

Community Groups |

Growing UP | Growing WITH | Growing OUT



"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

Why Community Groups?

Because God created us to live life in the context of relationships! This is an opportunity for you to connect with others as you experience real life-change in your Christian walk.

What is a Community Group?

A group of 6-10 people who "do life" together as they grow in their love for God, His word, and others. Community Groups encourage folks to take their "next step" in three areas: (1) **Spiritual Growth – UP** towards God, (2) **Relational Growth – WITH** Group members, and (3) **Missional Growth – OUT** to those in the church and world.

Thus, a Community Group is an environment where we are conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:29-30*). Our conviction is that "real life-change only happens in the context of biblical community."

Not to be left out is the fact that a Community Group is also a place for folks to have fun as they celebrate and share life together! Come join us!

Our journey begins with a six-week study of the book of *Joel*. The following Study Guide is intended to immerse you into God's word while you grow closer to Him in the context of relationships.

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Study One | Joel 1:1-12

Background

Author: Joel (“Yahweh is God”), the son of Pethuel.

Date written: Circa 835 to 796 B.C.

Written to: The Southern Kingdom of Judah *in order to* warn them of God’s impending judgment for their sins and exhort them to turn back to Yahweh, the one true God.

Our study of the book of Joel begins immediately with a description of a devastating locust plague on the land of Judah. Joel doesn’t waste any time, so let’s dive right in!

1. Who are the “elders” addressed in *Joel 1:2*? While the entire book addressed to “all who live in the land,” why might these “elders” be addressed first? What is the significance of the language of “(fore)fathers,” “children/sons,” and “the next generation” here?
2. Joel begins to describe the locust plague in *1:4*. What is the difference between the different kinds of locusts mentioned (NASB: “gnawing,” “swarming,” “creeping,” “stripping,” etc.)? What kind of point is Joel trying to make with these descriptions?
3. What are some other well-known occurrences of locusts in the Bible (see *Exodus 10:4-6, 12-15*; and *Revelation 9:7-10*)? Is there any connection between those other occurrences and the book of Joel? For what purpose does God use locusts? Why locusts and not some other means?

4. What is the general response of the people of Judah to these locusts? How many different kinds of people do you see listed in *Joel 1:5-11*? How is each person's specific response unique?

5. Why might a plague such as this one have been particularly devastating to the nation of Judah? How important do you think wine, grain, and oil were the livelihood of these people? What would a contemporary devastating equivalent be for our 21st century culture?

6. Read Deuteronomy 28:15-20 and 39. How do these verse explain more of what's going on here in *Joel 1*? From these verses, how important do you think obedience is to God? If not by locusts, how does God judge those who disobey Him today (including us)?

7. We see that the real issue is the pain of God's people as a result of His judgment for their disobedience (*Joel 1:12*). Are you currently living any part of your life in such a way that might be causing your joy to be "dried up" or "withered?" If so, ask others to pray for you.

Memory verse:

Joel 1:12 – *"The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree — all the trees of the field — are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away."* (NIV)

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Study Two | Joel 1:13-20

Our study continues with a description of mourning and repentance that God desires from His people when they stray away from Him and His ways.

1. Why is God (through Joel) addressing the religious leaders at the beginning of these verses? Why might they be held responsible for what is going on? What is the significance of “sackcloth” in Joel 1:13 (see *Genesis 37:34* and *Jonah 3:5-9*)?
2. What exactly are the “grain offerings” (cf. *Leviticus 2:1-15*) and “drink offerings” (cf. *Numbers 15:5, 7, 10; 28:7-10, and 14, 15*) in *Joel 1:13*? What purpose did they serve in the worship of God and why is it significant that they were withheld from God’s house (i.e. the temple)?
3. What is “the day of the LORD” in *Joel 1:15* and why is it such a dreaded “day?” For help, see similar uses of this phrase in other Old Testament prophetic books: *Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 13:5; Amos 5:18; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, Malachi 4:5*, etc. How often do you think of this “day?”

4. If the “day of the LORD” concerns God’s coming judgment, then how does the locust plague of chapter 1 relate to this “day?” In other words, how might God’s past or present judgment relate to His ultimate future judgment?

5. If the people of Judah (formerly part of the nation of “Israel”) were God’s chosen covenant people (*Exodus 2:24-25; 19:5-6*), then why would God bring such devastation upon His people (*Joel 1:16ff*)? What does this tell you about God’s desire for His people’s obedience?

6. Is Joel talking about literal “fire” (or drought) in *1:19* and *20* or is this a figurative way to refer to damage carried out by the locusts? How extensive is the damage caused by this “fire?” If you were in Joel’s situation, would you call/cry out to God as he does in verse *19*? Why or why not?

