



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Joel 2:1-17

"Joel - Judah's Repentance and God's Repentance"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we again turn to Thee with anticipation and praise. We thank Thee for the words which the prophets have written guided by the Holy Spirit. And we praise Thee for the fact that we are able to read them so many hundreds of years after these messages were given. We also ask, Lord, that Thou wilt enable us to understand as we read and ponder the words that these great men have written. And may the messages that they gave to ancient Israel and Judah or the nations be messages that we ourselves also take to heart where applicable. Enable us Lord to have that relationship to Thee concerning which the prophets speak and concerning which they exhort the ancient peoples.

We pray Lord that if there are some in our midst who have not come to know Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Savior that through the word of God they may come to know him. And for those of us who do know him but may be drifting, may be indifferent to the claims of the word of God or who may have departed from the closeness of the relationship that we once enjoyed enable us Lord to truly repent as the prophets exhort and return to Thee. May the message tonight be a means to that end we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight as we turn to the 2nd chapter of the prophesy of Joel is “Judah’s Repentance and God’s Repentance.” Joel, we said last week in the first of our series of studies is in the prophecy of Joel is the prophet of the day of the Lord. He has also been called the prophet of Pentecost. He could also be called a prophet of repentance according to one of the students of the Minor Prophets. That subject, so important in the Bible, comes before us with great importance and significance and strength in the prophecy of Joel. The same message that Joel gave is the message that John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus gave. For example, when Joel says, “Return unto me saith Yahweh,” he is saying the identical thing with the exception of the time reference that John the Baptist said when he said, “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” Or when the Lord Jesus uttered that same message, “Repent for the kingdom of the heaven is at hand.” For the Old Testament word “to return” or “turn to me” is the word which is used in the New Testament in the Greek text of the New Testament under the form “repent”. So that repent in the New Testament is the equivalent of return to me in the Old Testament. So Joel is a prophet of repentance. “As a preacher of repentance, he takes high rank among the prophets of God,” one of the students of Joel has said.

Now he also writes not only of the repentance of men and of the need for it, but he is one of the prophets who speaks of the repentance of God; a baffling subject which seems to contradict the immutability of God. If God is really immutable and unchangeable how can it possibly be said that he repents or that he relents as we shall read in the New American Standard Bible rendering of the Hebrew verb translated repent in the other versions? How can we square this with the text in Malachi chapter 3 and verse 6 where the prophet writes, “For I, the Lord, change not; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” How can we say that God is immutable that he does not change when we read in the prophets of the possibility of God repenting? Does not that mean that he does change?

Well, that’s one of the great questions that come before us tonight. Let me review just very briefly the argument that Joel’s prophecy has to this point. He writes of a vast locust plague that has come or is soon to come, and it is to come to Judah. But he describes it in language that is related to the eschatological day of the Jehovah or day of Yahweh; the day that includes the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus to the earth and the events that immediately precede that. In fact, as we shall see later when we study the day of the Lord in this book, it is a day which includes not only the Second Advent and the concomitant events but seems also in some contexts to stretch out through the millennial day so that the day of the Lord is a day that is characterized by judgment, by divine advent, and also by the kingdom that follows.

Evidentially, this plague was regarded by the Prophet Joel as one of the judgments of God upon Judah for disobedience. And so he seeks to encourage Judah to repentance on the basis of this plague that has come or is soon to come from God. But in his description of the locust plague which either has come or is soon to come, his language looks on to the ultimate repentance of Judah at the Second Advent for the ultimate sin of rejection of the Messiah.

So what we’re seeing here in the Book of Joel is a series of events that have the same pattern that other events in Israel’s history have in the future. We have the pattern of disobedience, the appeal to repentance, and then the prophecies of judgment. In the future day we have appeals of God to the nation Israel for repentance, and also prophecies of our Lord’s second coming to the earth in judgment and appeals are made on that basis. That sin of the past reaches its climax in the sin of the future which is the sin of the rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is certainly in Joel’s eyes a serious thing that Israel or Judah has lost fellowship with God, but it shall be an even more serious thing when this same Judah’s descendants together with Israel’s descendants shall be responsible with the Gentiles for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

Well, let’s look now at the first eleven verses in which we have the coming day of the Lord described under the terms of this local locust plague that was to come. We read in verse 1,

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run.”

