

Book of Joel I -- Notes

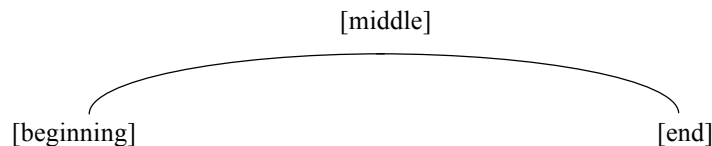
Introduction

- structure of class: (1) introduction to eschatology
(2) look at text, verse-by-verse
- Joel is 3 chapters | today, look at first 1.5 chapters
- structure of all Prophetic Books: judgment, then grace

Bible and the Idea of History

- two views of human history: circle and line
- virtually all other religions/philosophies – a cyclical view of history
– history repeats itself; nothing truly changes (stuck in loop)

But Bible uniquely sees history as a line, or a story:

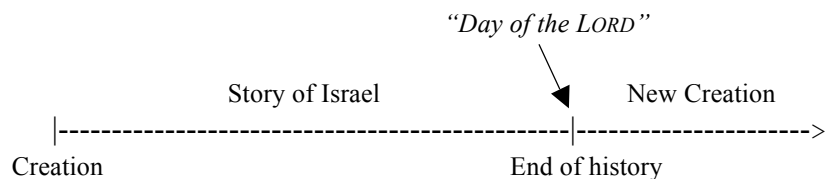


Structure of every good story is same

- beg--world at peace; mid--disruption; end--all made right
- example: The Lion King
– pridelands, cycle of life | Scar usurps | Simba returns

The Story of the Bible

- God created world good and beautiful in Eden | but sin destroys
- God establishes a new Eden in land of Israel
– but God's people continue to rebel and disobey
- in Prophets, promise God himself will redeem all things
– “Day of Lord”--climatic day, fulfillment, end of story
- happy ending forever and ever – New Heavens and New Earth



Eschatology is about the “end of the story”

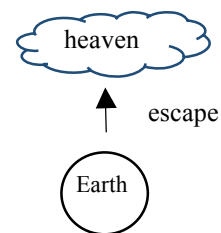
- *eschatos* – “last” | eschatology – study of last things
- eschatology isn't some weird, esoteric aspect of Christianity
– central to message of Christianity | what Christianity is about!
– eschatology is source of hope and joy | constantly think about it
- Scripture is thoroughly eschatological, from beginning to end
- frequency and level of detail explodes in the Prophetic Books

Corrective to popular theology | popular culture

- “This is the End” with Seth Rogan and James Franco
- world is in pandemonium | blue light sucks good people to heaven

But Bible doesn't describe redemption “above” but “ahead”

- two age theology – this present evil age and the age to come
– “this age” is temporary and passing away
– “age to come” is everlasting
- not “two world” theology: life on earth versus heaven
– otherwise, “heaven” becomes an escape from evils of earth
– but in age to come, earth itself is renewed and restored



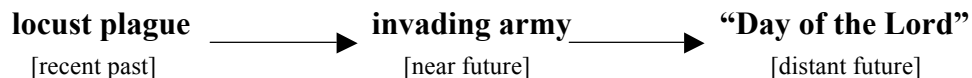
Redemption is not above us (heaven), but ahead of us (New Earth)

