

Joel and Obadiah – Hope Amid Judgment

Joel and Obadiah

Lesson Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 13 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the lecture did God use to convict you about ways you love comfort or accept complacency? In what specific way did God call you to obedience and surrender?
2. How did the notes on Amos help you recognize God's plan for the world? In what way were you led to think about His priorities for your daily life?

Second Day: Read Joel 1:1–2:17.

Joel predicted an invasion of locusts sent as an instrument of God's judgment.

3. a. How does Joel describe the locust invasion and its results in chapter 1?

- b. What escalation do you see in Joel's description in 2:1-11?

 - c. Give Joel's primary message from 2:12-17, including internal and external actions presented to the people on God's behalf.
- 4.
- a. Which truths about God are most meaningful to you from 2:12-14?

 - b. Explain the difference between true and false repentance – rending your heart and not just your garments (see 2 Chronicles 7:14).
5. How has God used difficult circumstances to call you to Himself?

Third Day: Read Joel 2:18-32.

Joel proclaimed a message of hope for the people of Israel.

6. What did Joel prophesy in 2:18-27 that gave the people of Israel hope?
- 7.
- a. Read Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:1-27. What part of this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost?

 - b. Which part of Joel's prophecy seems still future or not yet fully fulfilled?

 - c. What encouragement do you draw from these verses?

8. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit from the following verses?

John 16:7-15

Acts 1:8

Romans 8:9-16

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Galatians 5:22-23

Fourth Day: Read Joel 3.

Joel prophesied God's judgment of the nations and Israel's restoration.

The word "Jehoshaphat" means "God judges." This chapter foretells God's intervention in judgment as all nations gather against Israel and Jerusalem in the last great battle.

9. List several things that will happen at this judgment according to Joel 3:1-2, 9-21.

10. a. In what specific ways does God promise to restore and bless Judah in Joel 3:17-21?

b. Which of these promises have not yet been fulfilled?

11. What do you find either comforting or challenging from Joel about God and judgment?

Fifth Day: Read Obadiah.

Obadiah prophesied the downfall of Edom.

The Edomites were descendants of Esau and considered a "brother" nation of Israel.

12. From Obadiah 1:1-14, what was Edom's root sin, and why is that sin particularly damaging?

13. a. In what ways did Obadiah describe Edom's "unbrotherly" actions against Israel (see also Genesis 25:19-34 and Numbers 20:14-21)?

b. How might individuals or nations sin in this way today?

14. List the promises about Israel's future recorded in Obadiah 1:15-21.

15. How does the promise of the Lord's ultimate victory and certain rule encourage you?

Sixth Day: Review Joel and Obadiah.

God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.

16. What stands out to you about God from studying Joel and Obadiah – His character and actions?
How does this truth impact your life?

No homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders

Lesson Notes

Joel and Obadiah

Focus Verse

“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.” – Joel 2:13

“But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance.”
– Obadiah 1:17

Outline

- Joel’s Prophecy of the Day of the Lord – Joel
- Obadiah’s Prophecy of Edom’s Judgment – Obadiah

Engage

We love good news. We prefer movies that end happily, a profitable bottom line, and solutions that ease pain. But can we be truly secure if we seek bliss but ignore hard truths? Does shallow happiness truly satisfy? A true perspective on life and eternity requires embracing difficult realities. God sets the perfect example. He does not withhold bad news, even as He offers hope and rescue. God reveals the danger and damage of sin. He warns of coming judgment on people and nations. **God infuses hope into harsh and painful circumstances with His compassionate call and plan for rescue.** God’s holiness demands that sin and sinners are judged. God’s mercy offers the way to salvation and reconciliation.

Joel and Obadiah, two Old Testament prophets, faithfully proclaimed God’s message. They mirrored God’s heart as they blended hard truth and steadfast hope. God loves His people too much to sit idly by while they cruise toward judgment. He does not ignore the damage inflicted on His people by their enemies. God sent His representatives to point out sin, call for repentance, and offer hope. God’s heart and posture have not changed. **God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.** Sin’s curse has left every one of us utterly corrupted. However, God made a way of salvation for those who turn to Him. You are a sinner, but God sent a Savior – His own Son, who made a way for you to truly flourish no matter what life brings. The bad news makes way for good news that elevates the hope only God can provide.

