

WEEK OF JUNE 19, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Imitate his
compassion.**

UNIT: Early Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah)

THEME: Where Are You?

LESSON TEXT: Jonah 3:10–4:11; Joel 2:18-27

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: James 5:10-11; Exodus 33:19; Psalm 103:11-14

EXPERIENCE MY COMPASSION

BY MARK SCOTT

Can God change? Malachi 3:6 says, “I the Lord do not change.” God is immutable (does not change), but that does not mean he is a creature of habit and is forced always to do the same thing in the same way. His character does not change. But his methods can vary, and sometimes his prophecies (judgments) are conditional (i.e., given with a view that if the people do repent then God *relents* from his judgments).

Once again we are combining emphases from Jonah and Joel. The picture of God in both of these minor prophets is one of compassion, which the Lord so wants us to experience. Jonah “finally” got to Nineveh and preached for the people to repent. The real surprising thing is that they did.

The City and the Prophet

Jonah 3:10–4:3

God always welcomes repentance. God saw that the Ninevites *turned from their evil ways*. So God relented (comforted) and *did not bring on them the destruction* (a form of the word for evil) *he had threatened*. The repentance was citywide, and Jonah was—upset. That seems most odd.

The NIV takes some liberty in paraphrasing it, “*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong*” (he was exceedingly displeased), but it does capture the idea that Jonah is really chapped. The Bible says he *became angry* (hot or burned). He expressed that anger three times with what seemed to be suicide threats (Jonah 4:3, 8-9).

Jonah’s anger took the form of a complaint. His anger caused him to justify his trip to Tarshish and to speak against the loving character of God. He had wanted to *forestall* (prevent) going to Nineveh. Something is deeply wrong in the soul of a person who complains about the grace and compassion of God. Five great qualities of God are admitted by Jonah in his complaint against God (grace, compassion, slowness to anger, abounding in love—mercy or loving kindness—and relenting from judgment). Jonah is not in a good place.

The Plant and the Worm

Jonah 4:4-11

God addressed Jonah’s anger with an interrogating question and an object lesson. “*Is it right for you to be angry?*” God asked. The object lesson is more involved. Jonah sat down *east of the city* under a shelter

(probably to watch the coming judgment). When the judgment did not come, he pouted. So, God went to work to save the prophet. God *provided* (numbered or appointed) a plant, God provided a worm, and God *provided* a wind. There is no question who is in charge. God *provided* everything.

The plant grew quickly (maybe even miraculously). It provided shade for the angry prophet. His anger turned to happiness about the leafy shade. But by the next day a worm had chewed on the plant and made it wither. The hot Middle Eastern sun combined with the desert wind caused Jonah great distress. Again he gave his death wish.

But the plant and the worm served to drive home a lesson about the love of God—that grace is undeserved. Jonah did not plant it or *make it grow*. It’s short life God alone could control. We have a classic “how much more” argument. If God cares for the plant, how much more does he care for Nineveh with its vast population, its spiritual confusion (not knowing their right hand from their left), and *also many animals* (a rather humorous way to end the book). An angry prophet stands in contrast to the compassionate God.

The Wine and the Oil

Joel 2:18-27

Jonah’s object lesson was from the plant and the worm. Joel’s object lesson (or maybe metaphor) was from wine and oil. Remember that the locust plague and drought had made war on Israel. But repentance would cause God to look with favor on his people. If they would just rend their hearts (Joel 2:13); God would bless. God was *jealous* (envious) for his people and took *pity* (compassion) on them.

Wine and oil became symbols of new days (fresh starts; new beginnings) for Israel. It is not accidental that both are used in the New Testament for the age of the Messiah (John 2:1-11; Mark 6:13; James 5:14). God will bless Israel and take away the *scorn to the nations*. The *northern horde* (Israel’s enemies) would be judged (drowned in the sea and pushed into the desert).

Creation springing to life (as well as it being tamed) is also a symbol of God’s compassion and restoration. Rain and abundance of crops indicate more than that the locust plague and drought are over. They tell the story that the Lord is God and that *there is no other*. ■

APPLICATION

THE YEARS THE LOCUSTS HAVE EATEN

BY DAVID FAUST

Farming is a difficult way to earn a living. Would you like your livelihood to depend on the weather? Too much rain (or too little). Higher (or lower) temperatures than normal. Fluctuating fuel prices. Shifting consumer demands. Farmers deal with all of these variables and more. It takes faith in God to plant and harvest as a way of life.