By the way, it is a well known fact that locusts have a very close resemblance to a horse, not in size but the head of a locust is very similar to a head of a horse in appearance. It is so similar that the German word for locust is the word, Heu-Pferd, which means a hay horse. So the locust in its head reflects the horse and so it’s not surprising the prophet in describing the appearance of the locust should speak of them as like horses. Verse 4,

“Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them the people are in anguish; all faces turn pale. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path; when they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city, they run on the wall; they

climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”

You can see from the description of the coming day of the Lord unto the figure of the plague of locusts that Joel’s description is interspersed with dramatic allusions to the Lord’s Day and a hostile epiphany. Israel and Judah were accustomed to think of the day of the Lord as a time when God would come on judgment upon the Gentiles, upon the world. But Joel is saying something different here. He is saying that the day of the Lord is going to be a time of judgment upon Judah, upon the people of God; those who are the objects of the choice made when God chose Abraham and consummated his covenant with him.

In verses 1 and 2, we have the introductory warning and already the theme of the section is emerging. You will notice that in verse 1, we have reference to the day of the Lord. In the last stanza or so of the 1st verse we read, “For the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near.” And then in the 11th verse which is the conclusion of this section, we have again a reference to the day of the Lord. “The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”

So the theme of the section is ultimately the theme of the day of the Lord. He begins with the announcement of it and then reaches his climax in the final mention of it. The verse opens with the statement, “Blow a trumpet in Zion.”

Now this is designed to be an alert for in those days in order to let the people know that an enemy attack was coming a certain person was designated to stay on a tower and when he saw evidence of the enemy coming he would blow on a trumpet. He would blow on a horn.

Now that is what God is saying here. He is telling Joel, his prophet, I want you to blow a trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm on my holy mountain because some enemies of Judah are on their way to them. He speaks, of course, of the judgment that is to come.

So these ancient wall towers with the trumpet blowers on top of them are the equivalent of our modern air raid sirens. So I guess if we were to translate that into modern day English we would say, “Sound the air raid siren. And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near.” You can see how close that is to “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is near at hand.” The sense of immense of the eschatological or prophetic events is something that Joel has just as much as the New Testament people have had.

Notice the description of the day of the Lord in the 2nd verse. “A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it.” So the day of the Lord is characterized by Joel as a day of darkness and gloom, and that let’s us know that the chief characteristic of the day of the Lord is the fact that it is a time of judgment.

Now this description that is given in the last part of the 2nd verse, “There has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations,” and the linking of it with locusts you will if you are a reader of the Bible and you ought to be above everything else, you will remember that the locust plague was one of the plagues with which Moses smote Egypt in the battle between Moses and Pharaoh. And one of the things there was stated was that it was a great and mighty plague of locusts and there was nothing before it like it and nor would there be anything like it afterwards. This language is borrowed from Exodus chapter 10, verse 14 and verse 15 in the description of the day of the Lord. But as I say the strange thing about this day of the Lord in the context of Joel is that it is a time of judgment upon God’s people and that is stressed. “Sound an alarm upon My holy mountain,” and then he describes it.

Now in the remaining part of the section there are three sections that are easily discernable. I want you to notice verse 3, verse 6, and verse 10, and I’m going to point you to just two words in each of the first lines of these verses. Look at verse 3, “A fire consumes before them.”

Now we could put that around the other way, reverse the order, “Before them a fire consumes.” And then in verses 3 through 5, we have the locusts and the land. Verse 6, “Before them the people are in anguish,” and here we are treated to a description of the locusts and the effect of the plague on the people. And then finally, in verse 10 we read, “Before them the earth quakes,” and we are given here a description of the locusts but we move beyond the locusts to the relationship of the judgment to the universe as a whole.

So first of all, let me read or let us look for just a moment at verses 3 through 5 in which the prophet relates the locust to the land. He says a rather strange thing in that opening line of verse 3, “A fire consumes before them.”

Now you would not expect this if Joel were speaking only of a locust plague. You would not expect to see the effects of the locusts precede the locusts themselves as they made their way through the land. But that is what he says, “Before them a fire consumes.”