7. Are you ever afraid of God’s future judgment? As a follower of Jesus Christ, what hope does God promise us in the future (see *2 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:16.17; 5:9-10*)? Given this hope, however, how does God’s judgment for sin encourage you to examine your life?

Memory verse:

Joel 1:15 – *“Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.”* (NIV)

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Study Three | Joel 2:1-11

Our discussion centers again on the “day of the LORD.” At first glance, it appears as if we have another plague of locusts, but it is? Just wait and see!

1. What’s the deal with this blowing of the “trumpet (Joel 2:1; cf. Numbers 10:1-10 and Jeremiah 6:1)?” Where is “Zion” and what is its connection to God’s “holy hill/mountain (see Psalm 2:6)?” Why would this be an appropriate place from which to sound an alarm?
2. Based on its description, do you think that of the army attack in Joel 2 is the same event as the locust plague in Chapter 1? What is the time frame of the attack in Joel 2 (past, present, or future)? What is the time frame of the locust plague in Chapter 1? (Note: biblical authors often use similar terms to describe different events in order to maintain a literary theme.)
3. How does Joel 2:2 describe the “day of the LORD?” If this is to be a day of “darkness,” then why does Joel use the term “dawn” (1:2) and “fire” and “flame” (1:3)?
4. Who exactly comprises this “mighty people/army” in 2:2ff and why do you think this sort of language is used of them? Are they locusts or actual people? How do you know? (Hint: A good Bible commentary will give you some clues to this difficult interpretive issue.)

5. Read *Revelation 9:7-10*). How specifically does the description of the locusts in *Revelation 9* compare to and contrast with the “army” of *Joel 2*? If God is the in charge of this “army” in *Joel 2:11*, does that distinguish them from the army of locusts in *Revelation 9:7-10* (whose king is “Abaddon” or “Apolyon”)? Why or why not?

6. Think again about why God would unleash such destruction upon His people. Are you at all like the people of Judah who took their special covenant relationship with God for granted? How can you be reminded more frequently of who God is and how He desires for you to respond?

7. The plague in *Joel 1* was a past event whereas the coming army in *Joel 2* is a future event. Both are examples of God’s judgment. *Joel 2:1-11* depicts a foreign nation that God will send upon His people should they not repent of their sins. While *Joel 2:1-11* shares similar language with that of *Revelation 9:7-10*, these are two distinct events. How does the reality of God’s coming judgment impact your urgency to share the gospel with those who don’t know Christ?

Memory verses:

Joel 2:11 – “The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?” (NASB)

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Study Four | Joel 2:12-27

Following the promised future judgment of Joel 2:1-11, we have a startling message of hope and renewal. Think about what these verses say about God and our response to Him.

1. What does God mean when He commands the people of Judah to “return” to Him (Joel 2:12-13)? What does this “returning” look like? What is the meaning of the phrase “rend your heart and not your garments” in verse 13?
2. Are there any areas of your life where you need to “rend your heart?” Study the description of God’s character in Joel 2:13b. How should this description encourage us to “rend our hearts” to God? Describe a time when you’ve experienced God’s grace or compassion.
3. Note that the “trumpet” is being used for a different purpose in Joel 2:15 than it was in Joel 2:1. What is this new reason for using the trumpet? Look at verse 16 and following. Who is gathered and called to participate in this event?
4. What is Joel referring to when he mentions God’s “inheritance” (Joel 2:17; cf. Exodus 19:5)? Why would God’s inheritance be a “reproach/object of scorn” (Psalm 44:13) and a “byword among the nations” (1 Kings 9:6-7; Psalm 44:14)? Whose honor is really at stake here, that of the “inheritance” or that of God? (see also Deuteronomy 9:26-29)

5. Verse 18 marks an important transition in this section. How is the language of this section different than that of *Joel 2:1-11*? What is this “northern army” in 2:20? Does it refer to the locusts or something else? What does God promise to do to this “northern army?”

6. What are some of the things for which God’s people are to “rejoice” and “be glad” (*Joel 2:21-23ff*)? As you think about your own circumstances, what are some similar blessings for which you should be glad? Have you expressed this gladness to God lately?

7. Reflect a bit more on the great promises that God extends to His people in *Joel 2:26-27*. While these words were written to the people of Judah (or “Israel”) in the Old Testament, how might these verses apply to those of us who follow Jesus Christ today as part of His body, the church (*Revelation 21:4-5; 22:3-5*)? What should our response be to these promises?

Memory verses:

Joel 2:13 – *“And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil.”* (NASB)

Joel 2:27 – *“Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, And that I am the LORD your God, And there is no other; And My people will never be put to shame.”* (NASB)

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Study Five | Joel 2:28-32

Our passage for today is short, but pregnant with significance. Interestingly, most Hebrew Bibles set these five verses apart as a separate chapter in the book of Joel.

