

Youth 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

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

PARENT PREP

When things seem hard, sometimes our students just need a little hope; or to realize that they have hope. We can stand by our students as they struggle. We can hold them when they cry in pain. We also need to remind them that there is hope; not at the end of their struggle, but during their struggle. Hope is powerful. Be that source of hope for your students.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Let it Grow” from *The Lorax*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How are each of these stories about hope?
- 2) How does planting a seed or tree about hope?
- 3) Where do you see hope in your everyday life?
- 4) How is hope part of your faith story?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Joel 2:23-32. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What are the people of God going through when Joel gives this prophecy?
- 2) What has God done to show divine favor to the people of Israel?
- 3) How is Joel showing the people of Israel that they need both food and God in their life?
- 4) How Joel show that God's Spirit wasn't just for the prophets but for everyone?
- 5) How does this passage provide hope for the people of Israel?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What are locusts?
- 2) How are we to live with God?
- 3) Did dreams and visions stop in the biblical times?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": When was the book of Joel written?

Transformation

Conclude your time together by distributing two different colored Post-it notes and pens to everyone in the group. Have each student take several of the different colored Post-it notes and on the first colored Post-it, have them write all the things that make life difficult and then come and place them at the front of your meeting space. Then challenge the students to write all their dreams on the other colored Post-it note. When they have written all their dreams, have them place their hopes on top of their difficulties and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How often do you focus on what is hard instead of what you hope for? Why?
- 2) Which is easier for you to control: life's difficulties or what you hope for?
- 3) How are the things you hope for going to happen?
- 4) How are the things you hope for part of your faith journey?

Close with a prayer thanking God for being our hope.

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

The Hardest Question 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.

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.