Now that language is very suitable for an appearance of Jehovah. For an appearance of Jehovah would cast its glory, its sheen of glory before him as well as behind him. And so Joel let’s us know by this description that he does not want us to understand this invasion of the locusts as simply a local plague of locusts. His language goes beyond them, and he pictures the final eschatological or prophetic day of the Lord when the Lord Jesus shall come with the heavenly revenues of people with the angels and it will be truly so then that a fire shall go before him as well as after him. That’s a strange line, and I want you to notice it for that reason; “Before them.”

Now the destruction that the locusts bring after them, of course, we have talked about last time. Pusey, one of the commentators on the Minor Prophets, says, “The feels which the rising sun beheld covered with luxuriance are before evening a desert.” That’s how destructive locusts are. I don’t ever want to live through a locust plague.

One final thing in those three verses, did you notice how the description is a description of them as horses, and furthermore, that military metaphors abound because the locusts do proceed in their march as if they had some leader who is keeping them in line? They actually are like battalions and companies and division of soldiers. They each march in a certain line. They neither ones get in the way of the others. It is as if they are organized, naturally organized. And so stress rests upon the locusts as an invincible kind of infantry and cavalry that come to overthrow those who are before them.

Then in verses 6 through 9, the locusts and the people are discussed. We read in verse 6, “Before them the people are in anguish.” Apprehension and alarm are evoked by them. And again, there is another thing in the 6th verse that lets us know that this is not simply a description of a plague of locusts, because when we read in the New American Standard Bible; now you didn’t think did you when you got a New American Standard Bible that it would be a perfect translation? There are no perfect translations, incidentally. Even the one that I would do which would be almost perfect [Laughter] would not be perfect because I would change my mind about certain things. There’s so many things in the Bible that may be translated in different ways. And if you understand a passage in a certain way you translate the text in that way, but then if you came back a couple of years later and studied it again and discovered that you were wrong, that’s possible too and in fact, a very desirable thing to admit that you are wrong, then of course your translation which you approved two years previously would no longer be one that you would like. And so you would take the other alternative in rendering that text.

Well, the word “people” in verse 6 is in the plural in the Hebrew text. It is ammi. So before them the peoples, plural, are in aguish. And I think that there may be some

suggestion in that again that this locust plague is looked at ultimately by God if not by the prophet as the eschatological day of the Lord, and the locust plague is designed simply to be typical of that great day of the Lord that is to come. And here and there in the description words unsuitable for a local plague become very suitable for the ultimate plague at the second coming of Jesus Christ upon those who are disobedient.

In verses 7 and 8, the description of them as marching men is made because that is the characteristic of them. “They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths.” Locusts are gregarious, but they are disciplined. They are gregarious and they all like to hang together, but they are also very discipline and that is what he’s describing.

Incidentally, some of the descriptions are very interesting. One by S.R. Driver in which he describes the effects of living and in the midst of a locust plague he said, “The locusts,” describing them he said, “The locusts were so many that they attached themselves to our clothes. They went into the houses. When we closed the doors and windows they still found their way in just like a Texas dust storm.” I know when I first came to Texas the first thing I did when I heard there was going to be a dust storm one day was to rush around the house pulling all the windows down. I thought if you pulled the windows down you would keep the dust out. And I can still remember the next morning going through and putting my hand on the furniture like this and saying, “Mary, you didn’t do a good job the last time.” I discovered that the dust of a dust storm permeates everything.

Well the locusts were very much like that and Driver says that it was so bad in the homes where everything was shut, but they nevertheless came in that they were clinging to their clothes and even to the food that they were eating. Now that is one time when your diet would really work [Laughter] as far as I’m concerned.

Well, finally in verses 11 and 12, 10 and 11 rather, we have the locusts and the universe and you can see how now the picture enlarges in the prophet’s description. He

says, “Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.” This by the way is a very impressive climax, but the words still have reference to a locust plague in their primary meaning because the locusts are so many that when you look on the ground, so I am told, when you look on the ground in the midst of a locust plague the whole of the ground seems to be in movement; very much as you would see the ground in the midst of an earth quake.

So the description here, “the earth quakes,” is not necessarily a description as an earth quake as we know it, but probably it does go beyond the local locusts on the ground to the earth quake. “The heavens tremble,” and again the same thing because they are so many in the sky that they actually blot out the light of the sun. Many people have testified to that fact that when they come that happens.