Joel's Prophecy of the Day of the Lord – Joel 1–3

This week's lesson combines two prophetic books – Joel and Obadiah. Joel prophesied to Judah; Obadiah warned Edom. **While God aimed their diverse messages at two different target audiences, God's overarching message in both books revealed His heart and offered hope for His people.**

A Foretaste of the Day of the Lord – 1:1–2:17

Though scholars debate the timing of Joel's prophecy, many place Joel among the earliest prophets. Joel mentions the Philistines, Sabeans, Edomites, and Egyptians – prominent enemy nations prior to the exile of Judah and Israel.¹ **Because Joel's message centers around Jerusalem and Mount Zion upon which Jerusalem is built, Joel seems to speak to the southern kingdom of Judah.**² Joel used the term "Israel" to indicate the entire nation – both kingdoms. He never referred to only the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom.³

Joel writes as God's spokesman and with His authority. He presents the majestic Lord, enthroned in heaven and ruling over Judah and the earth. **Joel confidently understood that God engages with His creation to reveal His character, accomplish His will, and demonstrate His authority.**

The Locusts – 1

The Devastation – 1:1-7

In a time of prosperity, the people of Judah became complacent toward God. What does it take to awaken spiritually lethargic people? **In wisdom, power, and sovereignty, God deployed repeated waves of ravenous locusts to the land of Judah.** The prophet Joel heralded the noisy and destructive swarms as God's wake-up call to compel His people to repent. In a beautiful blend of poetry and prophecy, Joel described the successive locust attacks that stripped the land bare. These flying grasshopper-like insects have continually threatened Africa and the Middle East, with one swarm once estimated to number over 24 billion.

Who Was Joel?

- **The Prophet:** Joel means "Yahweh is God."
- **The Audience:** Judah during a time of national calamity
- **The Message:** The coming of the day of the Lord and a call to repentance
- **The Image to Remember:** Locusts

1: Enemy nations: Joel 3:4, 8, 19

2: Jerusalem and Mount Zion: Joel 2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:1, 6, 8, 16-18

3: Joel's references to Israel: Joel 2:27; 3:2, 16

The Day of the Lord

“The day of the Lord” emerges as Joel’s prominent theme.⁴ This term appears throughout the Bible referring to God’s specific intervention on earth, most often His judgment. The day of the Lord is not tied to one specific date, but rather a general expression of God’s wrath and judgment on sin. The day of the Lord also incorporates God’s rescue of the faithful – those who turn to Him for salvation. The prophets often spoke of present or coming judgments that prefigured the last great day of the Lord described in Revelation.⁵ Joel followed this pattern as he revealed the reality of judgment and called people to restoration through repentance.

Joel offered the present physical destruction of Judah’s land as a spiritual opportunity for God’s people. Old Testament prophets spoke God’s message into current situations, but often prefigured future events as well. Joel’s application of Judah’s present calamity also pointed to future judgment.

The Call to Lament – 1:8-20

God often uses events that show our mortality and lack of control to get our attention. He shakes us up to wake us up. **Joel urged people from all ranks of society in Judah to wake up and weep.** He called for them to wear sackcloth and mourn not just their physical losses, but more importantly, their sin. Joel summoned the drunkards, priests, farmers, and laborers to cry out to God. Joel even incorporated the cattle and wild animals in the dire circumstances facing Judah. The consequences of mankind’s sin mysteriously involve creation.⁶

Joel 1:15 directly connects Judah’s destruction with the day of the Lord. **These catastrophic circumstances did not come as a random act of nature, but as an expression of God’s judgment.** “Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.” In human understanding, we sometimes struggle to see anything difficult or devastating as ordained by God. How do natural disasters or other troubling current events intersect with God and His plan? God certainly uses painful disruption to awaken people spiritually and accomplish His greater purposes. We cannot fully explain everything that happens, but God’s sovereign control can be trusted.

