

COMMENTARY - JOEL

James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988),

The plague which we have experienced is of such magnitude that it must be a sign that the day of the Lord's punishment is near. Let us all gather for fasting and prayer. The Lord may deliver us. ¹

The Israelites had experienced plagues of locusts throughout their history. The plague to which Joel refers was so severe that nothing like it had happened in the past, and it was worthy of being remembered to all generations of the future. ²

To the prophet, the terrible plague of locusts was a sign that "the day of the Lord" was near which means a time or occasion when the Lord will intervene decisively in history, had been spoken about in two ways in the time before Joel.

1. The Day of the Lord will be a time of salvation for Israel. 2. The Day of the Lord will be a time of doom for Israel. Joel speaks of the coming Day of the Lord in both ways... The prophet says that the day is near at hand and that it will be a time of doom and destruction for Israel, of darkness, gloom, clouds, and thick darkness (2:2), a day which none will be able to endure (2:11). The coming of another plague and its attack will be "like a powerful army," that none will be able to endure. The prophet tells them that there is only one thing to do. They should gather for prayer and fasting and return to the Lord. ³

How to return to God?

Individual or the whole community fasted. .. The traditional practices of fasting with the assertion that a true return to the Lord is a matter of heart; an appropriate inward attitude should accompany them. ⁴

Why Return

Because of what God is like: "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repenting of evil." Joel's hearers understood what this means.... The prophetic call to return was later taken up by John the Baptist. "Repent," he said, which meant, reorient your priorities, reaim the direction of your life, return to the path you once followed." The reason he gave was, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," which referred to what God was doing through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Return to God because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for the sake of that world. ⁵

What to expect

The prophet offers no guarantees that God will come to rescue.

What do we do when there is no play to turn? These texts provide some models for attitude and action in such times. The Lord calls for a reorientation that is more than skin deep. The prophet reminds us what God is like. Then, with the King of Judah, we shall have to say, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon thee." The matter will have to be left, then, in God's hands. As Joel puts it, "Who knows whether God might leave us with a blessing?" ⁶

¹ James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 61.

² James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 62.

³ James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 63-64

⁴ James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 65-66.

⁵ James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 67.

⁶ James Limburg. *INTERPRETATION – A Bible Commentary on Hosea-Micah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 68.