



REND YOUR HEARTS

A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JOEL

MARK SCOTT • 4 SESSIONS

**NEXT
LEVEL**  **ONLINE**

OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

NEXTLEVEL: REND YOUR HEARTS: A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JOEL

SESSION: #1: OVERVIEW

Mark Scott

What does true repentance look like?

In the Bible, true repentance can be marked by many things—prayer, fasting, tearing one's garments, wearing sackcloth.

The OT Minor Prophet Book called Joel is about real repentance. If I were to assign a title to it, I would label it, "Rend Your Hearts."

A theme verse would be 2:13.

Important Notes:

1. Joel is a minor prophet—not minor in inspiration or significance but minor in length.
2. Joel's name means "Yahu is God." Notice the "El" in his name—as in Elohim, El Shaddai, etc. So, God's name is in Joel's name.
3. Joel was a fairly common name in the ancient world. In fact, 12 different people in the Bible alone are called Joel.
4. As a prophet, Joel's job was to be a covenant watchdog on the law.
5. As a prophet, Joel spoke by inspiration. The word prophet (nabi) means "one who speaks for God...one who bubbles forth with God's message...one who speaks enthusiastically."
6. Prophecy relates more to Joel's world than ours (or even a future one).
7. Joel prophesied early on in Israel's history. He prophesied somewhere in the 800s, a similar time frame of Obadiah and Elijah.

There are two major things at the heart of the Book of Joel.

1. The Locust Plague - Exodus 10 and the Book of Revelation
2. The Coming of God - Luke 2 and Acts 2

That's why we will use as our major icon for this study a broken heart. Joel says to his people and us, "Rend your hearts!"

Discussion Questions:

1. Does repentance sound like drudgery, or does it sound like a gift from God (Acts 5:31; 11:18)?
2. How is fallen creation connected to the sinfulness of humanity (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:18)?
3. Can you think of examples in the Gospels where Jesus tamed creation? What are we to make of that?
4. One man said, "The Holy Spirit won't manifest himself until we deny ourselves." How does that statement relate to this overview of Joel?

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SESSION #2: *REND YOUR HEARTS...CREATION WILL RESPOND*

TEXTS: Joel 1:1-12, 16-20; 2:1-11

Mark Scott

The Apostle Paul said that creation groans (Romans 8).

Sin not only fractured God's relationship with Adam and Eve; it also fractured Adam's relationship with Eve. Beyond that, all of the creation experienced this fracture as well.

Deuteronomy also promised that if Israel would be faithful to God that God would bless them with rain, and fruitful crops. Be careful of one-to-one correspondence. It is not an *unconditional* promise.

The prophet Joel did connect the dots between a physical plague and a fruitful creation.

1. Notice the people that God calls to repent—it's pretty inclusive.
2. As we stated in the overview lesson when we read about locusts we need to look backward (Exodus) and forward (Revelation).
3. There are locusts, and there are more locusts (1:4; 2:25).
 - Let's start by suggesting that they are real locusts. One rule of hermeneutics is "always take the text to be literal unless there is good reason to take it figuratively."
 - How bad would a real locust plague be? Here is some Locust Trivia:
 - Mature desert locusts have a 4-inch wingspan and are 3 inches long.
 - They look like grasshoppers.
 - They can turn the sky black with them rising up to look for vegetation.
 - They can soar up to 5,000 feet.
 - A swarm can contain one billion creatures weighing 3 million pounds.
 - They can travel 60 miles in one day and 600 miles on one migration.
 - In 1959, a locust plague in Ethiopia lasted 6 weeks. They consumed enough food to feed one million people.
 - They can take down crops at 250 feet/hour.
 - Could we understand the locust plague to be figurative—maybe descriptive of maybe an advancing army or even a coming draught?
4. Other devastations describe a dire situation indeed (1:16-20).
5. The other theme to note is the theme of the "Day of the Lord."

