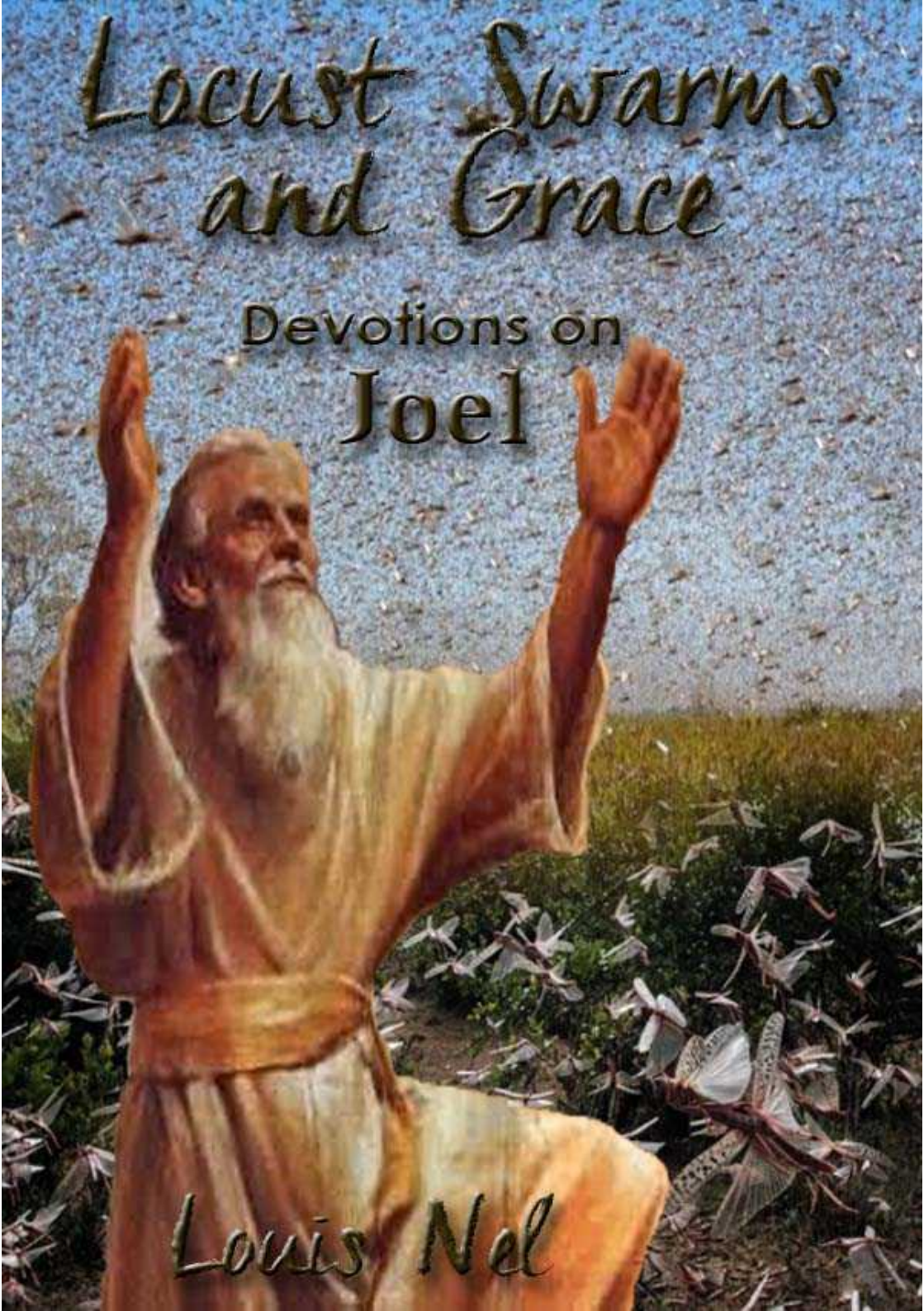


Locust Swarms and Grace

Devotions on
Joel

Louis Nel



Locust Swarms and Grace

Devotions on the Prophet Joel

Louis Nel

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Natural Disasters

Introduction to Joel

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When we look back over the past few years, you are astonished at how many natural disasters have struck the world. The first major one was probably the tsunami that hit the island of Phuket, where thousands of people died. This leaves one with many more questions than answers. Then the tsunami that hit Japan a few years later fills you with horror. It's still fresh in your memory. Then there are the super cyclones that hit America and cause total devastation. Volcanic eruptions in Iceland bring all of Europe to a standstill. But South Africa doesn't escape these disasters either. Scorching droughts cripple a large city like Cape Town, devastating floods hit the Durban area - everything to the extreme. Just last week, a few towns barely a stone's throw from where I live were completely destroyed by a

hurricane! And of course, we can't forget the nightmare of COVID-19, a natural disaster that paralyzed the whole world!

And then we ask the question: How is God involved in this? What is the connection between God and these disasters? Is this God's way of punishing humanity for all the godlessness happening on earth? Does God even care about all the injustice, the terrible sufferings that people inflict on each other? Could God be insensitive when He punishes people in this way? Where, then, is His grace? Will things ever get better for us?

Wow! These kinds of questions make me sound terribly pessimistic! But these are often the questions people, often even believers, ask. And it is precisely these kinds of questions that Joel wants to discuss with his readers.