The Invaders – 2:1-11

Joel sounded the alarm – “Blow the trumpet in Zion” – as he called the people of Judah to prepare for the invasion of a massive army. Was Joel again seeing the locusts or was this a literal army? His description blends the two, but his message clearly points to God’s imminent judgment. Joel used language often associated with the final days of the earth – disintegration of heavenly bodies and massive destruction.⁷ The disruption of creation draws people’s attention to what is happening. Joel leaves no doubt that the Lord Himself would send the enormous army as an instrument of His judgment. This dire warning sets the stage for God to work in the people’s hearts.

4: **The day of the Lord:** Joel 1:15; 2:1,11, 31; 3:14

5: **Nations’ final judgment:** Joel 3; Ezekiel 38–39; Daniel 2:44; Zechariah 12:3; 14:2; Acts 2:19-20; Revelation 16:16

6: **Creation and mankind’s sin:** Romans 1:18-23

7: **Heavenly disintegration:** Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 3:15; Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:11, 26; Revelation 6:12; 8:12

The Call to Repentance – 2:12-17

Joel concluded this alarming trumpet call by calling the people to return to the Lord. Joel pled for deep, heartfelt repentance – “Rend your heart and not your garments.” Outward formalities such as public assemblies, fasting, and mourning were insufficient. God desired deep internal repentance.⁸ The people needed to acknowledge their offense against God and turn away from their sin. Joel reminded Judah of God’s attributes of grace and mercy – He offered hope and a way of escape. If Judah repented, perhaps God would relent and withdraw His threatened judgment. God longed for His people to experience His goodness as they lived the life He intended for them – individually and as a nation. This message continues into the New Testament and reveals God’s heart.⁹

The Forecast of the Day of the Lord – 2:18–3:21

God’s Faithfulness – 2:18-27

God has good purposes in everything He does. In protective love, God warned Judah of devastating judgment and urgently sought their repentance. Evidently, the people of Judah responded to Joel’s message. Joel now prophesied that God would replenish and restore the land ravaged by devouring locusts. **God not only judges sin, but He also repairs sin’s damage.** God delights to bring good from hardship. He seeks to bring beauty from ashes and joy from sorrow.¹⁰ God jealously guards the welfare of His people. Like a surgeon who cuts to heal, God will not withhold pain from our lives if that pain accomplishes His good purposes.

God’s people in all ages have found comfort in the words recorded in Joel 2:25: “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten....” How many people look back sorrowfully on years lived without regard to God? God’s restorative grace brings fruitfulness to formerly barren places in a believer’s life. If your heart laments wasted years, lay hold of this promise today. By His Spirit, God renews the minds and transforms the lives of those who surrender to Him.¹¹ **Sorrow over past years fades with the experience of God’s redemptive power and growing hope in a glorious future.**

God’s Spirit – 2:28-31

Joel’s message shifts to a future day – “afterward.” This beautiful prophecy of an outpouring of God’s Spirit brought hope to the people of Joel’s day. **Joel spoke of God’s Spirit being poured out on all people – men and women, the young and the old.**

The magnitude of Joel’s prophetic statements incorporated circumstances beyond those faced by the people of Judah in his day. Peter quoted this very promise on the day of Pentecost.¹² Jesus promised believers that His Spirit would fill them with power to be His witnesses and do His work.¹³ On that day, the Holy Spirit filled believers as a rushing wind, tongues of fire, and multiplied languages, which attested to God’s power and the fidelity of His promises. **A new work of the Holy Spirit began at Pentecost, fulfilling Joel’s prophecy.**

8: True repentance: Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; 2 Corinthians 7:10