- our rescue is not vertical, but chronological

Introduction to Book of Joel

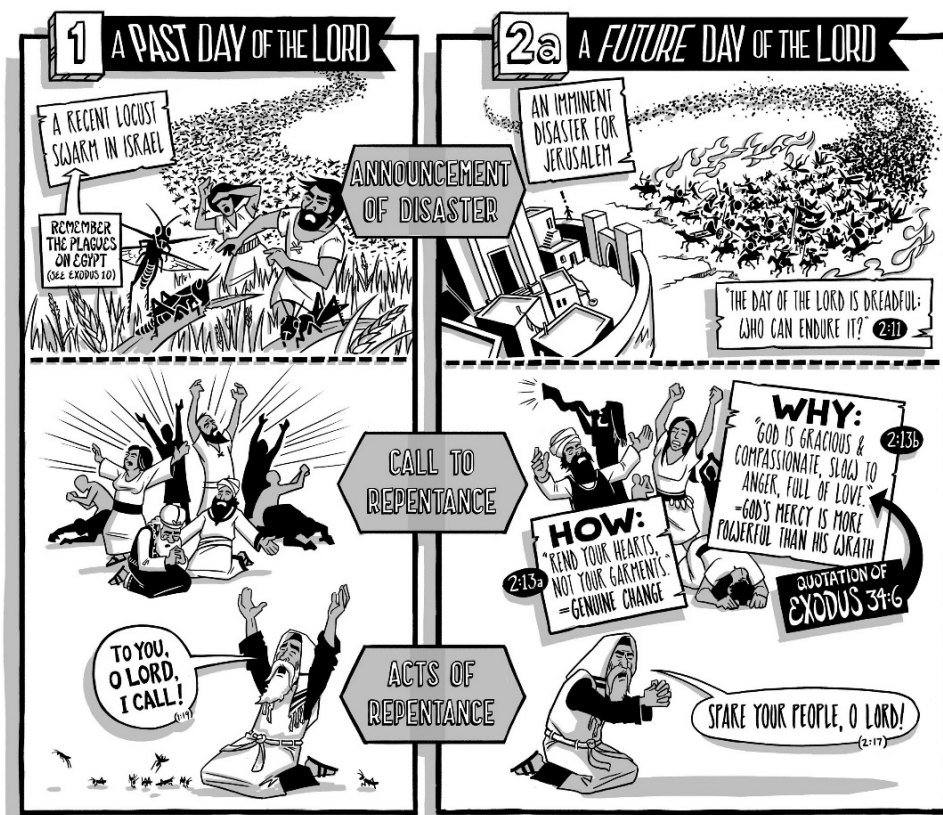
- setting: written after a devastating locust invasion
- locust – judgment of God against Israel for disobedience
- locust foreshadows a future judgment

3 time horizons:



The Book of Joel

- 3 chapters | today, we’ll look at 1:1-2:17 (first half of book)
- two parallel poems – 2 cycles of disaster and repentance



[source: The Bible Project]

^{1:1} The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

² Hear this, you elders;
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!

Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?

³ Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children to another generation.

⁴ What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

(1) Why locust?

- end of Deut – blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience
- Deut. 28 – lists locust infestation as curse | goodness of land ruined
- in Egypt – locust was 8th plague | but this time, sent against Israel

- locust is same as grasshopper | occasionally, swarm as mass
- consume all plant life

Israel was agricultural society

- destruction of locust and resulting famine hard for us to imagine
- leave behind rotting carcasses – disease, famine, death
- this was unprecedented in living memory (v. 1)

⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
and wail, all you drinkers of wine,
because of the sweet wine,
for it is cut off from your mouth.

⁶ For a nation has come up against my land,
powerful and beyond number;
its teeth are lions’ teeth,
and it has the fangs of a lioness.

⁷ It has laid waste my vine
and splintered my fig tree;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
their branches are made white.

God sent this calamity that people might wake up

- people fallen into complacency about their sin
- God desires to arouse his people and warn them
 - CS Lewis, “whispers in pleasures, shouts in our pain”
- particularly oblivious to danger were “drunkards”
- rather than the mirth or forgetfulness of alcohol
- people should be weeping and wailing

⁸ Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth
for the bridegroom of her youth.

⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
from the house of the LORD.

The priests mourn,
the ministers of the LORD.

¹⁰ The fields are destroyed,
the ground mourns,
because the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil languishes.

Imagery is startling – “lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth”

- bride on her wedding day is most joyful day of her life
- but instead, wearing sackcloth, sign of mourning – groom died
- image of stark contrasts – happiest moment but tragic mourning

v. 9 – “grain offering and drink offering are cut off from house of Lord”

- destroyed harvest – no more sacrifices at temple
- especially poignant sign of God’s judgment on his people

v. 10 – grain, wine and oil are no more

- these are basic necessities of Mediterranean life

¹¹ Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil;
wail, O vinedressers,
for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field has perished.

¹² The vine dries up;
the fig tree languishes.

Pomegranate, palm, and apple,
all the trees of the field are dried up,
and gladness dries up
from the children of man.