This book aims to reassure us as believers and make it very clear that God is definitely not insensitive to the things that happen to us. Joel also wants to emphasize that

disasters are not God's punishment for our actions. However, he wants to tell us that God demands accountability from us for the things we do wrong and this also includes believers! If I rob a bank I will go to jail, whether I am a believer or not. And even if I repent, I will still have to account for my deed. Believers are often under the misconception that because God has forgiven us, we are automatically exempt from the consequences of our missteps. This is not true. What is true is that God gives us the grace to deal with those consequences.

So, what does Joel want to tell us with this? He wants to call us to repentance! We must leave the old life behind, turn away from it and begin to live anew. But at the same time, Joel also wants to assure us that God will never abandon those who are faithful to Him. Despite the disaster that strikes us, we must know that the Lord has certainly not forgotten us. He wants to equip us to live fully as believers and be involved with us. But the greatest comfort the book gives us is that

God forgives so that you and I can live a brand-new life!

The book of Joel has really puzzled the learned men because there is no reference to when the book originated. Most of them agree that it was finalized after the exile, around 500BC or even much later. The first people to read this book were the faithful Jews of Jerusalem in the period between 450 and 350BC. It was a very difficult time for these people who had just returned from exile in Babylon to their homeland, Judah. It might be wonderful to finally return to your homeland but they found circumstances there that were terrifying. Suddenly, it was no longer just Jews who inhabited the land, but now they had to share the land with a multitude of hostile peoples. To make matters worse, their old arch-enemies, the Edomites and the Egyptians, gave them no rest. It was a bleak picture. And it was for these people, burdened with a heavy load, that Joel wrote. His task was to give them the courage to continue with life.

However, we must never forget that although the Bible books were written by people for specific readers of their time, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit makes them timeless. And so it is with Joel. Today, the context may be very different, but Joel still speaks to us today just as he did to his first readers more than two thousand years ago. Actually, it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the yellowed pages of the book of Joel. His message is still one of God's great grace. He dearly wants us to break away from sin and live a full life of gratitude!

How can we be sure that it is indeed the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the book? We find the answer in the very first verse of Joel: "This is the word of the Lord to Joel, son of Pethuel." When we read these words, we cannot help but heed what this unknown prophet writes, for they are not his own words but "the Word of the Lord."

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your great, great grace

over me. This morning I must confess that I do not live as You expect of me. Please help me to turn back to You!

Locusts

Joel 1:1-5

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

I can see the despondency on Grandma's face as she recounts that great horror: "Pitch black clouds," she sighs dramatically, "pitch black, making it actually dark - that's how they came flying over in their millions!" Those were terrifying years for many of the farmers in South Africa and Grandma experienced it firsthand. "It almost sounded like thunder when the swarms of locusts flew over us. When they came, we all ran to the fields to try to keep them away there, because where these locusts settled, they ate everything down to the ground so that nothing absolutely nothing, was left behind!"

Grandma lets out another long, sorrowful, despondent sigh as if she is reliving it all over again. "We tried to drive them away with anything that could make noise, even set

things on fire to smoke them out but it was hopeless. Our fields were stripped bare without a stalk left behind! Our vegetable garden and even the fruit trees were simply devoured and we lost everything...."

"Oh my dear child," Grandma sighs heavily again, "and if it's not the locusts, it's the armyworms!"

Joel begins his book by making it clear that this is not just a tract but that it is the Word of the Lord that came to him, Joel, son of Pethuel. Who Joel was and where he came from is unknown and we know even less about his father, Pethuel. However, it does not matter because the true Author of this writing is not Joel but God Himself! Indeed, it is He who not only speaks to the Jews of 300BC through this book but also to us today.

Joel then gets straight to the point and tells his readers of a terrible disaster that will strike them. Not just one, but a whole series of plagues will turn the land into a mess. Like Grandma's story of such a dreadful locust

plague that makes your hair stand on end! One day they suddenly appear in the desert, as if the sand itself comes alive. The small locusts crawl out from under the sand in their millions and within a very short time they turn into devouring monsters that just keep eating and eating. They consume everything in their path - fields, orchards, wheat, vineyards and even the precious olive trees. Joel prophesies that it will begin with caterpillars (armyworms?) that eat everything and when they are gone, the migrating locusts will eat what is left. And just when everyone thinks it is finally over, the next plague arrives, ground locusts and that swarming mass rolls over everything like a flood. But still, it is not the end because following closely behind them come the consuming locusts and they eat even the remaining stubble as well!

Joel begins his frightening announcement with three commands: Listen, pay attention and tell (v. 2 and 3). This emphasizes the seriousness of the matter because this is not just a story, they must listen to what the

prophet says! They must pay attention to his pleas and then they must not keep it to themselves but they must go and tell what they have heard and convince everyone. They must do something about the matter and not just leave it at that!

The first group of people who come under Joel's sharp tongue are the drunkards. Alcohol abuse, it seems was a serious problem at that time. Joel calls them out by name: "drinkers!" And then it concerns someone who indulges in drink. Today it is still an enormous problem! On the one hand, we have the desperately poor people who try to drown their sorrows with cheap alcohol and drugs. However, there are also ordinary people who indulge in drink and often make fools of themselves. So often you even hear famous people boasting that they drank too much. I do not think Joel means that a believer should not touch alcohol. There is nothing wrong with a glass of wine or a drink if used moderately.

