

WHEN YOU GET BUGGED

In the Chinese language words are formed by linking symbols together. Take for example, the Chinese word for "crisis". It's the combination of the symbols for two words, "danger" and "opportunity". And a crisis is both. On the one hand, it does pose a danger, but on the other hand, a crisis creates an opportunity. At the time of Joel, Judah was facing a crisis. In an age before pesticides, and the *Orkin man* a plague of locust had swept across the southern kingdom.

Once I went to a Bible Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. And while there I learned that once every 7 years or so, Nashville is plagued by locust. They swarm out of the ground. They're extremely active. You can walk down the sidewalk, and the little critters will smack you in the face. They *bugged* me the whole conference.

A locust is a dull-yellow insect - like a short, plump grasshopper. They're about three inches long, and have two antenna another inch or so long. Get up-close and personal with a locust, and you'll notice their face looks like that of a horse. Locust travel at tremendous speeds, and have a ferocious appetite. A swarm of locust resembles a black cloud moving over the landscape. The insects strip green plants of their vegetation. They leave nothing. Locust will even eat the bark off the trees. The locust have a nickname... they're called "*hunger incarnate*".

At the turn of the last century, there was a

plague of locust that swept over Israel and Syria for a total of five months. Scientists were able to document the spread of the locust and their devastation. The female bugs dug 4 inch holes and laid 100 eggs in each hole. In a single square meter of soil 70,000 eggs incubated.

When they hatched billions of locust were unleashed on the land. The swarms were so thick they blanketed out the sunshine. The swarms of locust moved 400-600 feet a day, consuming and devouring every scrap of vegetation in sight.

This was the crisis facing Judah. At best, the scourge could cripple the nation's economy for generations to come. At worse, their very survival was at stake. The people had never faced such a threat. A national emergency was declared. Trust me, a plague of locust would *bug* you too!

But enter the prophet Joel with God's Word to the people... This was a true crisis - *not just a danger, but an opportunity* - an opportunity to add muscle to their faith. God wanted to prove Himself to Israel, and teach them He could be trusted. Hey, God allows trials and difficulties - even swarms of locust - to show us we can lean on Him. In reality, *this was a test. It was only a test.*

JOEL 2 - ACTS 2

Joel 2:28 was quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost to explain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the newly formed Church. In Acts 2:16 Peter says, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..."

Joel states "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." But here's the point. The events that took place on Pentecost were the *what* spoken of by Joel - but not the *when*.

Joel is describing "the day of the LORD" - the end of the age. He looks forward to an supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel when they embrace Jesus as their Messiah - but that's still future. For now, God is pouring out His Spirit in the same manner on the Church. We experience His power. He communicates supernaturally with us. It's the *what* of Joel - just not the *when*.

ONCE A PICKLE...

Joel 1:5, "Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth." Here is the only sin mentioned in the book - drunkenness. Evidently, idolatry was not as big an issue in Joel's day as debauchery.

John Fielding described alcohol as "the liquid fire by which men drink their hell beforehand." If you've ever had close, intimate contact with the life of an alcoholic, you won't consider Fielding's description an exaggeration.

Understand, alcoholism maybe a disease, but drunkenness is a sin. I believe that some people are chemically predisposed to an addiction to alcohol. It's genetic. It's biological. But once that person realizes their make-up, then they know they're always one drink away from a drunk. There's an old AA saying that's true, "Once you become a pickle you can never be a cucumber."

That's why alcoholism is a disease, whereas drunkenness is a sin. An alcoholic knows he can't handle alcohol. It's impossible for him to drink a *few* beers. He'll never be a social drinker. He's always one drink away from falling. That's why it's a sin for him to take that one drink.

A non-alcoholic is free to have a glass of wine with a meal, but for an alcoholic it's a sin to drink a single drop. You may be predisposed towards alcoholism - but with the grace of God and a repentant attitude - you don't have to get drunk.

Bible Scan - Joel 1-3, Amos 1-9

Tape # SC56A

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THE DAY OF THE LORD

In verse 15 Joel shouts, "Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty." This phrase "the day of the LORD" is mentioned 5 times in Joel. It marks God's intervention in the affairs of men. It's associated with cataclysmic events and God's judgment - both past and future.