“The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. The Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”

This I say is a very impressive climax and it concentrates as you can see on the religious significant of the locusts, and in the description there are descriptions used that are used of the theophanies of God at critical points in biblical history. Earth quakes, for example, have always been associated with the Advent of Jehovah. When our Lord Jesus died on the cross there was an earth quake on the day of the resurrection. There are earth quakes associated with the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. Earth quakes are things that, incidentally, earth quakes are signs of the last days. Reading in the Olivet Discourse we saw how earth quakes characterize that time. The earth quake is a kind of standard effect of a theophany, an appearance of God. He is the Lord of the storm in the sense that when he comes the universe itself cooperates with him in the message that he brings in his Advent. And the message that our Lord brings at the Second Advent is the

message of judgment, and so we shall see the sun and the moon turn to blood, the heavens shaking, the heavens rolling up like a scroll, the earth quake, the rocks trembling, people hiding from the presence of the Lord because of the great catastrophic judgments in the earth. So the prophet returns to the day of the Lord for the locust event for him is a kind of day of the Lord in embryo.

Now then having giving us this magnificent description of the locust plague in verse 12 through verse 14, the prophet calls upon Judah to repent. Listen to his words,

“‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil (or repenting of evil), who knows whether He will not turn and relent (or repent) and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a libation for the Lord your God?”

This is the call for national repentance. He had just concluded the preceding section with, “And who can endure the day of the Lord?” Well, who can endure the day of the Lord? Well, these verses are the answer to this question. The person who is able to endure the day of the Lord is the person who has repented. This particular duty is the thing that will qualify them in enduring the day of the Lord. So the question that preceded the previous section is answered by these verses in which he calls upon Judah to repent.

Now he begins by saying, “‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘Return to me with all your heart.’” So the necessity of repentance is a very urgent necessity. The time to repent is now! Just as in the New Testament we read, “Now is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time.” Or we read when the Apostle Paul was preaching in the city of Athens in Greece that he said to them in the 30th verse of the 17th chapter, “Therefore,

having overlooked the times of ignorance God is now declaring to men that all men everywhere should repent.”

So the prophet likewise says the time for repentance is now. Incidentally, my good Christian friend, the time for repentance is always now. It should never be put off. The more we put off repentance for sin that we have committed the less likely we are to repent. For the more we put off repentance the harder becomes our heart. And so repentance is something that is always to be carried out now.

So I’m not surprised that he begins by saying that immediate action is necessary. Dr. Chafer at the seminary use to tell us in the theological classroom that, “Men, it is necessary to keep short accounts with God.” You don’t get in the habit of sinning half a dozen times and then when the number gets to six repenting or waiting till the end of the day in order to confess failure before God. Repentance is always an immediate duty as soon as the knowledge of sin comes, and short accounts are to be kept.

The content of this appeal is described further in the second line of verse 12 through the third line of verse 13. He says, “‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘Return to Me with all your heart.’” And then he says you should return with fasting, and furthermore, with weeping and mourning.

Now let’s notice two or three things. The first place he says, “Return to me.” The Hebrew text that is the word, shuwb, which means, “to turn;” shuwbah which means, “to turn.” But I say it is the Old Testament equivalent of Greek word, metatithemi, in the Greek New Testament which means, “to change the mind” or “have an after thought” which is usually a different thought and thus to change the mind with regard to some act or action and that change of mind is to expressed in a change of direction of life.

So “return to me” is a word that means repent. But now notice, if you look at that carefully, you will immediately see that this return presupposes that they had a relationship to him. You don’t return to someone that you did not have a previous relationship to.

So the very fact that God says to them “return to me” is evidence of the fact that he thinks of them as having once been in relationship to him. So he’s talking then ultimately about the covenant relationship that he had with Judah. He’s talking about the ancient Abrahamic Covenant, and since Judah by their disobedience have gone away from the Lord, he’s calling upon them to return to the terms of the covenant which involves obedience in the enjoyment of its blessings. Not the obedience for the consummation of them except in so far as we speak of an obedience wrought by God for the covenant is unconditional. But the enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant depend upon the relationship that we have with the Lord now.

Well that was true of the citizens of Judah. They had this Abrahamic Covenant and the promises that God had given to them; an unconditional covenant which shall be fulfilled but the enjoyment of those blessings was dependent upon the relationship of faith and trust which they were to maintain in Jehovah. This, of course, they have not maintained, but he points to the covenant relationship when he says return to me.

