. God may allow something unusual to wake us up. He can intervene in mercy, or in judgement. He can do something which is wonderful – or something that is awesome which makes us aware of God in a new way. God breaks traditions. 'Has this ever happened before?' asks Joel.

We should take notice when something unusual happens – whether it is wonderful or whether it is disturbing.

Unusual happenings

*Has anything like this happened in your days
or in the days of your forefathers? (1:2)
Tell it to your children,
and let your children tell it to their children,
and their children to the next generation.'* (1:3)

• Lessons for future generations

The Bible is interested in the story of the people of God. Christians should be interested in what God has done in days gone by. Joel envisages that future generations will learn from what happened in Joel's day. Joel's preaching got put into writing and we are learning from what happened even today.

• Chastening in the form of deprivation

God's chastening often takes the form of some kind of deprivation. When crisis comes it is God's way of speaking. We do not always like it. In Joel's day, God allowed the crops to be devastated. There was one swarm after another of locusts. They came in wave after wave, and destroyed everything edible. They damaged the vines. The people could not make wine any more. They were deprived of the necessities of life. The crops were ruined¹. It affected the whole agriculture of the nation.

¹ 1:11

Complete devastation

*'What the locust swarm has left
the great locusts have eaten;
what the great locusts have left
the young locusts have eaten;
what the young locusts have left
other locusts have eaten.'* (1:4)

• **God wants you to think**

We learn then: chastening sometimes takes the form of deprivation of something you feel you need. God can remove something from you, not because He is angry or bitter, but because He wants you to think. He is capable of withdrawing a basic necessity for your life. It could be something in the realm of money. God can withdraw your supplies, if you are careless about the things of the Lord. He can withhold success or honour. He can withhold vindication; you find you cannot prove you are right in some quarrelsome situation.

• **Severe dealings because God wants us to take Him seriously**

The reason why God handles us severely is to get us to think about what is happening in our lives. He wants us to be saved and to be living for Him. If it takes severity before we take God seriously, then God can act in severity. The nation was getting careless. The crisis did not last for ever. God changed the situation after a year or so. It was a temporary withholding of the necessities of life.

• **Temporary withholding**

• **Drunkards wine is removed – the very thing used to sin**

*'Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!
and wail, all you wine drinkers,
wail because of the new wine
that is snatched from your lips.'* (1:5)

It is almost amusing. The drunkards of the nation used wine, but God can remove the very thing you use to sin with. It was 'snatched' from their lips. He can do anything. The very thing you use to sin with, He can take away. He is all- powerful. His powerful chastening is part of His mercy.

• **Trees stripped completely bare**

*'For a nation has invaded my land,
powerful and too great to be numbered.
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion,
and it has the fangs of a lioness. (1:6)
It has made my vine a ruin,
and my fig-tree a stump of dead wood.
It has stripped them bare and thrown them away;
their branches have become white.'* (1:7)

The nation was devastated¹. It was facing starvation. In verse 6 the coming of the locusts is described as being like a nation of invaders. (This refers still to the locusts.) They were powerful and innumerable. They laid waste the vines. They stripped the bark off the trees, leaving only the white tree underneath².

1:4

1:7

God's discipline...

God's calling us to consider Him can be sudden. 'Snatched away' ¹ speaks of suddenness. God can do this to get us to respond to Him. He is not severe because He enjoys it. The point of His severity is that He might restore us, to get us to come back to Him. He disciplines us and this upsets us and makes us alarmed. Yet it is God's way of getting us to seek Him.

1:5

• **Can be sudden**

• *Is a call from God to consider Him*

Are you drifting from God? Is God allowing things to happen to you that get you to seek Him? We all find it easier to seek God when we are in trouble. It is a pity that we have to have trouble to get us to seek Him, but often that is the way it is. This can happen to individuals, to one person. It can happen to the whole church. Joel calls upon the whole of society. Elders¹, drunkards², Jerusalem³, farmers⁴, priests⁵. He calls the whole nation. He began with the leaders because they ruled over the smaller units of the nation. They are to take the initiative.

- 1:2
- 1:5
- 1:8
- 1:11
- 1:13

• *Has two parts catastrophe & explanation*

Chastening does not have any value unless you understand it. This is what the book of Joel is all about. God sent Joel and he is preaching about this crisis, telling the nation what the crisis is, and what they should do. He addressed every section. There is a message from God explaining the crisis. There are two things at the same time. There is the catastrophe; and there is also the prophet, Joel addressing the nation. This is God's way of getting through to them. He may allow something thing to happen to you. But at the same time He sends a word, a preacher. Seek the Lord. Turn to Jesus. Jesus died for all of your sins. Approach God through Jesus and His blood. Ask God 'What do you want me to learn from this crisis?' 'What would you have me learn from this blessing?' You will discover the Lord in a fresh way. That is what Joel wants to happen. Anything unusual that happens in your life is a prompting to seek Him in a fresh way.

• *Something to be learned*

• *Requires a response of seeking the Lord in a fresh way*



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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