My dad had an unusual method he used in teaching boy's Sunday School. For the first 15 minutes or so, he allowed the class to talk about whatever we wanted - girls, baseball, school - it didn't matter. But once the conversation died down my dad would say, "Boys, I've been quiet while you've talked. Now I expect you to be quiet while I talk." He'd present his lesson. It was an effective method.

In a sense, this is God's attitude in the world today. God is always at work behind the scenes, but on the world stage He's giving man his say. For the most part, godless men are running the show. But on occasion God will shut man up. He'll silence all human voices with an event that will force men to listen to Him. This was the effect of the plague of locust on the nation in Joel's day.

In the Bible the term "the day of the LORD" also has special relevance for the last days. At the end of the age God will break up man's party, and execute His will on the earth. "The day of the LORD" will begin with the rapture of the church - followed by the Great Tribulation and its judgments - then climax with the Second Coming of Jesus and the Kingdom Age. *God will have the final word!*

But understand, "the day of the LORD" is like all other Hebrew days. Genesis 1:5 reads, "the evening and the morning were the first day". Notice the Hebrew day is reckoned differently. Our days begin with daybreak, and end with nightfall. But the Hebrews began their days in the dark, and ended them in the light.

So it is with "the day of the LORD" - it begins with trouble for Israel. The plague of locust in the days of Joel was just a foreshadowing of the terrible devastations that will occur in the Great Tribulation. Israel will begin that final day in the dark, and only at the end will they see the light of Jesus, and embrace His Kingdom.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

Joel 3 discusses the aftermath of the Lord's return. He'll regather the Jews to their ancient homeland, and He'll gather together the nations of the earth in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. According to tradition, "the Valley of Jehoshaphat" is the "Kidron Valley" - the valley that runs east and southeast of the Temple Mount.

Here God will judge the nations... Joel envisions the scene in verse 14, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His peo-

ple, and the strength of the children of Israel." Never again will an army of any sort pass through Israel.

In Matthew 25:31-32 Jesus promised, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory... all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats..." And on what basis will the nations be judged? Jesus says in verse 40, "inasmuch as you did it to the least of these My brethren..." And who are His brethren... *but Israel!* God will judge the nations by how they treated the Jews.

This is why we need to vote for leaders who understand Israel's importance in God's plan. One day God will judge America by our policies toward Israel.

Devotion Box - Restoring the Years the Locust Have Eaten

Joel 2:25 is a favorite verse of mine, "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..."

God is able to overcome the consequences of sin in our lives, and restore to us wasted years, and talents, and opportunities.

Once DL Moody came home from a meeting, and his wife asked him, "How many people were saved?" He answered, "Two-and-a-half." She said, "You mean two adults and one child?" He said, "No, I mean two children, and one adult." The children have their whole life to serve the Lord, while the adult had wasted years.

Yet, here God makes an incredible promise. He'll restore our wasted years. He can make up for our foolishness... in our marriage... with our kids... in our career.. in our ministry. You might be 50 years old, but give God all the time you have left, and He'll make your final years as productive as a lifetime of living for Him!

AMOS

During the middle of the 8th century BC - 100 years after Joel - a flurry of prophets shouted God's Word to both the northern and southern kingdoms. To the nation Judah, God sent the prophets Isaiah and Micah. And to the northern kingdom of Israel He sent Hosea, Jonah, and Amos.

Amos introduces us to both himself and his prophecy in verse 1... "The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake."

This was *quite a quake*. 250 years later Zechariah 14:5 mentions the killer quake. The Jewish historian, Josephus, describes how the quake altered the topography of Jerusalem. Amos 1-2, written in 758 BC, mentions fire and brimstone type judgments on Israel's neighbors. It's possible this colossal earthquake produced lightning storms and prairie fires that fulfilled Amos' prophecies.