The horrific carnage on our country's roads during Easter weekends and December holidays is a nightmare and then the traffic authorities say that a huge percentage of the deaths are caused by alcohol. Someone who drives a car under the influence of alcohol is a potential murderer!

Another huge problem is the innocent children who suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome when their mothers abused alcohol during pregnancy. That mother is guilty of the mental impairment of her child. It is tragic that it is the innocent child who suffers.

Joel warns those who indulge in drink that they can cry and lament and complain in advance because after the locusts' destruction there will not even be grapes left to make wine!

Joel pleads today with each one of us to listen attentively to his plea. We must break away from the wrong things we are doing. Perhaps the wrong things are precisely that

we have become lukewarm and do not serve God as we should.

Prayer:

Lord, open my eyes and ears to Your voice and help me to take concrete action regarding the matter You lay on my heart!

The Temple Service is Disrupted

Joel 1:6-14

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

The prophet Joel, under the command of the Lord, predicts the devastating locust plagues that will strike the land.

In verses 6 and 7, the Lord Himself now speaks. It is no longer just Joel delivering a message but the Lord Himself who describes the destructive effect of this impending locust nightmare. He compares it to a mighty nation rising in countless numbers against His people, destroying everything in their path. Simultaneously, He compares it to an enraged lion tearing apart His vineyard. The lion breaks His fig trees to pieces, leaving them stripped bare. The grapevines stand dead and bleached white.

The vineyard and fig trees are, of course, symbolic of God's people. Thus God's people will be completely devastated by this terrible

catastrophe that will befall them. But what is happening here affects not only the people but also God personally, for it is His people who will suffer.

In verse 8, the prophet speaks again, asking the entire nation to do something about the situation. They must mourn, like a betrothed girl who has lost her beloved. This is a great tragedy that is hitting the land and therefore they must mourn. But what is the real tragedy? That their crops are eaten away? No, the tragedy is much deeper. The result of this locust devastation is that the temple service is disrupted, and this is the greatest tragedy. There is no longer a grain or drink offering in the house of the Lord. It is terrible! Service to the Lord has stopped!

The priests - the men who must maintain the service to the Lord - must mourn for they stand with hands tied because they can offer no service. Without wine, grain, or olive oil, there is nothing with which they can perform the service.

Even the fields will mourn because they are ravaged - eaten down to the bare ground by the locusts. Everything mourns, even nature - everything is plunged into mourning.

Secondly, Joel tells the farmers to stand aghast. Have you ever seen the face of a farmer just after a devastating hailstorm has flattened his entire crop, leaving nothing behind? It is utter dismay. Such dismay Joel asks of the farmers of Israel. The fruit farmers are also instructed to wail because there will be no fruit. For them, it means the end of the road. But again, their dismay is not over their own great loss - not over their destroyed wheat and barley - but over the disruption of the temple service. Because the fields are shriveled, there will be nothing with which to bring the offerings in the temple!

Thirdly, Joel commands the priests to put on sackcloth, mourn, and wail. Yes, they must even wear their mourning clothes at night. And again, for the third time, the real reason for their sorrow is the disruption of the temple

service. A day of fasting must be proclaimed for the entire nation and all the leaders and inhabitants of the land must gather at the house of the Lord and call upon Him there.

Once again, it is a sorrowful picture that Joel paints for us. But it all has a great purpose.

What does the Lord want to say to His people with all these things? Because everything is focused on the disruption of the temple service, the Lord wants to say that if the people do not genuinely mean what they do during their temple service and if it does not come sincerely from the heart, then it is actually an abomination to the Lord! He will not tolerate it!

What can they do about this? Is there anything they can do?

Yes, indeed! Joel gives them commands to prevent the people from sinking further into debt: They must proclaim a day of fasting, gather the congregation, go up to the house of the Lord and call upon the Lord. He wants to tell them that it may not be too late - do it

now!

For us the Lord wants to say the same thing today. The writing is on the wall for the world - just look at how nature is deteriorating! Disasters threaten us on many levels - in politics, finance and health.

However, it may still not be too late. The Lord asks us believers to truly take our religion seriously again. Many believers have become lukewarm. Yes, they still believe, but that is where it ends. They have only become passengers on the train to eternal life. The Lord wants us to truly put our shoulder to the wheel as active, working citizens of His Kingdom. He wants us to live out love in the way Jesus set the example for us. And our service to the Lord should not just be about living out traditions, but it should come honestly and deeply from the heart. Do it now!

Prayer:

Lord, I have become lukewarm in my service to You recently. Please give me the strength

and zeal to truly serve You with all my heart!

Drought

Joel 1:15-20

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

It was sometime in the early '90's when we decided to take a holiday in September to our bush house in Marloth Park in the Lowveld. We left Ballito early in the morning so we could reach the Swaziland border post by 7:30AM. As soon as we entered Swaziland, I could tell things were grim. The many cattle and donkeys we encountered along the road had their ribs prominently sticking through their skin - some looked like living skeletons. Very soon, we saw the reason - there was no greenery to be seen anywhere. There wasn't even anything dry for the poor creatures to eat. In some places it was just bare red ground without any plant cover.

