

Adult Teaching Resources

October 27, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

Choices That Matter

Habakkuk 1:1-2:4 (RCL 1:1-4, 2:1-4) – Faith for Hard Days

Jeremiah 29:1-9 (RCL 1, 4-7) – An Unlikely Garden

Jeremiah 31:27-34 – A Surprising New Start

Joel 2:23-32 – A Harvest to Remember

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A Harvest to Remember

Joel 2:23-32

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

*“Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.” Joel 28-29*

We ride waves of good times when everything goes our way, and we sit in pools when it seems nothing is right and we can't move forward. In our passage today, we read about the ancient farmer who has ridden the wave of successful crops, but now faces difficult days.

Where is God in these difficult days? Will God hear a prayer? Is it even worth using the energy to pray?

Opening

After everyone gathers for your class, keep the large group together. Ask you class to think of real-life situations they have experienced that have a “wave & pool” dynamic. One example is marriage. When marriage goes well, it's a great wave that seems to have no end. When marriage goes bad (possibly ending in divorce), it's a tragic pool that can take every bit of energy to wake up in the morning.

List on the board all the real-life situations your class can think of. List the wave aspect and also the pool aspect.

Ask questions like these to help move into the lesson:

How do you know you're “riding the wave” with each of the listed situations?

How do you know you're “stuck in the pool” with each of the listed situations?

When you're on the wave, what kind of energy and focus do you have for God?

When you're in the pool, what kind of energy and focus do you have for God?

When you're in each pool, what is your hope? How do you find hope?

Opening *continued*

How did you feel about what happened?

How did this experience change your future behaviors?

Reading the Bible

How are the children of Zion told to act? (be glad and rejoice in the Lord)

What has God given? (the early rain for their vindication)

What will be full of grain? (the threshing floors) What is in the vats? (wine and oil)

What is God repaying? (for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which God sent)

How are the people to respond? (shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God)

What will happen to God's people? (they shall never again be put to shame)

How does God reassure the people? (God is in the midst of Israel, God is the only God—there is no other)

What will God do afterward? (pour out His spirit on all flesh)

What will the sons and daughters do? (prophecy)

What will the old men do? (dream dreams)

What will the young men do? (see visions)

What will the male and female slaves receive? (God's spirit poured on them, too)

What will God show? (portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke)

What will happen to the sun and the moon? (sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood) When will this happen? (before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes)

What will happen to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord? (they shall be saved)

Making Connections

What has God given or provided that you understood to be a direct response, or repayment, for hardships or trials you've had to endure?

What is your definition of "God's blessing?" How do you know God is blessing (or has blessed) you?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says this about God's people, "Just as certainly as the people needed food, they needed God – and the same is true for us." When you think of all the things you need in life, where do you rank God? Why do you give God that ranking? If you weren't in a Bible Study class, would your answer remain the same?

Share a time when you have been physically hungry. How did you feel? What did you do to end your hunger? Share a time when you have been spiritually hungry. How did you feel? What did you do to end your hunger?

How do you know God is in your midst and available to you? How do you make yourself available to God? What can you do to become more available to God?

In your opinion, what is the good news? Who is the good news for? How do we restrict who gets the good news? Why do you think we do that? What do you think God wants us to do with the good news?

What do you think God's spirit being poured out is? What does it feel like? What does it look like? What are the results of it happening? Has it happened to you? How do you know?

Our passage says, "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." From what will we be saved? What do we have to do to receive that salvation?

So What?

Keep everyone in the large group. Share these words from our Lesson Writer:

"Things had looked dark for a long time. The deliverance Israel had long hoped for had not come. But now, there was Jesus. But now, there was the Spirit. But now, something new and different and vital and growing was happening. But now, God was at work in the world in a tangible way, and anyone could see it working in the lives of the disciples, and anyone who denied it was wearing blinders.

Death no longer reigned. Despair was no longer in command. The dark plague of doom no longer hung over the future because Christ had come, and had overcome, and had brought light and life into the world."

Ask your group to make a list of the ways they see God at work in the world in tangible ways.

How is the world different because of God?

How is the world better because of God?

What could be improved on so there would be more of God's presence in the world?

Spend time in discussion and celebrate God's presence in our individual lives and in the world.

The Challenge

This week, find ways to bring more of God into your everyday routine. Think about where God is absent or not as significant. Then, intentionally, with care and sensitivity to others, bring God more into where you are.

Prayer

Loving God, you are with us in the good days and in the bad days. We know you celebrate with us and cry with us. Thank you for your presence in our lives. Thank you for sending Jesus to the world and into our lives. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Types, or stages?—The description of the locusts in 1:4 and 2:25 uses no less than four different synonyms for locusts. This might lead us to think of a mixed cloud of different types of locusts, and translations of the different locust names vary widely. Many interpreters regard the four terms as different stages of life in the locusts’ development. The NET acknowledges the uncertainty by retaining the Hebrew terms in translation:

What the *gazam*-locust left the *‘arbeh*-locust consumed,
what the *‘arbeh*-locust left the *yeleq*-locust consumed,
and what the *yeleq*-locust left the *hasil*-locust consumed!