9: God’s heart: Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:18-22

10: Beauty from ashes: Isaiah 61:1-4

11: Renewed minds: Ezekiel 36:25-28

12: Pentecost: Acts 2:16-21

13: Jesus’ promise: Acts 1:8

God's Spirit Poured Out

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

God's plans and purposes have always incorporated the Holy Spirit's work and activity. God's own Spirit moved at creation¹⁴ and worked through God's people.¹⁵ The Holy Spirit activated God's words spoken by Joel to deeply impact the people of his day and foreshadow the future. In divine coordination, the Holy Spirit's work perfectly aligns with God's thoughts and intentions.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit work together in perfect harmony. **The Holy Spirit's work becomes deeply personal when we recognize His power in our lives.** He empowers us to renounce our self-will, sin, and rebellion against God. Wooing our hearts toward faith, the Holy Spirit leads us to Christ and salvation. The Spirit's moment-by-moment infusion of power allows a believer to live a transformed life – to obey God out of love and gratitude for His abounding grace. The Holy Spirit gives us hope as He unlocks the Bible so we can understand and apply its truth. God's life flows into the believer through His own Spirit. Our amazement at the Holy Spirit's work involves far more than facts. The Holy Spirit's presence and power reveal God's personal love in incredibly tangible ways.

When we do not recognize the Holy Spirit's presence and work, we miss much of God's involvement in our daily lives. Without the Holy Spirit's help, God's ways and His Word make no sense. Until the Holy Spirit awakens our dead hearts and minds, we are left without satisfying answers for life's deepest questions. **Failing to recognize God's active power and presence through His Spirit leaves us to interpret life and face eternity on our own.**

God did not leave us without help. **God's own Spirit was active in the past and continues His unstoppable work today.** If you are a believer, how often do you stop and ponder God's amazing gift of His Spirit? Those who trust Christ for salvation intimately experience the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit softens our stony hearts so that we love God more than we love ourselves.¹⁶ He makes God's pleasure more important than our own. We learn to welcome the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin and depend on His moment-by-moment guidance. He is the source of the indescribable peace that radiates within us. How have you experienced the wonder of God's own Spirit poured out within you? Thank you, God, for your Holy Spirit!

Joel also described dreadful events likely still future to us in these verses. God's plans unfold exactly on His timetable. Joel foretold of wonders in the heavens before a great and dreadful day of the Lord. In keeping with His plan of redemption, God promised through Joel, "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."¹⁷

14: Spirit at creation: Genesis 1:2

15: God's Spirit in God's people: Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 16:13; Ezekiel 11:5; Micah 3:8; Romans 8:9-17; Galatians 5:16-25; 2 Peter 1:21

16: Stony hearts transformed: Ezekiel 36:26-27

17: Calling on the Lord: Acts 2:21

God's Judgment – 3:1-16

Joel looked even further into the future as he foretold a future day when representatives from all nations will gather to make war against God's people in the "Valley of Jehoshaphat." The name "Jehoshaphat" probably does not relate to the former king of Judah, but to the name's meaning, "the Lord judges." The nations of the world will think they are gathering to destroy Israel, but in reality, God is gathering them for judgment. **God will judge the nations and fully restore Israel as His people.**

God's justice will prevail as He exposes and judges individuals and nations who perpetuate evil. Though God would use Assyria and Babylon to discipline Israel and Judah, He would judge the foreign nations for their cruelty against His people. Joel reversed Isaiah's famous lines about beating swords into plowshares.¹⁸ God commanded that warriors assemble and the weak declare their strength. Joel's words, "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe," reappear in Revelation.¹⁹ This imagery points to God's action as He brings judgment on the sin of mankind.