Later we drove through an area where the sugar cane fields usually stood lush. Even here, the scorching drought showed its cruel

face as the cane was pale and shrivelled. Swaziland was suffering under a drought that was bringing the poor country to it's knees. I did not enjoy the ride - it was all depressing!

When we finally reached Border Gate, the border post on the other side, in the afternoon, I sighed with relief. But it was so hot that even the crows were yawning. The last few kilometers to Marloth Park were no less depressing as the drought had taken its toll here too. Emaciated cattle were chewing on plastic bags in one of the impoverished villages where dirty children played in the dust.

Finally, we arrived in the "paradise" of Marloth Park. My heart sank because where it should have been lush and green by this time of year after the first spring rains, everywhere was dry and parched. A group of skinny impalas stared at us with dull eyes, lacking any zest for life. There was nothing left to live for because the dried-out thorn bushes stood over the baked red earth

without a blade of grass in sight. We drove past the carcass of an impala that had perished.

I felt sick.

Where we usually felt excited to unpack and enjoy nature with a beer in hand, this time it was a heavy burden to unpack the car. I sighed deeply as the scorching Selati wind took my breath away. That night, even the crackling old hardwood fire was not much comfort. The nightjar did not sing, and the lion did not roar. It was just the hyena whose mournful wail echoed through the clutching thorny claws of the sickle bush.

The next morning was already red-hot shortly after the fiery red sun's rays began to burn through the bare branches. By noon it was unbearable. "Something has to happen..." we said to each other. My heartfelt prayer went out to the poor animals suffering so terribly. Not far from the house something had died - I could smell death...

And then it happened: The scorching wind

suddenly died down and a deathly silence descended over the bush. There wasn't even a single bird call. Then a single white cloud appeared on the horizon, "as big as a man's fist." Within minutes it grew into a heavy cloud bank. The wind started up very suddenly, but this time from the southeast. And then I knew: this afternoon the big rain will come! Yes, after this afternoon the bush will come to life again!

In Joel 1:16-20, the prophet almost word-for-word describes the scene we experienced above. "The day of the Lord is near," he begins this passage, "it is a day of destruction, it comes from the Almighty." He wants to emphasize the seriousness of God's coming judgment over His people. On that day, God will intervene powerfully in the existence of His people who do not want to serve Him sincerely.

A terrible famine will strike the people so that joy and gladness will completely vanish from their worship.

Joel does not stand aloof from the terrible judgment that will strike the people and he then calls on God for deliverance on behalf of the people. He does not just preach to the people but aligns himself with them and sets an example by praying for deliverance himself.

The question is whether God will listen to his prayer and all the prayers that rise from the people. Will the Lord ever be merciful to them and give them deliverance?

When you and I pray to the Lord, it often feels as if the Lord does not listen to our prayers. Has the Lord forgotten about us? Will He ever give us deliverance?

From personal experience, I can say today that we should not lose hope! The Lord listens with great compassion to our prayers. Yes, sometimes He does not give the deliverance we ask for, but then we must realize that He has a much greater purpose with the things that happen to us and that we often see God's great plan when we look

back and know that it had to happen this way!

Prayer:

Lord, when times are tough for me, I ask that You calm me so that Your plan can be fulfilled!

The Day of the Lord

Joel 2:1-11

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

In the previous devotional I described the terrible drought in the Lowveld. After the scorching day, where the withering wind had choked the breath out of me, came an ominous calm. The Lowveld waited with bated breath for what was to follow.

At first, it was a small white cloud but then it began to grow until there was a cauldron of swirling clouds on the horizon that became darker and darker. The wind began to pick up, creating choking dust devils. There was not an animal or bird in sight; all were hiding. Within half an hour the sun was veiled behind the angry clouds that churned and boiled. Lightning began to pierce the pitch-black clouds in the distance, as if they were being torn apart.

A sinister rumbling filled the atmosphere.

Suddenly, gusts of wind from all directions began to whip the bare trees' branches wildly. One of the patio chairs lost its grip on the ground and tumbled into the thorn bushes. An ear-splitting thunderclap made me utter a curse word in fright. A suffocating darkness descended upon us and it felt like night!

Then everything happened at once. Lightning bolt after lightning bolt split the sky. Terrifying thunderclaps gripped my heart with fear. A few large raindrops splattered in the powdery dust. We fled into the house to escape the devastating storm. Dust sifted down on us from the thatched roof, torn loose by the howling wind. Large hailstones struck the bare, rocky ground like bullets. I covered my ears to shut out the terrible noise, but it was no use because I felt the heart-wrenching thunder through my body - through my entire being!

Half an hour later it was all over. We went out to assess the damage. Broken branches

were scattered everywhere. Dry branches had been violently torn from trees and smashed to pieces. Our laundry, which had been hanging on the line, was in a mess - some pieces hung shredded somewhere in the veldt on thorn bushes. There had not been time to think about the laundry. It looked as if a hurricane had hit the bush!

But I wanted to cry with frustration because the few drops that fell had barely dampened the parched ground. When will there ever be relief?