JUST AN OL' COUNTRY BOY

In 7:10 when Amaziah the priest hears Amos' predictions of an invading army he goes to King Jeroboam and accuses Amos of conspiracy to bring down the kingdom. He says, "The land is not able to bear all his words." In fact, Amaziah confronts Amos in Bethel, and banishes him from Israel.

Amos responds in verses 14-15, "Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'"

Amos was a rancher by trade. He also tended sycamore fruit. So he was a rancher and a farmer.

Remember 1:2 we're told he was from the town of Tekoa. And understand, Tekoa was a hick-town - a town with a single traffic light. It was a country village about 12 miles south-east of Jerusalem in the Judean wilderness. Tekoa was the kind of place "where dogs live under the front porch, where mailboxes are made out of old auto parts, where funeral homes have neon signs, where there's a tire swing in everyone's front yard, where children are named after good dogs, and where everyone in town knows how to milk a goat."

This all meant Amos wasn't a member of the professional clergy. He'd never been to seminary - had no formal training. He was just an ol' country boy from down south that God called to minister in the urban jungles of the northern kingdom.

Amos wasn't a prophet for profit. He made his living from his ranch. He didn't view the ministry as a profession, but as a passion - as a calling, not a career.

Amos was an amateur. I also want to be an amateur - ever since I learned the meaning of the word. It's French, and it means "For the love of it!" Amos served the Lord because he loved the Lord. And we need more men like Amos today.

Understand, Amos has nothing to lose here. He's not worried about his rank and in the local ministerial association. He's not up for a nice, cushy, high-paid job at denominational headquarters. He's not worried about the board firing him and losing his salary. He doesn't have a salary. Hey, he doesn't even have a board.

Amos' agenda is simple - speak God's Word, and let the chips fall... It's when you've got nothing to lose... that's when you've got nothing to fear!

Devotion Box - Are You On The Level?

But Amos 7:7 brings the moment of truth. Amos has another vision. He sees a construction worker's plumb line. The plumb line was an ancient level - a weighted string that hung through the hold in a board. It was used to determine if a wall was "in plumb", or straight. If the string touched the board you had a crooked wall.

Which reminds me of the riddle a plump friend of mind asked, "How do you know if a person is on the level?" He rubbed his stomach and answered, "Their bubble is in the middle." God places the level against Israel, and discovers the nation is out of plumb - crooked and corrupt. It has to be torn down and rebuilt.

Guys, as followers of Jesus we need to be careful we don't shift out of plumb. Jesus is our plumb line - and the question for the Christian is are we growing more and more like Jesus? We need to put the plumb line up against every area of our lives. In this realm of my life am I exhibiting the image and character of Jesus? In my family life - with my friends - at work - in the church.

Am I in or out of plumb?

Devotion Box - Living Next door to a Dragon

In 5:4 the Lord calls out to Israel, "Seek Me and live..."

Novelist, JR Tolkien, once wrote, "It does not do to leave a dragon out of your calculations, if you live next door to him." If you lived next door to a fire-breathing dragon it would have to be a concerned. Ignore him and you'd get burned.

Well, God is also a fire-breather. He's certainly a force to be considered. And He lives in your neighborhood. You can't ignore Him, or pretend He doesn't exist. You'd best factor Him into your plans. Hey, the only way to live is to seek the Lord.

STARTING PLACE, SHARED PACE, SUPERNATURAL GRACE

Verse 3 is a key verse, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"

For two people to walk together - whether they be a husband and wife, a brother and sister, business partners, teammates, or close friends - there needs to be a strong mutual agreement. And in the body of Christ that agreement involves three elements: a starting place, a shared pace, and a supernatural grace.

Ask yourself, do we agree in these 3 before you link-up with someone...

As a Christian our starting place is the cross. Our goal in life is to lay down our rights and surrender to the will of the Father. And the person with whom I want to walk has to agree to the same goal. If there's another agenda there'll be trouble.

Then we need a shared pace. It's hard

to walk in tandem if your partner has a longer stride, or quicker gait. Often believers will link-up on a project, but conflict erupts because one is more mature than the other - or they have different gifts and callings - or they don't share the same vision or priorities or focus. To walk together people need a mutual understanding and a common direction.