Where is the hope in this apocalyptic scene? Verse 16 presents God as the stronghold for His people, even as He judges those who have rejected Him. **By His grace, believers find refuge from God's judgment in God Himself.**

God's People – 3:17-21

Joel describes the spiritual and physical restoration of Israel. The land formerly ravaged by locusts will be graciously replenished. **The Lord's presence and protection will make Jerusalem and Zion flourish as a scene of indescribable beauty.**

Through Joel, God warned of judgment and offered hope. The gospel message echoes this theme as God's offer of salvation through His Son brings hope despite the reality of sin and judgment. **Those who find refuge in God are eternally safe – protected by the Lord.**

Obadiah's Prophecy of Edom's Judgment – Obadiah 1

Judgment on Edom – 1-14

The prophetic book of Obadiah specifically addressed the nation of Edom. **Esau's descendants, or the nation of Edom, was considered a "near relative" of the Israelites.**²⁰ Strife characterized the relationship between the Israelites and the Edomites despite their connection. The initial contention between Isaac's twins, Esau and Jacob, set the course for the future of their descendants.²¹ During Israel's exodus from Egypt, the Edomites refused to allow the Israelites to pass through their land.²² Their unbrotherly behavior continued during Obadiah's time. They delighted and participated in cruelty to Judah as she fell to Babylon.

18: Swords into plowshares: Isaiah 2:4

19: God's judgment: Revelation 14:14-20

20: Esau: Genesis 32:3

21: Esau and Jacob: Genesis 25:23-34

22: Edomite refusal: Numbers 20:14-21

Who Was Obadiah?

- **The Prophet:** Obadiah means “Servant of Jehovah.” His exact identity is difficult to determine among 13 men named Obadiah in the Old Testament.
- **The Audience:** Edom, the nation that descended from Esau, most likely prior to the exile
- **The Message:** God’s retribution on Edom for unbrotherliness and betrayal of Israel
- **The Image to Remember:** Lofty dwelling places

The name Edom means “red,” an interesting connection with Esau, who was red-haired at birth and sold his birthright for a meal of red stew.²³ The nation of Edom bordered Moab and Judah along a high plateau of red mountains between the River Zered on the north and the Gulf of Aqaba on the south. Many fortresses dotted Edom’s boundaries, sitting high like the eagle’s nest referred to in Obadiah 1:4.

This short book presents a message of hope to Judah. The promise of God’s judgment on their enemy nation and a promise of restoration consoled God’s people.²⁴

The Verdict – 1-9

The Sovereign Lord God Almighty declared His solemn judgment against Edom. **Pride rose as Edom’s predominant sin.** Commonly referred to as a “root sin,” pride leads to many other sins. Edom, though a relatively small nation, boasted of her achievements and impregnable fortresses. God promised to bring down this arrogant nation. Edom’s downfall offers a needed warning in a world that often esteems pride as a virtue.

The Crimes – 10-14

God’s identification with His people runs deep.²⁵ Rooted in God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, when Edom offended God’s people, the nation actually offended God Himself. When Jerusalem and Judah were stripped and helpless in the clutches of their enemy, Edom did not help their brother nation. Instead, Edom “stood aloof,” rejoiced over Judah’s distress, and participated in the plunder of God’s people. **Edom’s unbrotherliness against Judah did not escape God’s attention.** Judgment awaited the proud nation of Edom.

Deliverance in Zion – 1:15-21

God’s Judgment on All Nations – 15-16

God’s judgment goes beyond Edom. **All people and all nations stand accountable to God.** Obadiah declared, “The day of the LORD is near for all nations.” This statement points to God’s

23: Esau: Genesis 25:25, 30

24: Edomite cruelty and judgment: Isaiah 34:5-15; 63:1-4; Jeremiah 49:17; Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 25:13-14; Amos 1:11-12

25: God and His people: Matthew 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4-5

final judgment, like many other Old Testament prophecies.²⁶ Judgment awaits all who have rebelled against God and delighted in the mistreatment of His people.

God's retribution for evil inflicted on those He loves brings comfort to believers. The reassurance God's people experience goes beyond a desire for evildoers to receive payback. In this life, circumstances make it seem like evil is winning and God is losing. This is not so! The fact that God's justice prevails over evil brings hope. Vengeance belongs to God, who dispenses perfect justice at the right time and in the right measure.