Be ashamed, O tillers of soil

- shock and deep despair of farmers
- imagine all your work and labors destroyed in a moment
 - if all sermons erased, or house burned down

Call to repentance

¹³ Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;
wail, O ministers of the altar.
Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,
O ministers of my God!
Because grain offering and drink offering
are withheld from the house of your God.

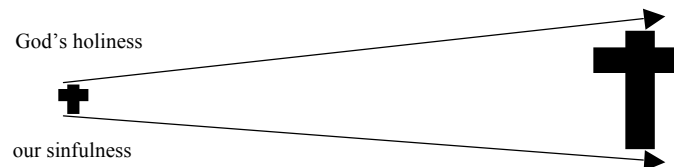
¹⁴ Consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.

Sackcloth and fasting

- outward signs of remorse and repentance
- deeply felt emotions want to be expressed outwardly | not stifle
- outward expression deepens and completes the inward heart

But the natural heart hates repentance

- when I ask my children to say “sorry” – they protest, traumatic
- to repent is to recognize our flaws and capacity for evil – we hate it
- but Christianity says that repentance is gateway to true joy
 - Christian life is continual repentance

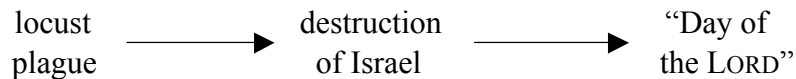


¹⁵ Alas for the day!
 For the day of the LORD is near,
 and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.
¹⁶ Is not the food cut off
 before our eyes,
 joy and gladness
 from the house of our God?

First mention of “the Day of the Lord”

- “Day of the Lord” is how human history ends – resolution to tension
- resolves two things:
 - unanswered injustice and evil | cries for justice
 - rescue of God’s people and renewal of all things
- solution to both problems: God will draw near
 - terror for evil-doers; rescue for God’s people
 - salvation and judgment – on Day of the Lord
 - Red Sea crossing as archetype

In Book of Joel, timeline:



“Day of the Lord” in Prophets:

Zephaniah 1

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. ¹⁷ I will bring distress on mankind, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. ¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full and sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Isaiah 13

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. ¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

Zechariah 14

¹ Behold, a day is coming for the LORD... ⁸ On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem... ⁹ And the LORD will be king over all the earth. ... ²⁰ And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “Holy to the LORD.” ²¹ And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 4

⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

“Elijah the prophet” as a forerunner is John the Baptist

- so that the Day of the Lord is the coming of the Messiah
- Jesus’ birth is the beginning of the “Day of the Lord”
- this complicates the picture – because human history goes on

Furthermore, the NT speaks of a future “Day of the Lord”

2 Peter 3:10

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

So that the “Day of the Lord” has both already come and future

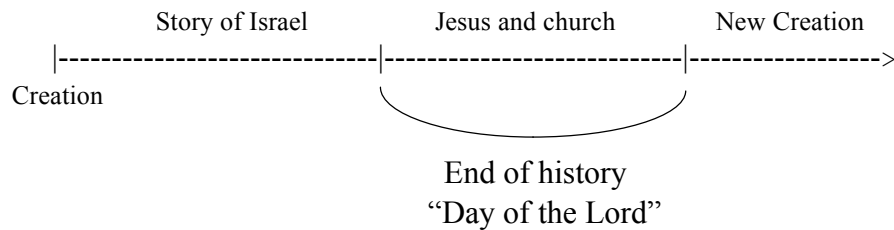
New Testament Eschatology

- ministry of Jesus has inaugurated the “end of history”
- meaning, we are now living in the end of (redemptive) history

Difference from Old Testament – “day” is stretched out

- analogy: from distance, see several peaks (mountain range) but when arrive, realize peaks separated by many miles
- the “day of the Lord” is stretched between two comings of Christ

Now in New Testament:



We are inside the “Day of the Lord”

- we are at the End of History
- not chronological history – but redemptive history

New Testament describes the present as end of history

- the “last days” are not ahead of us, but happening now

Hebrews 1:1-2

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

1 Peter 1:20

Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake.