Finally we need a supernatural grace. No matter how strongly people agree on the essentials of the mission, issues arise that cause friction. That's where we need the love and peace and patience of the Holy Spirit. If a person isn't in touch with God's grace they won't be able to work through problems when they occur.

To walk as one we need a starting place, a shared pace, supernatural grace.

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - April 29, 2001 - CC Christian School (Grades K5-5th) is registering students for the 2001-2002 school year. Open house today at 3:00 pm - Tuesday, May 1, Mother / Daughter Ladies' Night Out - Thursday, May 3, National Day of Prayer, Men's Prayer Meeting 6:30 am, Ladies Prayer Brunch 10:00 am - High School Summer Mission Trip Information Meeting, May 6, 5:30 pm - Men of the Cross, Friday, May 11@ 6:30 pm, BBQ, Ball & Bible - Guys' Retreat, May 27-28, All Guys Age 8-80, FFA Camp in Covington, GA. - Preschool VBS, June 4-8

Next Bible Scan - May 13 - Obadiah and Jonah

"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" - Amos 4:12

Bible Scan Memory Verse

A FAMINE IN THE LAND

Amos 8:11-12 tells us, "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." And if you've move a lot lately, and have looked for churches that teach the Word, you'll understand Amos's next statement... "They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it."

So many churches offer merely *sermonettes for Christ-anettes*. Where are the churches that are committed to the true exposition of Scripture? *There is a famine in the land!*

To me, the biggest indictment against today's church is the ignorance of the Scriptures among its members. There are churches today that believe the Bible - they even fight for it's inspiration and authority - they just don't teach it.

There is a famine... and notice it's consequences in verse 13, "In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst." Think of the sad, pathetic pictures we see on television of the starving tribes in Africa - shriveled, bony bodies - sunken eyes - protruding stomachs. People are dying of starvation. But if you could the souls of people in our own hometown you'd see a similar picture. People are starving spiritually. They're wasting away for lack of solid food.

This is why our priority has to be God's Word.

Devotion Box - Chosen People

In Amos 3:2 the Lord says to both Hebrew nations, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

A few years ago American Express had as its a motto: "Membership has its privileges." Indeed it does, but if you ring up a bunch of charges on your American Express card you'll also discover, *membership also has its responsibilities*.

God chose the Hebrews to be His special people, and they enjoyed every single privilege that entailed. The problem though is they failed to accept the responsibilities. They sinned perpetually against God and His grace - and were punished over and over. One Jewish historian prayed facetiously, "Lord, thank you for choosing us as Your chosen people, but how 'bout choosing someone else for a while." The Hebrews never accepted membership's responsibilities.

Let's also not miss the obvious lesson... in Christ, we are also God's chosen people - and with that exalted position comes both privilege and responsibility. Let's not just take advantage of the blessings - let's also be faithful to God.

Devotion Box - Sacred Assemblies

Amos 5:21-23 is God's critique of Israel's sacred assemblies.

Their church services, holiday celebrations, financial offerings, and praise songs were all worthless to God. He's unimpressed with prayers and songs and service - if our hearts are AWOL.

YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

A central theme in the book of Amos is that you can't run from God. Amos 5:20 says you can flee the lion, and a bear will eat you. Flee the bear and a serpent will bite you. You can't escape God's judgment.

In Amos 9:1 God speaks of the Assyrian invasion, "He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered." Then in the succeeding verses He shows how no matter where they run, God will track them down. "Though they dig to hell... though they climb to heaven... though they hide at the bottom of the

ocean..." It's a sobering passage.

Joe Lewis may've been the greatest boxer of all time. During his reign as champ he fought a challenger named *Billy Kahn*. Billy was quick and fleet of foot. His strategy was to stay out of his opponent's reach. When Lewis was asked if he could win against Kahn - he replied... "He can run, but he can't hide!" And neither can you and I hide from the Heavyweight of the Universe, Jehovah God.

Rather than run and hide we need to remember Amos in 4:12, "Prepare to meet your God..."