

Glimpses of the Prophets.

Joel.

PROF. J. R. SAMFREY, D. D.

Many men of the different periods of the history of Israel bore the name Joel. All that we know of Joel the prophet is gleaned from the roll of his prophecies, and that is little indeed. He was the son of Pethuel, a man otherwise unknown to us. From a study of the prophecies of Joel we learn that he was almost certainly a Judean and an inhabitant of Jerusalem. He was well acquainted with the services of Jehovah's temple. It is impossible to read his prophecies and not be impressed with his culture and literary skill. His book is a fine specimen of pure classic Hebrew. His outlook on the nations was broad, and his grasp of the principles of the divine government was firm and strong.

DATE OF JOEL.

Nowhere in the Scriptures are we definitely informed as to the time when Joel lived and prophesied. The date of his prophecy becomes, therefore, purely a question of literary and historical criticism. This department of research, in contrast with textual or lower criticism, has been rather unfortunately called Higher Criticism. Many questions in the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament have decided theological bearings, but the date of Joel has little to do with debated questions in theology. One may be a decided conservative, and hold that Joel is one of the latest of the Old Testament prophets, or a radical critic, and accept the early date of Joel. The arguments in favor of a very early date for Joel are stated in an admirable manner by Prof. Kirkpatrick in "The Doctrine of the Prophets." Prof. Driver argues strongly for a late date in his excellent short commentary on Joel and Amos. Orell and Kirkpatrick seem to this writer to have the best of the argument, hence we locate Joel in the reign of Joash of Judah, about 830 B. C., according to the revised chronology. During the minority of Joash the good priest Jehoiada directed Judah's policy. At such a time it would be natural to appeal to the priests to lead the people back to Jehovah. The absence of allusion to any king in Judah would be easy to account for. It seems more likely also that Amos quotes from Joel than to suppose that Joel is quoting from Amos for the phrases in common seem more thoroughly imbedded in the context in Joel. Amos takes as his text a quotation from Joel. Compare Joel 3:16 with Amos 1:2.

Let us open the prophetic roll and read for ourselves. (The purpose of this series of studies in the prophets will not be accomplished unless the men and women who have the goodness to follow it are induced thereby to read afresh the prophetic scriptures. That is indeed a commendation devoutly to be desired.)

TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION BY LOCUSTS AND DROUGHT

Read the first chapter of Joel and note how terrible the distress in Judah must have been. Locusts have swept over the country and barked the very trees of the field. All the crops have been destroyed. Wine and oil, wheat and barley, vine and fig-tree have been involved in one common ruin. It is time for the ministers of God to gird themselves with sack-cloth and assemble the people of the land in the temple of Jehovah to entreat his mercy. A terrible drought has followed on the heels of the locusts. The beasts of the field pant in mute appeal to God.

This picture seems clearly to refer to a literal visitation of locusts and drought in Judah.

YET MORE TERRIBLE VISITATION AT HAND.

The prophet sounds an alarm in Zion, announcing that "the day of Jehovah" is at hand. This significant phrase always points to some signal manifestation of the justice of God. Joel pictures it as a day of darkness. Jehovah has a mighty army on the point of invading the land. He likens the locusts to horsemen and their noise to the rattling of chariots or the crackling of fire in a stubble-field. They advance in serried ranks, each one moving forward in his own path, and no weapons can check their course.

CALL TO FASTING AND PRAYER.

Hear the words of this earnest prophet as he addresses the people of Jerusalem: "Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and repenteth him of evil" (Joel 2:12, 13). Joel emphasizes the element of sorrow in repentance. It is evident that he does not overlook that change of mind and reformation of life which must be included in all genuine repentance. While calling upon the people to assume the outward garb of mourning, he points out clearly that God wishes the heart to be rent in deep penitence rather than the garments.

JEHOVAH HAS PITY ON HIS PEOPLE.