Someone said that body and soul lived so close to one another that they catch each other's diseases. That's also true of humankind and creation.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Make a list of the *natural* catastrophes (e.g. earthquakes, tornadoes, etc.). How do these show us a creation that is still out of sorts with its Creator?
- 2) Many environmentalists suggest that global warming is created by human beings. In light of the Book of Joel how might that be true, and how might it not be true?
- 3) Are some judgments of God built into the fabric of creation (e.g. gravity)? What does this say about the laws of God evident in creation?
- 4) What advancing army might Joel be referring to in Joel 2:1-11? (Think about the time frame of Obadiah and Elijah).

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SESSION #3: REND YOUR HEARTS...GOD WILL COME DOWN

TEXTS: Joel 1:12-15; 2:12-32

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We're looking at the Minor Prophet Joel under the theme "Rend Your Hearts." A key idea, of course, is repentance.

- The NT word means "to change the mind."
- The OT word means "to change the direction or behavior or return to previous behavior."
- A man by the name of Chamberlain said, "Repentance is moving from the mind of the flesh to the mind of the Spirit" (*The Meaning of Repentance*).
- James Smith said, "It is not just trimming the tree of sin but cutting it down. It is not just turning over a new leaf but casting away the old book" (*The Minor Prophets*, 75).
- According to the founding academic dean of Ozark Christian College, Seth Wilson, it is "to change the desires or affections."
- One preacher said, "It is agreeing with God against yourself."

I don't want us to think that our repentance will automatically push God's hand.

God invites us to turn our lives toward him.

How God comes down when we repent:

1. The Call to Serious Repentance (1:13-15; 2:12-17)

- The call for the leaders to repent—priests, ministers, and elders.
- The evidence of this repentance will be sackcloth, lamentations, proper offerings, fasting, assembling at the temple.
- This call is no small thing.
- Important Words:
 - 1. Return (shub)
 - 2. Steadfast love (chesed).
- This is about as serious as Jesus is in Luke 13:1-5.

2. Repentance Reverses the Bad News (2:18-27)

- What gets removed when we repent:
 - 1. Reproach
 - 2. Armies are driven away
 - 3. Land, animals, and trees will be glad
 - 4. People are blessed
 - 5. God will be praised and known

3. Repentance Assures the Gift of God (2:28-32)

- This is such a significant passage in light of its use in the New Testament. Joel becomes the prophet of Pentecost.

- Holy Spirit phenomena is evident in prophecy without gender or age specificity. Just like God pours out rain and blessings on creation physically, so he pours out himself generously on all his people.
- What about the cosmic signs?
- In other words, the *Spirit age* is the beginning of the end.

The bottom line: God is going to save his people from locust plagues, from drought, and from invading armies. We just need to repent...and God will meet us by coming down.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Sackcloth, lamentations, grain and drink offerings, fasting, and solemn assemblies were all evidence of repentance in Joel's day. What gives evidence of repentance today in the new covenant?
- 2) How does God's character make repenting more inviting?
- 3) Would we always know when God had removed an enemy from us?
- 4) How does having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit aid repentance (Cf. John 16:8-11)?

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SESSION #4: REND YOUR HEARTS...NATIONS WILL NOTICE

TEXT: Joel 3:1-21

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God's people are always on display for the nations!

- "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6b).
- And when God's people do not function as this light to the nations, then God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of their behavior (Romans 2:24).

We see in the final chapter that when we rend our hearts, the nations will notice.

I would like to read through chapter three with kind of an *expository reading* approach. Let us strive to notice how God will **punish the nations** and how he will **protect his people**.

The main idea is, "Rending our hearts paves the way for the coming of God." He may come in judgment, or he may come with his precious Holy Spirit. But having a repentant heart will prepare us for either.

**Corrective Note* Mark said the dispersion of the Jews would take place in "the time of the Bible." He meant to say at "the time of the New Testament."*

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Is there evidence to suggest that God spares unbelievers and believers to accomplish his purposes (Genesis 18:22-33; Acts 27:39-44)?
- 2) Is there a behavior among believers today that you think might be causing the Christian witness to be compromised? How are we blaspheming God's name among the nations today?
- 3) How would you answer the following question? "Isn't your God sort of capricious—I mean, he uses nations for his purposes one minute and then turns around and punishes them the next?"
- 4) How does knowing that God will have the last word and execute the last judgment give his followers security and comfort?

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