Now notice too that he says, “Return to me with all your heart.” It is not to be a perfunctory show of grief. Now there are some people who think we should not confess our sins to the Lord. I personally disagree with that. I think believers when they have sinned against God they should confess their sin. But if you think that the confession of sin is just simply the wrought expression of what you have done in a sentence without any deep feeling of contrition over it, then you don’t understand what true confession is. True confession is confession that arises out of the sense of iniquity, the sense of guilt, and it is accompanied by true sorrow for sin. We do not truly confess our sin to God when we simply say to him, “Lord, I have sinned. Forgive me.” if all that we are doing is simply saying a word or two to him. Confession is something much deeper than that. And so when he says, “Return to me with all your heart,” he’s saying no perfunctory show of grief, and incidentally, if you have sinned and you don’t have that deep feeling of having wronged a holy God and a loving God and a compassionate God the thing to do

is to get done on your knees and ask him to give you that sense of wrongdoing of a holy and compassionate God that you ought to have. You are hardened if you cannot sense the significance of what it is to grieve God by your sin.

But one final thing, notice he says, “Return to me with all your heart and with fasting, weeping, and mourning.” New Testament believers are often inclined to say, “Well, fasting was an Old Testament practice and we don’t have to fast today.” Well half of that statement is true and half of it is false. It is true that fasting is an Old Testament practice. And it’s true that we don’t have to fast. There’s no command in the New Testament that says you must fast. But if you read the New Testament carefully you will discover that the Apostle Paul speaks of himself as one who fasted. He speaks of fasts in the plural. So he didn’t think it was such a bad idea to fast. Not simply to lose weight, but to get off by yourself and to have time with God. And if it means you have to miss a meal or two all the better. It is important that you have that time with God.

I think when people have great decisions that they are to make that is the time to consider fasting and seeking the face of God. I still remember a young man at seminary who fasted for about three days. He was one of the best students in the class and we didn’t see him for three days. And he lived in the dormitory with the rest of us, and so we asked him when he came back where he had been. He said he had been in his room. And we said, for three days? And he said yes, he had been praying over the future work that God wanted him to do. And he spent three days in his room eating very little. He was fasting in order to find the mind and will of God with reference to his future.

So the fasting and the weeping and the mourning that accompanies the confession of sin or the repentance is one of the signs of true repentance. “Return to me with all your heart and with fasting and weeping and mourning, and rend your heart not your garments.”

Now the Jews reached the state where they rend their garments when they didn’t feel anything at all, and it became a kind of ritualistic thing like Caiaphas did when the

Lord Jesus stood before him. He rend his garments not because he really was angry over someone blaspheming, but simply he was angry at the Lord Jesus. “Rend your heart not your garments.” The custom was to take off those garments, to rend them take them off as a sign of shame and reproach and seek the face of God.

I was listening to the radio today, and I heard of a young lady who was riding on the National Airlines plane from Houston to Las Angeles. Well, she was engaged I the first act of repentance and rending of heart. She took off her clothes on the plane and paraded up and down the isles of the plane with champagne glass in her hand, sat down on a seat and talked with the people and explained that she was celebrating the fact that she had just inherited five million dollars. Well the stewardesses hastily finally got her back to the first class section where she had been seated and clothed her and she slept the rest of the way to Las Angeles, but National Airlines issued a statement that passengers on other planes should not expect such entertainment. [Laughter]

The incentives to repentance are described by the prophet in chapter 2, verse 13, the third line. He says, “For return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness, and repenting of evil.”

Now notice twice in this section that he says that he wants them to “return to the Lord your God,” in verse 13 and again in verse 14, it’s “the Lord your God.”

Now why should one return to the Lord? Well, he recommends that we should return, as the citizens of Judah should return, because his attributes are such that he forgives sinners who repent. Listen. He says, “For he is gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger, abounding in covenant loyalty, abounding in loving kindness.” Incidentally, these words are derived from Exodus chapter 34 in connection with the renewal of the covenant on Mount Sinai. And so he in effect is saying this is the kind of God we have. He’s a gracious God. He’s a compassionate God. He’s slow to anger. He abounds in covenant mercies, and he repents of evil. So return to me. Confess you iniquity and be received into the fellowship of the Lord.

