

God's Timing—and Ours

Joel 2:12-32

"What time is it?"

Normally, we ask what time it is to locate ourselves in the never-ending flow of daily activities. We experience time in a linear way as it moves forward second by second, never reversing itself—clock time. But Old Testament prophets understood that God would intervene in the normal sequence of historical events with his own kind of time (*kairos*), time infused with judgment and grace. This is transparent time in which we see through what is happening and view events from God's perspective. The effect when clock time becomes significant time is something like the moment when, in the middle of a boring lecture (clock time), a professor announces a surprise test which will determine whether the student will pass or fail (significant, eternal time). Clock time is a resource that can be managed; God's time is a gift to be received.

The move from clock time to eternal time is part of the meaning of the Old Testament concept of the day of the Lord—one of the central themes of Joel's prophecy and a crucial truth as we consider end-times themes. By studying the prophecy of Joel, we will deepen our grasp of not only how Jesus inaugurated the end times, but also of how much more we should anticipate the full realization of the day of the Lord.

1. Recall an experience of "losing track of [clock] time" because you were caught up in a totally engaging activity.

2. In Joel 2:1-10 the prophet was writing more than four centuries before Christ. He explained that the plague of locusts swarming over Judah and destroying the land was a definite judgment of God on the disobedience of his own people. This was their first experience of the day of the Lord (Joel 2:1, 11), a day which did not exempt God's own people Israel from judgment. Compare verses 4-7 with Revelation 9:7-10. What are the creatures described in these verses?

3. Comparing these verses with those in Revelation 9, what conclusion do you come to as to the timing of these things? In other words, has it happened, or what time in the future will it happen?

4. What is the scene being portrayed in verse 11?

Does this move you to want to warn those whom you love?

5. Read Joel 2:12-17. National repentance was appropriate for a nation-church like Israel under the old covenant. In what ways should the Lord's people today express their repentance now that the church and the state are separate?

6. Read Joel 2:18-27. What do these verses tell us about God's willingness to forgive when we truly turn back to Him?

In these verses God promise an end to oppression for Israel and also us. When will this oppression end?

7. In verse 23 the NKJV translates: ... *For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you-- The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month.* But the God's Word translation says: ... *The LORD has given you the Teacher of Righteousness. He has sent the autumn rain and the spring rain as before.* Who is this teacher?

8. Read Joel 2:28-32 further elaborate the results of repentance on the day of the Lord. What supernatural benefits will come to Israel "afterward" (During Tribulation)?

9. How are these spiritual gifts, signs and securities indications of a deeper fulfillment of Israel's covenant relationship with God?

10. In what ways does Joel's prophecy of an Old Testament "Pentecost" go beyond the normal experience of the people of God before Christ?

11. In quoting Joel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21), Peter made an important change. Instead of saying "afterward" (Joel 2:28), he inserted a phrase from another prophecy about the day of the Lord in Isaiah 2:2 — "in the last days" (Acts 2:17). Why is this change of time important in the light of the events of Pentecost?

12. Like distant mountain peaks which appear to be merged without revealing the depth of the hidden valleys between, Joel pictures multiple realities without assigning their place on a time line or showing how deep are the valleys between the peaks. In Joel's prophecy repentance followed by forgiveness would inaugurate the day of the Lord and bring about an age of Messianic blessing (Millennium). Peter reversed the order, calling for repentance *because* of the events of that day. Why are repentance and calling on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21) so essential at the time of God's intervention?

What does this interpretation of the flexible *order* in which things will happen (while retaining the essential truths) suggest about the relation of "end-time" events to our kind of clock and calendar time?

10. The elaborate imagery of cosmic, irreversible changes common in Old Testament prophecy and used by Joel (Joel 2:30-31; Acts 2:19-20) shows that in the day of the Lord nothing will ever be the same again. How can that be true for you today?

11. What answer can you give to the person who wonders whether God will restore in their life "the years the locusts have eaten" (Joel 2:25)?