The prophet writes in Joel 2:1-2 that the watchmen on the walls should blow their trumpets because danger is upon them. The day of the Lord is near - a dark day of terror. The prophet uses the image of an army to describe the coming of the locust swarms - terrifying, fearsome! They will devour everything before them like fire. It will sound like the gallop of thousands of war horses on command. It will roar like chariots during a great battle. Crackling, rumbling - a great

noise - this unstoppable force of God will surge forward, thundering over the mountain tops. They will overrun the city and even seep through windows into houses.

So terrifying is this invasion that the whole cosmos, the earth, heaven, sun, moon, and stars tremble in fear. The sun and moon become dark and the stars lose their brightness.

Then comes the climax of this passage where Joel cries out so that his voice echoes through the valleys of the land: It is the Lord who leads this army. He is personally the Commander. This immense army of His does exactly what He commands. They are irresistibly strong!

The passage concludes with Joel's question: "Indeed, the day of the Lord is great and terrible - who can endure it?" (v. 11)

Today, as we read this terrifying part, we must realize that our people have strayed just as far from God as Israel did in ancient times. It is purely incomprehensible grace

that God has not yet unleashed His wrath upon our people. But then we know that He is a God of love and grace because if we read the next verse (v. 12), we see His infinite mercy and that He merely asks that we return to Him. We will discuss this further in the next devotional, God willing.

The big thing now, however, is that as a believer, I should not merely point fingers at all the "bad" people in our country. Instead, I need to introspect and examine my own life under a magnifying glass. Am I truly living as the Lord asks of me? Is my love perhaps just a ritual?

We must also view this passage from a New Testament perspective in God's salvation through Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, God's punishment came through war and natural disasters. In the New Testament, Jesus received God's punishment, and now His punishment is complete. We cannot consider disasters and adversity as God's

punishment. The Old Testament day of the Lord is, in New Testament terms, the Second Coming and final judgement. For believers, however, it is the final confirmation of our acquittal. Today, we can only read the Old Testament through the lens of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Lord, please show me where my life falls short and help me to correct it!

Grace

Joel 2:12-17

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

The devastating storm has disfigured my beloved Lowveld. First, the dreadful drought that withered every blade of grass and leaf and then, after everything was gone, came the terrifying storm. I sat on the porch with my eyes closed. My soul pleaded to the Lord. I opened my heart to God. And then I knew: my God is gracious - He will provide relief in His time!

The next day, clouds gathered from the east - heavy, pregnant clouds, fed by the mighty Indian Ocean. They came and poured their heavy load of refreshment over the Lowveld. They drenched the earth with life-giving, soothing, cool water. The listless impalas suddenly came to life and leapt and danced and kicked and frolicked and ran around wildly!

I felt my spirits leap with the impalas and I burst out laughing. My God is great and loving and gracious! Between the rain showers, I heard the guinea fowls chattering loudly. The birds came back to life and sang their songs of praise exuberantly. Life is a song! The earth smelled clean and fresh. The dust washed off the trees and shrubs and suddenly it looked as if they had new life again. Everything rejoiced to the glory of God. The veldt was grateful!

The great rain has passed, and now a deep concern gnaws at my heart - was it perhaps too late? Will grass ever grow again from this dead soil? Everything is gone - not a blade of grass in sight. Day after day, I watch the ground - hoping to see a hint of green again. My heart aches for the poor animals. But they look positive and I can't understand it! Then it dawns on me - they have hope! The promise of new life has been given to them, and they place all their hope in it. And that's why they can still have a spring in their step and be exuberant in a world that looks like it

will never bring forth life. They know their deliverance is a reality!

Barely a week after the rain, we sit on the porch early one morning with a steaming cup of coffee. Something is different, but I can't put my finger on it. Then I notice it: the red earth has a green hue this morning! I put my cup down and run into the veldt. I fall to my knees and before my eyes is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen - through fine cracks in the red soil, thousands of fragile green leaf tips are pushing through. Tears of gratitude stream down my cheeks.

Barely two days later, the entire Lowveld is covered with a velvety green carpet of grass. God has kept His promise! The impalas' hope was certainly not in vain. He is gracious, beyond description indeed!

After Joel's description of the terrible devastation, he begins verse 12 with the soothing, life-giving words: "Yet even now, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning!" In verse 13, Joel

comforts: “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.”

Are these not the most wonderful words ever for any sinner? If I stand guilty before the Lord and He tells me that He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and that He totally forgives me?

In the previous devotional, Joel instructed the watchmen on the walls to blow the trumpets to announce the impending danger. Now they are again instructed to blow the trumpets. This time, however, it is different; now they must blow to call the whole congregation together. The entire people must gather, even the children and the nursing babies. Everyone must be consecrated to the Lord. Even those who do not want to be disturbed, the bridegroom and bride in their honeymoon chamber!

The Old Testament sometimes gives us the impression that the Lord is a God of

punishment. Yet we see here, as in many other parts of the Old Testament, that the opposite is true and that He is a God of grace and forgiveness. If the people are willing to turn to Him, He is willing to set aside the punishment. Therefore, the prophet calls the people to repentance and fasting. It is a priority for the whole people and they must drop everything and gather as one!

