

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
September 7, 2016

Joel 1:1–2:21. Devastation and hope.

Acts 7:1–53. Stephen’s address.

Job 18:1–21. Death illustrated by Bildad.

COMMENTS:

Joel 1:1–2:21. Joel opens up with the description of a severe locust plague which had swept over the land, destroying the agricultural produce on which both man and beast so heavily depended for survival. This disaster signaled an even worse calamity to come—the destructive day of the Lord. The magnitude and uniqueness of this event is illustrated with reference to many “generations”: your children, their children, and their children’s generation (**1:2-3**). Note all of those who are to mourn in light of the national disaster, **1:5-13**. The people were to reflect on this plague as a harbinger of the devastation promised in the coming Day of the Lord (**2:1-11**). In other words, now that he had their attention, Joel told the people to stop looking around at the locusts and to start looking ahead to the fulfillment of what the locust plague symbolized: the invasion of a fierce army from the north (**2:20**). After describing the devastating invasion of Israel, Joel calls for an assembly where God’s people would repent of their sins and seek the Lord’s help (**2:12-17**). The nation didn’t know when this invasion would occur, so the important thing was for them to turn to the Lord now. But they must be sincere. It’s easy to participate in a religious ceremony, tear your garments, and lament, but quite something else to humbly confess your sins and bring to God an honest heart (Matt. 15:8–9). As David, a man after God’s own heart, put it, “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Psa. 51:17).

Reflection: One thing that encourages us to return to the Lord is understanding His gracious character. Note what we find in Joel 2:13, “*So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.*” We find these expressions of God’s grace and mercy that go back to Moses’ meeting on Mt. Sinai, when he interceded for His sinful nation after Golden Calf and its gross sexual immorality (Ex. 34:6-7). God is always there with grace and mercy for anyone who wishes to return to Him. Given that Christ paid for all sins, there is absolutely nothing that stands in the way between us and God. What a blessing to know that He is always there with grace. If we have strayed and have not returned to Him, it is not because of Him. He stands ready with His matchless grace.

Acts 7:1–53. This is the longest recorded message in Acts, which shows the importance God attaches to it. Note how Stephen sets forth Israel’s past history and God’s past workings in order to vindicate Christianity. Note how he shows that Israel’s past provides objective history of her pattern of opposition to God’s plan and His spiritual leaders, an opposition that continues in the Jews standing before him (7:51-53). Instead of conforming to this truth in their minds and actions, they rejected Stephen as a messenger and attacked him (7:54-8:1). Note the sequence of evil, negative volition, that Stephen lays out in Jewish history: they misunderstood their own spiritual roots (7:1-8), they rejected God’s messengers (7:9-36), they disobeyed the Word of God (7:37-43), they rejected God’s tabernacle (7:44-50), and they constantly resisted the Holy Spirit and God’s truth (7:51-53).

Reflection: It is no accident that rejection of Truth on one level always extends to other levels. The pattern of negative Old Testament believers is reflected in negative Christians of today, for example, such a believer who does not care about God, will not care about the historical roots of Christianity, will reject pastor-teachers’ shepherding of them in the Word of God, will live in disobedience to the Word of God, will reject the local church, and live a life of constant grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit. They will do all of this by seeing the world and what it offers on some level a far greater good than God and His Word—just like the rebellious Jewish *believers* that Stephen outlines. Negative volition is like a cancer that continues to spread unless it is treated, and like with cancer, the sooner it is dealt with the better.

Job 18:1–21. In this section Bildad paints four vivid pictures of the death of the wicked: (1) A light put out—light is associated with life (18:5-6), (2) a traveler trapped—like a frightened traveler beset by dangers (18:7-10), (3) a criminal pursued—who gets weaker and weaker but still tries to keep going (18:11-15), and (4) a tree uprooted—which speaks of dying trees with dried up roots and dead branches (18:16-21).

Reflection: Though Bildad was talking to the wrong man and with the wrong motive, what he said about death should be taken seriously by every human being. Death is an enemy to be feared by all who are not prepared to die (1 Cor. 15:26), and the only way to be prepared is to trust Jesus Christ (John 5:24). For the Christian, death means going Home to the Father in Heaven (John 14:1–6), falling asleep on earth and waking up in Heaven (Acts 7:60; Phil. 1:21–23), entering into rest (Rev. 14:13), and moving into greater light (Prov. 4:18). None of the pictures Bildad used should be applied to those who have trusted the Lord for salvation. Those who know the Lord have no fear of going Home to be with Him—and finally into complete bliss, full of light and directly seeing the glory of the Lord face-to-face.

Advancing in the Lord by knowledge and by love,

Pastor Don