Ancient farmers had no tractors to make their work easier, no trucks to carry their produce to market, no manufactured fertilizers to help their crops grow. Droughts, fires, and floods could wipe out their crops and eliminate their food supplies. Without pesticides to fight back, farmers watched in desperation when locusts swarmed through their fields. These aggressive insects could ruin acres of grain in a few hours while their wings made a terrifying sound.

The prophet Joel foresaw a damaging plague of locusts in Judah. "The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the olive oil fails. Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed" (Joel 1:10-11). Even worse, the army of locusts foreshadowed an upcoming military invasion that would devastate the land. "Surely the people's joy is withered away," the prophet lamented (1:12).

What Is Consuming Your Dreams?

You probably don't wake up in the morning thinking about locusts, but are other worries eating away your confidence? "Locusts" come in different forms. A promising career gives way to unemployment. A happy marriage disintegrates into dullness and tension. Friends prove unfaithful. The church disappoints you. Youth yields to old age. Health surrenders to disease.

What should you do when "locusts" threaten to consume your dreams and devour your joy? Joel suggested three ways to respond.

Join others in prayer. Joel said, "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all

who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord" (1:14). In a national emergency, the correct response was to gather God's people for fasting and prayer. On a lesser scale, the same principle applies to individuals. You don't have to face tough times alone. Ask the church's elders and other friends to join you in fasting and prayer.

Repent and turn to God. "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (2:13).

Rely on the Holy Spirit. Foretelling the Day of Pentecost, Joel quoted the Lord: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (2:28). Whatever "locusts" you face, the Spirit's power can make you an overcomer.

Renewed Hope

Joel's dire prophecies included an encouraging promise. God said, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . never again will my people be shamed" (2:25-26).

The Lord can restore the years the locusts have eaten. Either in this life or the next, the lonely will find fellowship. The brokenhearted will find comfort. The disappointed will experience fulfillment. The aching will find relief. Dark shadows will fade in the bright light of eternity. Temporary misery will be replaced by Heaven's joy.

Meanwhile, don't be surprised when some locusts show up. I recommend keeping a large flyswatter handy.

Personal Challenge: What "locusts" are eating away at your life and making you worry? On a piece of paper or in your prayer journal, list the things you are worried about. Then write a brief prayer, giving them all to the Lord. Ask the heavenly Father to restore your hope and renew your faith. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. What bothers you more—when bad things happen to good people or when good things happen to bad people?
2. What was your “I will . . .” statement last week, and how did you follow through?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jonah 3:10–4:11** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask the same two people to each read **Joel 2:18-27**. Then, as a group, quickly paraphrase God’s promises in Joel and the story in Jonah.

3. What adjectives would you use to describe God in these two passages:
 - What adjectives would you use to describe Jonah?
4. Jonah 1:17 says, “the Lord *provided* a huge fish to swallow Jonah.” Look again at Jonah 4:1-11. What do you learn about God’s provision for Jonah?
5. What similarities do you see between how God treated Nineveh in Jonah 4 and Israel in Joel 2?
6. In Jonah 4:2-3, Jonah was upset that God gave Nineveh the same chances for repentance that Israel received. In what ways can you empathize with Jonah here? (Or is his behavior too far out of line?)
7. What do you learn about God and yourself from Jonah 4:10-11?
8. In Joel 2:25, God promised to “repay [or redeem] the years the locusts have eaten.” The locusts represented not just insects eating crops but also a scavenging foreign army. It must have felt like a trauma that could never be healed. Yet God’s promise came true. When has God redeemed something in your life that you thought was forever broken or lost?
 - What do you hope he might yet redeem?
9. What trait or attribute of God did you need to be reminded of this week?
10. Based on what we’ve discussed, what are you doing well?
11. Based on what we’ve discussed, what could you do differently in obeying God this week?
12. Who needs to hear this story, and how will you tell them?
13. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: “This week, I will . . .”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Joel 2:28-32** and **Obadiah 15-17** as we continue our study of the Early Minor Prophets. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