Locust swarms—Locusts are a type of grasshopper that are normally solitary and of little concern to gardeners or farmers. Under certain conditions, however, such as with the emergence of new growth after a period of drought, or when the population of grasshoppers has become too dense, their brains begin to produce more serotonin, which causes them to change color from green to brown, eat ravenously, and breed with abandon. Hordes of “hoppers” morph into flyers that join together, releasing more serotonin that signals other locusts to be attracted to each other. The growing swarms may combine with other swarms to create clouds containing billions of locusts spread out over many miles, with as many as 200 million locusts per square mile. Swarms such as this can devastate crops over a wide area. (For more, see the article “Locusts” in Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locust>).

In 2013, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization used the photo below, by Yasuyoshi Chiba, in an appeal for aid to Madagascar, where an invasion of locusts had devastated fields and caused a food crisis.



Living with God—The promise of 2:27 (and 3:17), that God would dwell in the midst of Israel, echoes the words of traditional narratives and prophetic texts alike. Exodus 25:8 called for the building of a sanctuary to mark God’s dwelling with Israel (also Exod. 29:45, Lev. 26:11).

According to 1 Kings 6:13, God promised Solomon that “I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.” Isaiah called on Israel to praise God, for “great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. 12:6).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Ezekiel foresaw a time of harmony when God could say “My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore” (Ezek. 37:27-28).

Similar to Joel, Hosea declared that God would not execute his anger over Israel’s sin, “for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath (Hos. 11:9). Zephaniah, likewise, spoke of a time when judgments would cease and God would be in the midst of the people (Zeph. 3:15, 17).

Dreams and visions—The belief that God spoke in dreams and visions was common in the Old Testament. God spoke to Abraham in a vision (Genesis 15), and to Jacob (Genesis 28). God called Samuel in a nighttime visitation (1 Samuel 3). Moses spoke of God speaking through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Deut. 13:1, 3, 5), as did Jeremiah (Jer. 23:27, 28, 32). God’s promise to grant David an everlasting dynasty came to the prophet Nathan in the night (2 Samuel 7). Amos (1:1) and Isaiah (1:1, 6:1-13), among others, spoke of receiving visions from God.

The word indicating a divine vision, by the way, is at the root of a commonly misunderstood verse: the King James translation of Prov. 29:18 is “Where there is no vision, the people perish, but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Many sermons have been preached on the need for people to have a vision for the future, lest they perish.

The verse says nothing about “vision casting” or setting goals, however, as moderns use the word. In the text, the word translated “vision” is *chazōn*, the word that indicates a prophetic vision, or a vision from God. The translation of *yippara’* as “perish” is also unfortunate, for the word usually means “let loose” or “be unrestrained.” The meaning of the statement is that when people acknowledge no vision from God, they do what they want – as opposed to those who find happiness in keeping the law.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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When was the book of Joel written?

The book of Joel appears second in the “Book of the Twelve” (the last 12 books in the Hebrew Bible, often called “the Minor Prophets”). This suggests that the editor of the collection may have considered Joel to be a contemporary of the eighth century prophets Hosea and Amos, as his prophecy appears between the two. The placement may also be due to the fact that Joel speaks much of the “day of the Lord,” which is also an important theme for Hosea and Amos.

Other evidence suggests that Joel wrote much later, however. First, Joel never mentions the northern kingdom of Israel; only Judah. This suggests a time after Israel was overrun and scattered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE.

Second, Joel appeals to elders and priests, but never mentions a king, which implies a time when there was no king. The rule of Judah’s last king came to an end in 587 BCE, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried many of its residents into exile. Admittedly, the lack of any reference to Israel or to a king are both arguments from silence, but they cannot be ignored.

Although there is no mention of a king, Joel speaks often of Jerusalem having a temple and a well-organized religious establishment of priests and other leaders, which would imply a time after the temple was rebuilt in 515 BCE, and following the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (1:2, 9, 13-14; 2:7, 9, 15-17, 19). References to the walls of the city in 2:7 and 9 also suggest a time after the walls of the city were rebuilt. This took place under Nehemiah, perhaps around 445 BCE.

Assyria and Babylonia, who dominated the area during most of the eight-sixth centuries, are not named. There is a reference to “the northern army” (2:20) and Mesopotamian invaders typically came from the north, but this appears to be a metaphorical reference to the locust plague, which is described as a “great army” sent by God (2:25). As God had gotten rid of the locusts in Egypt by driving them into the Red Sea (Exod. 10:19), so the “northern army” of 2:20 was to be driven into the Dead Sea (“eastern sea”) and the Mediterranean Sea (“western sea”).

The enemies that are mentioned include peoples who were prominent in the late Persian period (Tire, Sidon, Philistia, Greece, Edom, Egypt; cf. 3:4,6, 19).

Linguists have noted that several Hebrew terms and expressions typical of later periods and other postexilic prophets appear in Joel. And, some have argued that Joel appears to reference other prophets, including Obadiah (v. 17 – Joel 2:32), Malachi (3:2 – Joel 2:11, 4:5 – Joel 2:31).

The Hardest Question *continued*

In the postexilic period it was also more common for prophets and others to interpret immediate events as divine punishment, and this is the case in Joel, who sees the locust plague as having been sent by God, necessitating a time of national repentance to seek God's favor.

Some scholars, such as Douglas Stuart, argue for a pre-exilic setting (*Hosea-Jonah*, vol. 31 of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 224-225). Arguments for a postexilic date seem stronger, however, and are more widely accepted.