The Lord is willing to forgive you and me again and again and again and show us grace and an abundance of love. But He also asks us to follow and serve Him unconditionally. He asks us to love Him above all with all our heart, soul and mind. This love should not just be lip service but must come deep from the heart. It means that we must have a living relationship with Jesus. A living relationship means there will be living communication and that our love will translate into actions. Practical love means that we will cherish God's creation and that we will love our fellow-believers and our fellow-humans - even our enemies - deeply

and live out that love practically toward them.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your great grace, despite my many sins. Lord, forgive me and help me to fully serve and love You!

God is Compassionate

Joel 2:18-27

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

Three months after the first drought was broken in the Lowveld, we return for a visit. As we drive into Marloth Park, I barely recognise the place. Where there was only red soil three months ago, there is now lush, green, waving grass. The marula trees are heavily laden with fruit and beneath them lies a yellow carpet of ripe marulas. Their sweet fragrance drifts in the air. With a song in my heart, we drive the dirt road to our bush house. It's steaming hot but the dense, lush green forest makes it feel as though we are right in Paradise!

Our driveway is so overgrown that we can barely reach the house. We unpack as quickly as we can and settle comfortably on the veranda, trying to take in all the beauty. Everything is so different from the last time

we were here. I fill my lungs with the delightful scents of the bush. In my heart, there is a song of gratitude for the Lord has once again been abundantly gracious to us. He has provided in abundance, far more than we asked for!

By the time the sun slips behind the thorn trees, our cosy fire is already crackling, spreading its flickering glow among the dense bushes. Down by the river, the old baboon struggles to quieten his rowdy family in the fig tree, which is bursting with ripe, juicy figs. Soon, the roar of a lion echoes through the refreshing night air. A hyena responds with a melodious call, followed by a hippo's hearty laughter in the river, full of contentment. A little duiker comes to visit us on the edge of the firelight. God is gracious. He is great. He is loving!

When we humble ourselves before the Lord and repent of our sins, He responds to our contrition. He sends prosperity again - so Joel says. For Israel, he says, there will be

corn and wine again - more than enough. They will no longer be a mockery among the nations and the Lord will destroy their arrogant enemy! (v.20)

Joel excitedly sings his hymn of praise, indirectly telling the people not to be afraid by directing his praise to nature, which seems devastated. The fields should rejoice with joy and the cattle should leap with sheer exuberance for the Lord makes the pasture green and lush. It is all a great miracle! In my mind's eye, I see the young calves leaping playfully, running in circles and spinning around - everyone is elated about the abundance God provides. He sings to the fruit trees - the fig trees stand full, laden with wonderfully sweet, plump figs. And the vineyards, loaded with bunches and bunches of exquisite grapes, ready for harvest. One can hardly believe that everything was recently consumed by devastating locust swarms. It can only be a miracle of God that such things can be accomplished! (v. 21, 22)

Therefore, Joel speaks to the inhabitants of the land: the people of Zion must rejoice and exult in the Lord. They must overflow with joy, for the Lord will open the floodgates of heaven and pour down a torrent of rain upon them as a sign of His wonderful righteousness. Their threshing floors will be heaped with abundant corn and their wine presses will overflow with delightful wine. Streams of golden yellow olive oil will fill the jars at the olive press. Where the locust swarms and caterpillars have sown destruction, the Lord will now compensate in abundance! (v. 23-26)

I already see the Israelites dancing and singing joyfully with flutes and lyres and tambourines. They praise and glorify the Lord for He is gracious and good and He has forgiven all their iniquities - their stubbornness and even the fact that they followed other gods. But they have turned around and now worship the Lord, the God who created everything - they worship Him from the heart and not just with rituals.

The picture looks very bleak for our beautiful country South Africa. Strikes, uprisings, corruption and load shedding threaten to destroy our economy. Climate change causes devastating floods and droughts. Farm murders, domestic violence, gang violence, etc., grip our hearts with fear!

The Lord wants us to serve Him again with full commitment. Not just rituals like going to church and giving tithes but that our service will come deeply from the heart. That when we march together to church, our hearts and souls will be part of the worship service. That our service to the Lord will be the practical living out of love in all areas of life.

Would the Lord then not perhaps let the miracle happen and transform the looming dangers into positive things? Might He not give job satisfaction and even joy in the workplace where there is now discontent and strikes? Might He not transform the uprisings into people using their energy in community service? Might He then not miraculously

restore nature - after all, He created it?

Prayer:

Lord, I confess this morning that our country has strayed far from You. I plead, Lord, that You would let a miracle happen so that our people may serve You again with devotion!

Vision of the Future

Joel 2:28-32

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

The night by the crackling fire in the bush is heavenly beautiful and the night sounds are like an angel choir. Somewhere by a pool, a chorus of frogs hums their love song to the pretty lady frogs. A solitary scops owl softly coo's his heart's longing and a nightjar prays fervently: "Oh Lord, deliver us!"

I recline comfortably in my chair and say, "Thank you, Lord..." because everything is heavenly. The cool night air washes over my spirit, and I marvel at the millions upon millions of stars that cover the sky. I search for a few familiar landmarks in the heavens, but it's difficult because in this pure air there are many more stars than you can usually see.