Evidently Joel's call to prayer did not go unheeded. The priests assembled the people before the temple and entreated the favor of Jehovah. Joel 2:18 is the divid-

ing line between threat and promise. The terrible scourge of locusts and drought brought the people to repentance and reformation of life. Joel had encouraged them to trust in the mercy of their God. "Then was Jehovah jealous for his land, and had pity on his people." This verse is to be interpreted as a historical statement. Joel's ministry was not in vain.

REMOVAL OF THE ARMY OF LOCUSTS.

Joel now predicts that Jehovah will take away the devastating army and scatter the locusts east and west. Both the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea are covered with the departing pests. The pastures and the trees revive again, rains will be given for their season, both the former rain and the latter rain. Threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. Prosperity shall be seen on every hand, and will be a proof that Jehovah is in the midst of Israel.

OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT OF JEHOVAH

Temporal prosperity is not enough. Jehovah is going to pour out in the coming time his Spirit upon all flesh. This spiritual refreshing will stand in striking contrast with the terrible drought of the past. The Spirit will be given in such profusion that even slaves will receive this marvelous gift. All classes of society are to share in this great blessing, and deliverance shall come to everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah.

Every reader of the New Testament knows that Peter at Pentecost claimed the supernatural events of that day as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel. No other day in history witnessed such a glorious fulfillment of the prophet's words. At the same time it is well to remember that the prophecy is applicable to the new dispensation as a whole, and had repeated fulfillment.

HEATHEN NATIONS TO BE JUDGED

Judah and Jerusalem were in danger not only from locust and drought, but also from nations, many of whom broke into the country and carried away captives to be sold into slavery. Jehovah promises protection to his people against invaders.

Joel calls upon heathen powers to arm themselves and come into the land of Judah. It will fare with them as with the enemies from the East in the days of Jehoshaphat, when the heathen invaders destroyed each other. Jehovah will roar from Zion against his foes, and will lay waste the lands which have vexed his people.

Isaiah's vision goes farther and predicts the conversion of heathen peoples to Jehovah. It was not given to Joel to make a complete program of Jehovah's dealings with the Gentiles.

JEHOVAH'S PEOPLE TO BE DELIVERED.

"Jehovah will be a refuge unto his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel." Like many other prophets, Joel pictures physical nature as being in sympathy with Jehovah's purpose to bless his people: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and the brooks of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of Jehovah, and shall water the valley of acacias." All prophecy, both in the Old Testament and the New, looks forward to the final victory of the saints over the foes of God's reign. The kingdom of God will prevail over all opposition, and the people of God will dwell in quietness and safety under the protecting presence of Jehovah.—Ex.

Answering Our Own Prayers.

BY REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D.

It is a mistake to dismiss our petitions with an "Amen," or leave them behind us when we close the closet-door. Let us carry them out to our offices, to our workshops, to our round of household duties. Let us bind them like a rosary upon our necks to be our constant meditation. Let us labor all day long for their fulfillment. Earnestness and faith while at the mercy-seat are not enough, they must be supplemented by an honest effort to realize our supplications, with the help of God.

Kneel down to offer your petitions with importunate confidence; and then rise up to strive for their fulfillment. Pray for the blessing as zealously and trustfully as though it must come direct from God; and then work for the blessing as though it all depended on yourself. This is both philosophy and common sense. Prayer and work go arm in arm. The match was made in heaven. What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.

It is well to look heavenward with a feeling of dependence; but they are fools who fold their hands and open their mouths like the Jews at Iabraham, and expect the clouds to drop manna free and plentiful as hoar-frost.

It is well to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread;" but this does not exempt us from the obligation of that old decree, "Thou shalt eat thy bread by the sweat of thy brow."

It is well to wait on the Lord for his tender mercies; but blessed is that servant who shall be found waiting, not in his bed, but in the vineyard with sleeves rolled up and perspiration on his face.

God helps those who help themselves. And if we consider the matter we shall be surprised to see how

often we are able to answer our own prayers. Indeed, for the most part, here is the way God grants our petitions. Instead of giving us the blessing, he gives us the wherewithal to gain it ourselves. You ask for food. He does not fill your basket with baked loaves, but he gives you strength to labor for a livelihood.