And by the way, we have here a very clear indication of the fact that propositional theology, that is theology expressed in sentences, is also the teaching of the Old Testament. We often have people today say that the Bible is a book in which we have accounts of existential relationships between people and God. And we should not think of the Bible as containing theology or statements or propositions of theology, but we should rather think of the Bible as giving as the mighty acts of God. God reveals himself in his mighty acts. He does not reveal himself in words written in sentences. And so we shouldn’t think of the Bible as an infallible book, but only as a record of infallibly encounters between man and God.

Well, you’ll notice that Joel never heard that particular theory for he says that we should return to the Lord because, and now he gives us some good theology, some good propositions, some good sentences. As a matter of fact, the Bible is just a collection of theological sentences. He says he’s gracious. He’s compassionate. He’s slow to anger. He abounds in loving kindness. He’s just giving us a brief treatment of the attributes of God; those that pertain to forgiveness. Doctrine is something that we cannot possibly do without.

As the old mountaineer expressed it, “A man can no more talk about what he don’t know than he can come back from where he’s never been.” And so if we are going to understand any divine thing, we must come to an understanding of the word of God as written. That’s why we study the Bible. So he recommends that attributes of God.

Now I said I wanted to say something about can God repent? We can’t deal with this in detail, but he does say that God does repent. But we know that God does not change. What does it mean when the Bible says that God repents? Well, of course, it does not mean that he changes because he’s an unchangeable God. It rather refers anthropomorphically or he speaks to a man and his manner of treating men. It appears that God repents because his manner of treating men seems different. Taking the case of Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh; he went into that city and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh

shall be destroyed.” But the people of Nineveh repented it is said and God repented of that which he had promised. He did not really change his mind. There was a condition in Jonah’s message. He said, “Yet forty days.” In other words, there was forty days time given to them to change their minds. He acts according to certain well defined principles. He punishes the impenitent. He blesses the penitent. And if he had treated Nineveh after they had repented the same way as he treated them before they repented, he wouldn’t be the same kind of God he is said to be in the Bible.

It’s like a thermometer. If you look at a thermometer you might say a thermometer is a very changeable thing for the mercury goes up and down on the thermometer in accordance with the heat. But strictly speaking the thermometer is unchangeable. It operates according to an unchangeable principle. So it is unchangeable in its essence. It’s changeable as we look at it. That’s what the Bible means when it says God repents. It’s only as we look at it. He acts according to his well defined and scripturally presented principles. I suggest that you compare Jeremiah chapter 18, verse 7 through verse 18 for it.

Finally, the passage concludes. We must stop with a call for national service. So Joel proceeds briskly to the implementation of the attitude of repentance. Attitudes can be means of spiritual ends. And so he states in verse 15, 16, and 17,

“Blow a trumpet in Zion. (This evidentially was addressed to the priests.) Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, (notice this) gather the children and the nursing infants.”

Don’t put them in the nursery, bring them; even the nursing infants. Even if a few squalls in the meeting won’t upset things. Why do you think? Well, because they were part of the covenant too. They were shareholders in the Abrahamic Covenant. They

were like stockholders in the company. They all had part of the ownership, so they were to be brought too.

“Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Let the priests, the Lord’s ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach,’ a byword among the nations. Why should they among the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’ ”

So the emergence, the staccato speech, Amos says you ought to have a meeting, a day of fast, a special assembly, all of the theocratic community should come there, all who are shareholders in the covenant, and then the priests should lead in a lament. They are representatives of the people and they are to plead the covenant and to plead the honor of Jehovah. And that God would forgive and bless again the people that he had brought into that covenant relationship.

Repentance is one of the great doctrines of the Bible, and it has a reference to the church, the church that is out of fellowship with God which reaches the place where it is unfruitful in its testimony. Is Believers Chapel there? They are called upon to repent. In a number of the messages that our Lord gave to the churches in Revelations 2 and 3, he calls upon those churches to repent. And repentance also has reference to our own individual life. And if there is something in our life that is hindering our relationship with the Lord, repent is the word of the New Testament now for he is a gracious, compassionate God who abounds in loving kindness and will bring his new covenant blessings into enjoyment in the life of the person who returns.

If you are here tonight and there is something hindering your fellowship with God, this message is a message to you. And it is a message to all of us who are part of a Christian community if the blessing of God is not really upon us.

“Judah’s Repentance and God’s Repentance” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these words from Joel the Prophet. May, oh
God, they have their effect in our life. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.