

How Do You Spell Relief?

Joel 2:12-15

Does anyone remember this commercial from Television? The scene flips from one person to the next who have either overeaten or for some reason have gas, indigestion, or bloat. Each person is in agony and needs relief - fast. Of course, the miracle product that will eliminate their source of irritation is ROLAIDS™. Yes, it doesn't matter if you ate like a pig, ate too fast, ate the wrong food for you, or anything else, Rolaid's™ is the answer to give instant relief from your discomfort. So most of the United States went around for a few years spelling Rolaid's™ whenever they didn't feel well. How do you spell relief? R O L A I D S™ ?

Well they didn't have Rolaid's™ in the days when the prophet Joel spoke the word of the Lord to Judah. Today we are going to look at the book of Joel and get a glimpse of the spiritual condition of Judah at this time. Many people have tried to nail down a more precise time frame for the book of Joel, but no one can really pin point a date. It is given a very general 850 – 300 BC time frame based of various historical events. Another general rule of thumb when talking about Old Testament prophets is ... if the message is from hope to despair, the prophet is usually pre-exilic, bringing a message of destruction and breaking from the Lord. If the message is from despair to hope, then the prophet is usually post-exilic, bringing a message of restoration and mercy from the Lord after being broken. The book of Joel contains both a message of destruction and of hope, so it's dating is further complicated. The author himself is unknown in history. We know it is Joel the son of Pethuel as stated in Joel 1:1, but who is that? He is not acknowledged as any of the other Joels mentioned in the Old Testament. What gives the book of Joel particular credence is the fact that Peter quotes Joel's words on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Apparently, Joel's words from hundreds of years before were relevant in Peter's day. I believe they are relevant to us today too, even though they were written some 2700 years ago.

The book of Joel is only three chapters long and doesn't waste any time bringing us right into the event at hand. **Joel 1:2-4** tells us of the famous locust swarm that totally destroyed all vegetation in the land of Judah. ***“Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. 4 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.”*** Joel spends some time describing what happened and the devastation that this event caused. There are four different Hebrew words used in this passage referring to locust/grasshopper critters, as if there is some distinction, so the English translators try to keep some distinction (Heb. for: 1. cut off, 2. increase, 3. lick up, 4. devour). Whether or not there are differences is immaterial. All the people of this land are affected by this terrible destructive event. This was a national disaster. God's people had become complacent, at ease in Zion, enjoying the blessings of the Lord for their own pleasure and not following God in their personal lives at all.

Let's focus for a minute on the particular people mentioned and the specifics Joel speaks of. Joel 1:5-7 – Joel addresses “drunkards” – those who have abused the blessing of the fruit of the vine that God bountifully provided His people. ***“Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. 6 A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. 7 It has laid waste***

my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.” Wine was a very important element in their worship of God. One of the offerings is the “drink offering,” and now the vines are destroyed and the wine is no longer available for service to the Lord. The locusts have totally destroyed this area of their lives without mercy. Notice how Joel refers to the vine and the fig tree as the Lord’s. The fruit of the vine and the fig clusters are used in the Old Testament to represent God’s Blessings to His people.

Next Joel addresses the people of Judah and tells them they should lament like an espoused virgin who lost her soon to be husband. ***Joel 1:8 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.*** How painful it would be to suddenly find your fiancé snuffed out right before the marriage was to take place. How heart wrenching for the virgin. We wait as the espoused Bride of Christ, and how we should lament if our relationship were to be severed from our Lord. There is great pain in separation that can only be understood if we experience it first hand. Joel also mentions the priests in this section. They are not exempt from the pain of this destruction. In fact, they should mourn for themselves and for the people. If anyone should recognize the devastation and what it will mean to God’s people and their worship, it will be the priests. Yet they have become complacent along with the people, and they are also part of the chastening of the Lord. Don’t ever think that the one delivering the message is exempt from its sting. God’s word speaks to **all** who hear it.

Joel 1:11-12 – speaks to the farmers – those to labor and toil to produce the crops. ***11 Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. 12 The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree- all the trees of the field-are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.***

The farmers have come to the place where they assume everything will grow just fine. They no longer depend on the Lord for even the rain that waters and causes the fruit to grow and flourish. They are going through the motions (playing church) – doing their part in the labor, but not appreciating the spiritual aspects of their lives. Suddenly, without warning, every fruit-bearing tree is laid bare. Even the bark is stripped from the wood and the entire land looks like white sticks and death. There is nothing left, not one green leaf, not one piece of fruit. The effect is that the people lost their joy. The blessed people of God have been rendered desolate and fruitless. Sometimes we can get a good assessment of where we are spiritually if we take inventory of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (***“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”***). Are the trees of our spiritual garden producing these fruits, or have some or all of your fruit trees been stripped and fruitless?

Even their animals were devastated because all vegetation was destroyed. ***Joel 1:18-20 How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering. 19 To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. 20 Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.*** They had no place to graze and feed. Animals were also a very important part of the worship and sacrificial system established by God. Do you see what’s happening here? They have lost everything that establishes them spiritually as the people of God. They have become just like the nations around them – yet – not without hope, because God has not turned His back on them. He will do whatever it takes to keep us from falling away from Him. While He cannot overlook sin, He will certainly never leave us or forsake our cries of repentance to Him.