"Aaaa, there it is!" I point out to Mosbolletjie, "the Southern Cross!" Gradually the stars start to fall into place for me. To the left of the

Southern Cross are two bright stars, Alpha Centauri and Beta Centauri. The first one is the closest star to us, except for the sun which is also a star of course. It is about 4.4 light years away from us. So I am looking four years back in history when I look at it. Its neighbour, Beta Centauri, is 390 light years away from us. This means that what I now see there actually happened 390 years ago, the time when Jan van Riebeeck set foot on Cape soil for the first time. (By the way, Beta Centauri, one of the supergiants, is actually a triple star - three stars orbiting each other.)

My mind struggles to process this because I am simultaneously looking 4 years and 390 years into the past!

A lion roars deeply and loudly from the direction of the river, pulling me back to the present.

Joel, the prophet, also becomes enraptured with time, but the big difference is that he does not look into the past but into the future. First, it is just a few hundred years that he sees into the future and then his vision jumps

a few thousand years further, to the end of times.

Wonderful things Joel sees happening there! When he begins to write, his thoughts fly a full 500 years into the future, to a wonderful day, not long after Jesus' ascension. "I will pour out my Spirit on all people," Joel prophesies about the events of Pentecost.

Through the ages, many people have longed for the wonderful presence of God. Only a few people were ever in that indescribably privileged position to personally encounter God. Abraham was one such privileged person, as was Moses, who could talk with God as with a Friend.

Later, the Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of God's presence. When the temple was built, people came here to worship and seek God's face because the ark was here and so was God's presence.

The Holy Spirit was, of course, always there and God empowered certain chosen people through His Spirit. There were kings,

prophets and judges in whom the Holy Spirit worked and they acted powerfully. These people performed wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit!

Now Joel makes a very controversial statement - that there will come a day when the Holy Spirit will not only be in such very privileged people but will come upon everyone. It doesn't matter if they are men or women or children, and it doesn't matter how old or young they are or if they are rich or poor. And the most controversial of all, it won't matter if they are Jews or not!

And then it happens exactly like that on Pentecost, 500 years later. When it happens, Peter remembers precisely what Joel wrote at that time, and he explains to the bewildered people witnessing these events that Joel predicted everything in detail. (Acts 2:16)

Today, 2000 years later, the Holy Spirit is still in every believer and He gives us all the strength and wisdom we need if we just allow Him to do so.

But Joel simultaneously also sees into the distant future, when the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” comes. This naturally refers to the final Judgment Day at the second coming of Christ. It will indeed be a “dreadful” day for everyone who has not accepted God’s promises. But for everyone who believes, it will be precisely the opposite - a day of deliverance for everyone who believes. “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” Joel writes in verse 32. In the New Testament context, this means that everyone who believes in Jesus as Saviour will experience this wonderful salvation from God. For those who do not believe, however, it will be a day of sorrow, fear and terror because they have rejected God!

The Lord teaches His people that when He intervenes, He changes everything for those who believe in Him. He changes judgment to deliverance and He makes the oppressed the victors! Yes, this is the God we serve - we can put all our trust in Him. Let us serve and

trust Him with our whole being!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you very much for the wonderful promises from Your Holy Word. Thank you for Your Holy Spirit and thank you for that last day that we can look forward to with great joy!

The Terrible Day of the Lord

Joel 3:1-17

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Day by day our hearts shrink when we hear about the terrible things nations do against believers. Extremists in Muslim countries cannot tolerate Christian believers. We see this happening in African countries, where many Christians are killed for their faith and we see it even worse in some Arab countries. Now I must quickly add that not all Muslims are hateful towards Christians; the majority are tolerant. However, there are extremists, as there are among Christians and they get all the attention and give both faiths a bad name!

Such things don't happen in our own country, do they.....? Really.....?

A young woman with the beautiful Muslim name of Fatima once told me her story. She grew up in a Muslim community in Johannesburg - her family were all Muslims.

Then, one day, she heard the Gospel of Jesus' salvation. She was deeply convinced that this was the only truth and she gave her heart to Jesus. It was wonderful to finally be freed from sin and have eternal life!

But it was not that simple, because with this step she renounced her Muslim faith. Her family threatened her to abandon her "foolishness" and give up that "false" faith, but she didn't want to - she couldn't! For the first time in her life, she had experienced something truly precious!

Her family could not endure this "disgusting" thing she had done and she was thrown out of the house and left to fend for herself. But they still didn't let her go her way. Fatima received many threats, not only from her family whose name she had brought into disrepute, but also from all her friends and the entire Muslim community. When she still refused to give up, she was declared an outlaw. Anyone could kill her summarily!

She fled from Johannesburg to Durban, where she eventually ended up at a mission

station where she could live out her faith and calling. But she still received many death threats and her life was never safe. And this in a "Christian" country!

We often hear the question: "But doesn't the Lord see the injustice?" Sometimes it seems to us as if these people who oppress and persecute believers are prospering. Does the Lord ever take notice of their atrocities?

Joel answers these troubling questions in 3:1-17, when he speaks about the "terrible day of the Lord," the second coming of Jesus. On that day all these nations will be judged. He will gather all the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This name has great significance - Jehoshaphat means "The Lord judges," thus the Valley of Jehoshaphat is "the place where the Lord judges."

It will take the form of a court case where charges are brought against all unbelievers. The crimes of these nations were against God's people and were therefore essentially against God Himself. It was actually a violation of God's property because Israel

belongs to the Lord. But it goes much further than just Israel, because everyone who is a believer belongs to the Lord, so every nation that persecutes Christians will come under God's judgment.