1. When will these incredible events of Joel 2:28-32 take place? Have they taken place already? How might passages such as *Jeremiah 31:31-34* and *Ezekiel 36:26-27* help us understand this passage?
2. Who will experience the pouring out of God's Spirit? Is this limited to the nation of Israel or the entire world? Read *Galatians 3:28*. How does this passage relate to the pouring out of God's Spirit in *Joel 2:28*?
3. What will this "pouring out" look like? Why might prophecies, dreams, and visions be significant (cf. *Numbers 12:6*)? What is the significance of Joel's use of natural images ("heaven," "earth," "sun," and "moon;" see *Matthew 24:29* and *Revelation 6:12*)? How then is this "pouring out" connected to the "day of the LORD?"
4. Carefully observe the text of both *Joel 2:28-32* and *Acts 2:16-21*. What are some similarities and differences that you see between these two passages? Why did the Apostle Peter use this Old Testament passage when speaking to the Jewish leaders about Jesus Christ (see *Galatians 3:13-14*)?

5. Did the events of *Acts 2:1-13* (i.e. the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, speaking in tongues, etc.) fulfill the prophecy of *Joel 2:28-32*? If they did fulfill them, did they do so completely? Partially? Dually fulfilled (fulfilled once on Pentecost and once more at Christ's second coming)?

6. What is the only way for someone to be delivered/saved from the atrocities mentioned in *Joel 2* (see verse 32)? What does it mean to "call on the name of the LORD?" Does it mean something different to us than it did to the people of Judah in *Joel 2*? What kind of heart attitude is required if someone wants to "call on the name of the LORD?" Do people call on the LORD, or does He call them (*Joel 2:32* seems to indicate both)?

7. It would appear that the coming of the Holy Spirit in *Acts 2:1-13* at least looks back to the language of *Joel 2:28-32* (see *Acts 2:16-21*) with the ultimate fulfillment of *Joel 2* coming at Christ's return in the future (*Matthew 24:29-31*). How do these prophecies exhort you to live this week? How do you need to call humbly "on the name of the LORD" this week?

Memory verses:

Joel 2:32 – "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls." (NIV)

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Study Six | Joel 3:1-22

Our study of Joel ends with God's proclamation of judgment upon the nations of the earth. Hopefully you've been encouraged and challenged by this small but significant book!

1. Have the events of *Joel 3* taken place yet or are these events to come in the future? How might these events be tied to 2:28-32 (see 3:15)? How would Jerusalem's restoration relate to God's judgment upon all the nations (see *Joel 3:2-3* for help)?
2. Try to locate Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia on a Bible map. What significance would these nations have in the history of Israel (check a good Bible dictionary for help!)? Why do you think God is so concerned about returning His people to their land (see *Genesis 13:14-17; Deuteronomy 1:8*)? Do God's people occupy the land in the fullest sense today?
3. Notice the warfare language of *Joel 3:9-16*. How does this warfare language ("plowshares into swords") relate to God's judgment? What is the significance of Jehoshaphat (i.e. the "valley of decision;" see *2 Chronicles 20:1-30*)?
4. How extensive will God's judgment be? What do you think it will look like? What do the "harvest" and "winepress" have to do with judgment? What might the connection be between these verses and *Revelation 14:14-20*? What does the reality of God's judgment say about His view of sin and our need to confess and repent on an ongoing basis?

5. Observation is one of the most essential elements of a good Bible student. What differences do you observe between God's treatment of the wicked nations and that of His people Israel in Joel 3:16ff? What might God's presence in Zion have to do with Jerusalem being holy (Joel 3:17; see also Revelation 22:3-5)?

6. What sort of language describes the blessing that will come upon God's people in Joel 3:18? Why might wine, milk, and water symbolize God's blessing? How does this contrast to the description at the beginning of Joel (see 1:10-12 specifically)? How might this blessing relate to the future described in Revelation 22:1-2?

7. Contrast the fates of Egypt and Edom to that of Judah/Jerusalem. Why does God specifically call out Egypt and Edom? What was the history between these two nations and Israel? Finally, as we conclude the book of Joel, how should you live in light of God's promised judgment upon the world as well as His promised blessing upon His covenant people?

Memory verses:

Joel 3:16-17 – *“The LORD roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem, And the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel. (17) Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, And strangers will pass through it no more.”* (NASB)

Resources for Joel | TBC

For further study of the book of Joel, see the following Bible Study Resources:

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/joel.pdf>

<http://net.bible.org/bible.php?book=Joe&chapter>