Joel 1:13-14 – gives a command to the clergy. Wail, mourn, cry, and pray for the people, for the Lord to have mercy. You might not have any idea how Pastor Jerry prays and mourns for us all; especially those

of us who might have shared some things we are going through. He is burdened constantly for us. Why? ***Joel 1:9 Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD. Verse 13b “the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.”*** Hello? This stuff is not in here by accident, you know. The Bread and the Wine are withheld in your life. Your communion with the Lord is affected and in a drought. When we are complacent and forget the importance of our relationship with God, we become spiritually anemic. This is a slow but progressive process that will kill us if not treated.

We sing the song “Blow the Trumpet in Zion” with joy and hand clapping because it’s an upbeat tune, but what is it really talking about? Look at Joel 2:1,9,11 – the verses that the song is take from – ***“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. 11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army”*** We are singing about locusts. We singing about the great devastation that God brought upon His people to chasten them back into His presence and fellowship. A great locust swarm that destroyed the entire land of Judah was at the command of God Almighty to destroy all their means of worship and religious practice. Even the Trumpet or shofar was used to bring the people together for worship and religious ceremony. It is now being used as a distress call to warn of the impending doom. What would you think if you woke up one day and all the churches in the country were destroyed and all the Bibles were gone; all the instruments and hymnals were burned by fire and everything that remotely relates to religious worship was gone? It would be hard for us to relate to the level of devastation this was to the people of Judah because we have the Spirit within each of us, and we are the church, but they didn’t have this yet. Their only connection to the Lord was through these practices and elements. God Himself basically stripped them of their spirituality. Why would He take away their only link to Himself? He must have really wanted to get their attention. Joel 2:3 refers to the Garden of Eden. Their land was lush and fruitful at one time and desolate the next. Also, in the Garden, God’s voice and His presence brought fellowship and peace. The people wanted to be with Him. But once sin entered the picture, God’s presence and voice brought fear, and guilt to their lives. They hid themselves and broke fellowship with the Lord. So He evicted them from the Garden and cause that place to disappear from access, and they could no longer walk with Him and enter His presence. Here in Joel, God again takes away from them the means of their entering into His presence, by destroying their spiritual elements because they were no longer reverent and depending on God.

Can you sense the agony in these people? Do you see the devastation all around them that was caused by their spiritual condition? They are not doing well at all. They have more than indigestion and gas. How do you spell relief? Joel brings an answer from the Lord to these shocked and hurting people. He had to tell them that they caused their own calamity, but he also brings a message of hope from God, and a reassurance of His steadfast love for us even when we blow it.

Joel 2:12-15 (text)

12'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing- grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.

How does God spell relief?

Repentance is the cure. It doesn't come in pill form or in a roll wrapped nicely in foil. Repentance comes in a way we don't like to deal with most of the time. We want to be happy and joyful. We want to be laughing and have everything go smoothly in our lives. But, what does God want? What is He saying to you today? What things are going on in your life and family that may indicate that we need to repent and draw closer to God, even though that won't be fun for while? Repentance comes in the form of weeping, brokenness, mourning over our loss of fellowship with the Father, turning from our sins if necessary and the things that bring us temporary pleasure, in order to gain the communion of our God and to be in His presence forever. He does not want to see us in anguish, unless that's what is necessary to help us recognize our need to repent and come back into His presence. He is waiting for all to be in communion. How is the fruit of your land? Do you have a drink offering and a grain offering to bring to the Lord today? Are you in communion with God in prayer and fellowship? Isn't that where we are supposed to be?

Listen to Peter preach to the people in Acts 2:16-21 and see Peter explain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of hope and the coming Day of the Lord. **Acts 2:16-21**

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter went on to explain about Jesus' death and resurrection as the fulfillment of prophecy. The people were deeply affected by this message of salvation and begged to know what they needed to do. Peter's answer to them was the same as Joel's answer to the people of Judah centuries before, and it is the same answer for us today. God's word never changes and His desire for us is still the same.

Acts 2:38-39

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call."

How do you spell relief?

If you have never received Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, then relief is available from your question of what will happen to you when you die. If you are not sure of your salvation, then hear the word of the Lord and dare to believe that Jesus did all that is required for you to get to Heaven.

How do you spell relief?

If you have accepted Christ, but you're not walking in step with the Lord for whatever reason, then turn back to the One who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love. He will never turn away one who calls out to Him. His desire is to restore the years the locusts have eaten and to bless.

Joel 2:25 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm- my great army that I sent among you.'

How do you spell relief?

If you are following the Lord and even in positions of leadership in the church or maybe even clergy, there are still times we feel the Lord's hand, correcting and chastening. How can we stay in His will and receive His blessing and anointing in ministry? The answer is also the same. We need to turn back to Him constantly and quickly, and He will abundantly pardon.

Joel 2:13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

How do you spell relief? R E P E N T

Let's bow our heads and hearts in the presence of the Lord and search deeply within ourselves to see if there is any wicked way in us. We need to come back to the altar of God, the altar of repentance, the altar of prayer. Our church needs to individually and corporately be united in prayer and repentance. Our ministries need the direction and blessing of the Lord. Each area needs to be bathed in prayer. Our leaders need to be humble before God and ask His forgiveness, direction, blessing, and anointing if we are to grow and prosper. He wants to bless. He wants to see us succeed and be fruitful in ministry.

Psalms 51:10-12

"Create in me a pure heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."