The charges brought against the nations, according to Joel, are that they scattered Israel. Moreover, they took the land. The land does not belong to Israel but to God, so they are robbing God! God's people were regarded so lowly that they were simply made slaves. They thus attempted to humiliate God!

Ultimately, the Lord somewhat mockingly tells these mighty nations to prepare themselves and come to make war against Him. All the "brave" men should march up against Him. They can come with all their weapons and they better take their plough-shares and make swords out of them so that there will be enough weapons, and from their pruning hooks they should make spears because they will need them all!

Who can stand against the Lord, the

Almighty? Do these mighty nations really think they can defeat the Lord? None of them takes the Lord seriously, and none takes into account the "terrible day of the Lord," when God will destroy them all and cast them into damnation!

And the believers? "The Lord is a refuge for His people, a stronghold for Israel." (Joel 3:16). Today we know that this prediction for the Israelites is just as applicable to me and you, the believing children of God, because we are His Israel! "Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your God!" says the Lord. (v. 17)

You and I can be at peace today about all these unholy things going on in the world. The Lord is fully aware of them and He will intervene at precisely the right time. None of the injustice will ever go unpunished.

But the greatest news of all is that you and I are safe in the Lord and that the evil forces cannot rob us of the wonderful gift of eternal life! God has indeed promised it to us!

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that you have given me eternal life out of your great mercy!

Fountain of Living Water

Joel 3:18-21

[View this devotion on Youtube](#)

I am excited as I put on my walking shoes early in the morning, just after dawn. My hands tremble slightly from pure excitement. As I begin to walk through the veldt from the little river, the lush grass is soaked with dew. I fill my lungs deeply with the wonderful fresh air.

Forty years have passed since I was last here, on the farm where I grew up near Waterval Boven. I now want to explore the farm – to see all the places I remember from my childhood – the old stone kraal, the rocky hill with its delicious wild fruits. And of course, that fountain with its delightful, sweet water!

Soon I find the kraal where we used to pen the cattle every evening. Grandpa had built the kraal himself – using stones from the field as building blocks, without a trace of cement. As neatly as they were packed back then, the

old kraal still stands – truly a masterpiece!

I tackle the rocky hill and soon start to pant, as I am not as fit anymore. Here I used to run out as a child without ever getting tired. Tears come to my eyes as I look again at the beautiful stones that artistically decorate the hill – sandstone rocks breathtakingly sculpted by wind and weather into all imaginable shapes. And the wild fruit trees are still there. Oh, how I stuffed myself with those delicious fruits!

When I reach the top, I sit on a flat rock and drink in the landscape below me. There our old farmhouse still stands, and across the little river, the familiar Elandskrans. Just a bit below me, the fountain bubbles out from under a massive rock, but now it is overgrown with trees and dense bushes.....

My thoughts wander far back – forty, fifty years. I am once again the lively little boy clambering around in the mountains. I lie flat on my stomach where the fountain bubbles out and slurp up the delicious water. It is ice cold, wonderfully sweet and refreshing. It

ripples down the hill in a stream fringed with lush green water plants.

Further down the stream feeds a series of dams teeming with yellowfish, tilapia and trout. And then there are the orchards with the most delicious juicy fruits to choose from. And rich vegetable gardens, brimming with pure farm wholesomeness. The bubbling fountain gives life to everything on the farm before it flows into the little river. In turn, it eventually flows into the great Crocodile River, giving life to thousands of people and animals, even in the Kruger National Park.

The last verses of Joel are actually the highlight of the book. The presence of the Lord in Zion leads to all sorts of changes. Where the land once suffered under a series of locust plagues and severe drought, it now literally bursts at the seams. The land produces an abundance with great fertility. Where there were only dry, barren ditches, there will now be healing water flowing.

Joel then uses the image of a fountain that bubbles from the house of the Lord and

waters the Valley of Shittim. We find the same image of the river that springs from Eden and waters the garden (Gen. 2:10). Eden then becomes the symbol of fertility and prosperity because it is God's garden and there is full harmony between God, man and nature. The same image is also used in Ezekiel 47, where water flows from the temple. It causes lush green trees along the stream and eventually flows into the Dead Sea, at such a breathtaking rate that the bitter-salty water of the Dead Sea becomes fresh. Zechariah 14 uses the same image and in Revelation 22 the image is repeated again, where the crystal-clear stream of water flows from the throne of God.

What does all this mean? The core of the passage is encapsulated in verse 21 where it is implicated that Israel's sins are forgiven. What a beautiful image that the crystal-clear, clean, fresh, life-giving water has washed God's people clean of their sins?

And no, it definitely does not only apply to Israel – it is also for you and me, the

believers, the children (people) of God. Today we, as believers, can just shout out in gratitude that God has forgiven all our sins and that we can stand before Him as clean-washed, purified children.

Is this not reason enough to motivate us to give our entire lives into His hands and live a jubilant life of gratitude that will make Him happy?

Dear reader, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for working through the book of Joel with me. It was not an easy book but ultimately it was well worth it. The comfort from the book has once again warmed my heart for the Lord!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this beautiful book. It has touched my heart and made me think deeply about my own life again. Sometimes you spoke to me harshly from the book. Thank you that I can once again cling to Your wonderful promises!

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