God's Salvation for His People – 17-21

God emphatically spoke through Obadiah of ultimate victory for His people. He would bring them home again to the promised land. “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau.” **God would deliver the lands of their enemies into Israel's hands.**

Obadiah's final sentence speaks of God's universal rule: “And the kingdom will be the LORD's.” **God's rule and reign cannot be stopped by human oppressors, false gods, or spiritual opposition.** Though God would allow enemy nations to discipline His people, His promises to them remained steadfast.

The eternal King reigns without rival. No matter how things appear today, God's justice will prevail. As this world and its people move ever closer to final judgment, God calls people to find refuge and salvation in His Son. **God warns of coming judgment, but offers hope and restoration.** Through Joel and Obadiah, God moves His people to share urgently the reality of coming judgment and the good news of the gospel with others.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Joel warned the outwardly prosperous people of Judah of imminent locust swarms that would strip the land bare. This tangible event offered a wake-up call as Joel cried out to people from all ranks of society to repent – to turn from sin and to God. With his somber message, Joel foretold “the day of the Lord” – a coming day of accountability to God. He also promised God would restore the devastated land and banished nation. God would pour out His Spirit on His beloved people. In a future day, God will gather all people and all nations to face the judgment due their sin. **Joel's message of certain judgment echoed with a call to find hope in God.** God's warnings represent the depth of His love and care for His people. God passionately longs for His people to return to Him – to find a place of vitality and fruitfulness.

Obadiah spoke of God's pending judgment to Edom, a brother nation who should have offered care and help to Israel. In pride and arrogance, Esau's descendants mistreated the Israelites and rejoiced in Israel's pain. God never overlooks wrongs done to His people. **Obadiah declared that the proud nation of Edom would crumble while Israel would prevail.** Obadiah's message offered hope to God's people. God's justice cannot be thwarted by evil individuals and enemy nations.

²⁶: Final judgment foretold: Isaiah 66:18; Joel 3:1-2; Haggai 2:6-7; Zechariah 9:8

Apply It

Joel urged the nation of Judah to hear God's voice through the devastating locust swarms that devoured their land and livelihood. **While we may struggle to understand God's hand and plan in modern-day catastrophes, every troubling situation offers an opportunity to turn to God.** Difficult times lower our defenses and prove our lack of control over life's circumstances. Distressing situations can harden us if we blame God, but can bring incredible growth and transformation when we humbly turn to Him. God can use every calamity you face to accomplish His purposes. How is God reaching you through the most difficult thing you face today? When will you pause and listen for His voice?

If we do not yield to God's transformative work woven into life's agonizing moments, we are left with only jagged scars and painful memories. Suffering is wasted when we fail to surrender to God. There is another way. **Our creative and powerful God uses even the consequences of personal sin for our good and His glory.** God loves to restore the years the locusts have eaten. How have you experienced God's restorative power in your life? If your story includes wasted opportunities or years of spiritual complacency, will you turn to God right now?

God judged the nation of Edom for inflicting harm on the Israelites. Similarly, God calls believers to family loyalty within the body of Christ. **This world's socially acceptable combative posture tempts believers to turn on one another when God has commanded us to love each other genuinely and patiently.**²⁷ While it seems socially acceptable to publicly vilify another Christian, Scripture exhorts us to uphold unity and speak directly to those with whom we disagree. God's Spirit will give us wisdom to humbly uphold truth and maintain unity. Is God leading you to make amends with someone you failed to honor and protect? What will you do?

Joel called the people of Judah to recognize God's judgment and repent. Obadiah announced God's verdict against Edom. Across the ages, people have zealously suppressed any sense of personal accountability to God. Ignoring God's grace expressed in every sunrise and drop of rain, people attempt to live independent of God and rule their own lives. This delusion will be shattered, if not in this life, in eternity. **Every nation and every person stand guilty before God.** In mercy, God sent His Son to bear the just penalty of sin for everyone who puts their faith in His sacrifice on their behalf. How does the reality of individual accountability before God impact your life? With whom would God have you share both this reality of judgment and also the gospel message of hope and salvation?

27: Christian love: Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-14