

Something bad is coming. Can it be avoided?

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Joel chapter 2:1-27

I remember a science class I took in high school. The teacher thought the whole class were not studying in the first few weeks. He threatened to give the whole class a final exam at the end that would for sure fail the whole class. That was bad news and that would be a terrible outcome at the end. However, he also gave a condition that would change the outcome. The condition was that any student that would study in a consistent way from then on by getting a grade of 80% or higher on every weekly quiz, that student would not need to take the final exam. That student could get an A or B+ depending on his average weekly quiz score. Guess what? That means one can avoid the bad outcome in the future by studying hard consistently, and thus can skip the harsh final exam. I changed my study behavior since then and studied hard in a consistent manner. At the end I got an A without the need to take the final exam. Book of Joel chapter 2 reminds me of that class situation.

Book of Joel is one of the minor prophet books. Joel is a prophet in Judah when there were Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom. Chapter one describes a locust plague, which the Israelites are familiar with, to give a warning on the Lord's message of judgment. Chapter two is about a near future plague, and chapter three is about the future when Jerusalem will be restored (Final Day of the Lord). Today, we study Chapter 2.

1) Bad event is coming

a. God was not pleased with the Israelites

The Israelites during the period of the Israel and Judah kingdom, the people committed sins such as idol worship. Chapter two starts with a description on a potential near term disaster like a locust plague as punishment.

b. The punishment will be dreadful and painful

God's punishment will come soon. It will be dreadful like a locust plague. It is also like a large and mighty army swept through the land. The destruction is like rushing through the area without stoppage. It will be painful for the people and nobody can endure it.

2) It can be avoided

God wants us to change our course of sinful acts. He wants us to repent.

a. God gives us a chance to repent

Verse 12 clearly stated that God gave them a chance to repent. "Even now" means now is at a very late stage and situation but acceptance of repentance is still available. Verse 13 stated God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. The same for us today. We should repent if we sin against God and away from Him.

b. God wants us to consecrate ourselves in our hearts and actions

Repentance includes fasting, weeping and mourning. Fasting indicates action of serious commitment and careful examination of wrongs. Weeping and mourning indicate emotionally regrets. The turnaround shall be absolute and consistent. The most important is the heart. Rend your heart and not your garments (Vs. 13). Take off the garment is the Jew's traditional way of showing remorse but that can just be an outward appearance. God want us to be committed to the change deep in our hearts, and show it in real actions.

3) Good ending if we change our course

a. God bless us when we change our course from sinful acts

Verse 19 states "I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations." God is faithful as stated in verse 23.

b. Respond to God

Verse 26 states "... you will praise the name of the Lord your God..." We need to submit to God, the Lord. We need to praise and thank Him. Verse 27 states "... I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; ..." It is very important that He is our only Lord. We shall never have any other idols.

God can withhold the punishment if we repent. The bad outcome can be avoided. In fact, God will bless us if we consistently follow Him. I can draw a parallel of the final judgement with my final class grade. I can skip the final exam that has many hard questions by turning around my bad behavior and consistently study hard, and the reward is having a good grade based on my changed behavior. The final judgement of God will be similar to my final grade based on weekly quiz. It would be a reward evaluation based on how one followed and served God after he/she has been repented (Rev. 22:12, II Tim. 4:8, James 1:12).

Are you away from God? Are you addicted such as with idol worship, illegal drug, smoking, gambling, immoral sex, compulsive spending, etc.? If you are, turn around. You don't want the type of punishment as described in Joel. God is merciful. He will guide you and bless you. After that, follow Him and serve Him consistently and you will be rewarded.