“End times” is not some future event, but this time period

- confusion is concept of “end” | “end” of redemptive history

¹⁷ The seed shrivels under the clods;
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down
because the grain has dried up.

¹⁸ How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.

¹⁹ To you, O LORD, I call.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned
all the trees of the field.

²⁰ Even the beasts of the field pant for you
because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

Creation itself is dying – fertility of Promised Land is undone

Second poem

Invading army

^{2:1} Blow a trumpet in Zion;
sound an alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near,

² a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful people;
their like has never been before,
nor will be again after them
through the years of all generations.

“Trumpet” sounds an alarm

- a massive invading army is on the way

“Day of clouds and thick darkness”

- clouds and darkness are theophanies of God
 - in wilderness, “a pillar of cloud and darkness” | on Mt. Sinai
 - cloud filled the Temple at Solomon’s dedication
 - NT – Mt. of Transfiguration, Ascension
- clouds indicate God’s fearful presence drawing near

“Like blackness spread upon mountains a great and powerful people”

- terrifying image of an invading horde

³ Fire devours before them,
and behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them,
but behind them a desolate wilderness,
and nothing escapes them.

“Land is like the garden of Eden”

- comparison to Garden of Eden is not accidental
- Promised Land was Eden restored | people back in Eden
- but invading army destroys Eden and turns into desolate wasteland
- realization of curses of Mosaic Covenant

⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,
and like war horses they run.

⁵ As with the rumbling of chariots,
they leap on the tops of the mountains,
like the crackling of a flame of fire
devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
drawn up for battle.

⁶ Before them peoples are in anguish;
all faces grow pale.

⁷ Like warriors they charge;
like soldiers they scale the wall.
They march each on his way;
they do not swerve from their paths.

⁸ They do not jostle one another;
each marches in his path;
they burst through the weapons

and are not halted.

⁹ They leap upon the city,
they run upon the walls,
they climb up into the houses,
they enter through the windows like a thief.

Joel is poetically describing invading army like locust plague

- they march in formation – disciplined, veteran soldiers

¹⁰ The earth quakes before them;
the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.

¹¹ The LORD utters his voice
before his army,
for his camp is exceedingly great;
he who executes his word is powerful.

For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome;
who can endure it?

Earthquakes; sun and moon are darkened

- world is falling apart | creation is being undone
- signs of judgment and end of world

Remember at Jesus’ crucifixion

- sun is blotted out, 3rd hour to 6th hour | earthquake
- judgment of God is poured out on Jesus

Call to repentance

¹² “Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.

¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God?

Again, call to repentance

- “do with all your heart” – meaning, not divided heart
- not: no doubts, but not split in two directions, still holding to sin
- repentance is turning away from sin and toward God

“rend your hearts and not your garments”

- not mere outward show, but genuine, heart-felt repentance
- false repentance just wants to avoid punishment
- but true repentance is grieved over the sin itself

Source of repentance is the character of God

- gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love
– reference to Exodus 34:6

“Who knows whether he will not turn and relent?”

- does not mean it is doubtful or unknowable that God will forgive
- Hebrew expression affirming divine freedom | God is not obligated
- but we know God’s character is merciful and full of compassion
- 1 John 1:9 – “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;

consecrate a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶ gather the people.

Consecrate the congregation;

assemble the elders;

gather the children,

even nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,

and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar

let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep

and say, “Spare your people, O LORD,

and make not your heritage a reproach,

a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,

‘Where is their God?’”

Idea of corporate repentance

- not just individual repentance, but everyone is obligated to join in
- v. 16 – let bridegroom leave his room; the bride her chamber”
– even most momentous event cannot be an excuse
- necessity of repentance is of highest urgency

“Make your inheritance not a reproach”

- why should peoples say, “where is their God”
- similar to Moses’ appeal in Exodus 32:11-14
– based on (1) God’s unconditional promise to Abraham
(2) God’s reputation among the Gentile nations

Joel does not ask for mercy and forgiveness

- by excusing or diminishing Israel’s sin
- rather – he appeals to the promise God made Abraham
– tension between unconditional promise and conditional blessing
- and God’s plan to bless all nations through Israel
– if Israel is destroyed, how will God’s glory be manifest to nations?