On a winter's night a benevolent man sits by his fire-side. The winds are whistling and the storm is fierce without. In a lull of the tempest he hears the wail of distress. He bends his head to listen more intently; and the cry is repeated. Then he settles back into his comfortable chair, shuts his eyes, clasps his hands and murmurs fervently, "God help the hungry, homeless poor." If the winds could cease their whistling this man in his easy chair might hear a still smaller voice, "I hate thine easy compassion, I abhor thine indolent prayer!" Let him open his door and venture forth into the stormy night, lend a hand to the poor creature who crouches under his eaves wringing her thin blue fingers, and then God will have helped the hungry and homeless poor; his prayer will have been answered and, by the grace of God, he will have answered it himself.

Let us not abate one jot or tittle of our "voice of supplication," but stimulate ourselves to more earnest effort for the acquisition of our own desires. Keep on praying for the miserable; but be sure you leave no stone unturned to relieve their misery. Keep on praying for the sick, but go to their bedsides, relieve their needs and shrive their troubled souls. Go on praying for the conversion of your children, but use the voice which God has given you to warn them of the wrath to come and the hand which he has given you to lead them to Christ. Go on praying for the success of your pastor, but see to it, meanwhile, that his efforts are supported and supplemented by your cordial help and sympathy, and there will be no doubt of his success. So, in every case, if we shall follow the prayer of faith with corresponding effort, God will satisfy us with his favor.—Ex.

Genesis—A Devotional Study.

BY REV. J. W. WREDD, D. D.

Genesis is rightly called the "book of beginnings." It tells the beginning of light, of life, of suns, moons, stars, of land and sea, of trees and vegetation, of the fish of the sea and the fowls of the air, of the beasts of the field. And presently of that to which all else tended, the creation of man. Then come other beginnings—beginning of the day's work, beginning of Sabbath rest, beginning of communion with God in the cool of the day. Alas! the beginning of intercourse with Satan. Here swiftly come doubt, and sin, and death, and all the trains of evils that follow upon disobedience to God. Beginning, forthwith, of judgment, but, thank God, also of mercy, for God is good and he loves us still.

I want, however, that we should deary in Genesis, on a closer study, the beginning of soul life, and the intimation for each of us of what constitutes spiritual living.

There are nine great epochs of sacred history centering about the world's great men. Giving to each five hundred years, we have Adam, Jared, Enoch, Noah, Abram, Moser-David, Zerubbabel, Christ! More than half of these, it will be seen, fall under the sweep of Genesis, and the lesson of each and all is, Begin with God, or Get back to God. Men can not get along without God. We have tried it, and in every case failed. These five great worthies in succession teach the same truth: Start with God. Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abram and the fathers of Israel whose names follow in Genesis Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, giving with Noah and Abram, a fivefold terminal division to the Book, carry forward the thought. I must have God. I can not get along without my Father, God.

So I read my Genesis in the devouter atmosphere of my closet of prayer, alone with God. In each of the great characters I see something of the workings of my own soul and hear the pleading call of God. Adam, get back into the beginning with God; hear the voice calling in the thickets, "Adam, where art thou?" Enoch, walk with God and learn to keep step with the Eternal; it will not seem strange some day to wake up in Paradise. Noah, fear God and build an ark to the saving of thy house. So Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. In each the call is, Back to God, and to see things good in God. In him all is good. But in each case also we see the Spirit's lead and Christ's sweet guidance, taking the soul on and up to God the Father. Here may I come and be at peace. Thus find I mine own Genesis. Getting back to the beginning with God, lo, the morning stars are still singing, the sons of God are shouting for joy, and all is good!—Sel.

At a meeting in London lately Lady Henry Somerset, the great temperance worker, was absent through illness. The lady who took her place made this kindly but unexpected explanation: "Dear Lady Henry has been overworked; and we must, of course, be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."