

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist
Sunday, June 28, 2020
JOEL 1:2-13: Learning from Locust

What do you know about locust? Yes...those larger grasshopper type things that are the things of biblical plagues and the food for prophets!

Let me tell them about you what I learned about them from worldatlas.com:

Locusts can swarm in huge clouds of thousands of [insects](#). When they do, these pests can devour crops like nothing you have ever seen. It can be difficult to imagine why nature invented them as it did, but there must have been a time in history when there was simply too much vegetation around, and having mas amounts of hungry locusts around was the answer to the problem.

Enormous swarms of locusts can eat the same amount of food in one day as everyone in New York and California combined. Scientists in [India](#) claim that even a modest locust swarm can eat as much food as 35,000 people and travel an impressive 200 km in one day. Because of these realities, locusts in large numbers are able to eat farmers' crops quickly, leaving little for helpless humans to harvest, live on, and sell.

You do not hear of attacking locust swarms each year and there is a reason for this. Weather conditions must be favourable in order for locusts to take over. Many things happen when the weather is right. [Locusts can live on their own](#), and when they do, they behave like a solitary grasshopper. When the weather becomes dry however, locusts tend to congregate in groups, wherever there is enough vegetation left for them to eat. If this happens, many changes take place for both locusts, and humans alike.

According to National Geographic, when locusts make the move to live in groups, their bodies react by releasing higher levels of serotonin. This makes the insect more sociable, and open to eating a wider variety of foods. Following this, the rains come as eventually they always do. When the wet season returns, the locusts relish the new abundance of plants they

have around them. With more to eat, the groups of locusts then begin to reproduce more rapidly. Their communities become more crowded.

With increased numbers, the insects switch to a completely new lifestyle. This is called the “gregarious phase”. When locusts hit this phase some impressive changes take place. The desert locust changes colour from green to yellow and black, or to just yellow. Their brain also grows larger and the insects develop a larger capacity for endurance. This allows the locusts to migrate long distances, and to target crops and vegetation en masse, creating the perfect storm for insect plagues.

At the moment, [reports indicate](#) that clouds of desert locusts in northeast Kenya are more than three times the size of New York City. There are an estimated 192 billion insects in these massive swarms.

According to experts in the field, the only fast and effective way to get rid of the current locust plagues is to spray the land and crops with pesticides. Reports indicate that some countries being attacked are presently doing this. In places such as Somalia and Yemen, however, the efforts to do this have been squelched by the conflict present in the areas. It is not safe for planes to fly and spray, and this is creating a toxic situation that could cause famine.

The horn of Africa seems to be where the swarms first hit. Reports indicate the locusts flew across the Gulf of Aden to Somalia and Ethiopia in 2019. The bugs are now spreading elsewhere. Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan, Yemen, and Kenya have all been battling the locusts recently, as have countries in the Persian Gulf. These include Kuwait, Iran, Bahrain, and Qatar. [India](#) and Pakistan are also dealing with the plague.

According to scientists, climate change caused warm waters to develop in the western Indian oceans in 2018. This resulted in a lot of rain falling in the form of [multiple cyclones](#) over the East African regions and the Arabian Peninsula. This created the perfect conditions for locusts in the area to ramp up their numbers and reproduce more than usual in a breeding frenzy.

Locusts live for a few months at a time, but they can also breed rapidly. It can take a locust about two to four months to mature into an adult, but this

can also happen in as little as three weeks. The UN says it fears the present locust invasion could grow to invade 30 different countries.

In favourable conditions such as those that appear to be around right now, locusts can reproduce so rapidly they grow exponentially in numbers. If this happens, the population could multiply to be 400 times its original size by this summer.

Locusts are so amazing it comes as no surprise there one was developed into a Marvel superheroine. Among other remarkable feats, these tiny beasts can travel over 81 miles in one day, and have been known to fly across the Red Sea in one trip. A swarm of locusts actually flew from northwest Africa all the way to Great Britain in 1954, and also from West Africa to the Caribbean in 1988, in just ten days.

We haven't had any locust in Canada (the Rocky Mountain Locust) since 1902 – for some reason they went extinct.

On the flip side – locust are high in protein and actually quite a good food source. We know that John the Baptist ate locust and wild honey. As the well-known Disney theologian Pumba said: “Slimy yet satisfying!”

The prophecies of Joel start out with Locust! **Let's read Joel 1:2-13:**

² Hear this, you leaders of the people.

Listen, all who live in the land.

In all your history,

has anything like this happened before?

³ Tell your children about it in the years to come,

and let your children tell their children.

Pass the story down from generation to generation.

⁴ After the cutting locusts finished eating the crops,

the swarming locusts took what was left!

After them came the hopping locusts,

and then the stripping locusts, too!

⁵ Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!

Wail, all you wine-drinkers!

All the grapes are ruined,

and all your sweet wine is gone.

**⁶ A vast army of locusts has invaded my land,
a terrible army too numerous to count.
Its teeth are like lions' teeth,
its fangs like those of a lioness.**

**⁷ It has destroyed my grapevines
and ruined my fig trees,
stripping their bark and destroying it,
leaving the branches white and bare.**

**⁸ Weep like a bride dressed in black,
mourning the death of her husband.**

**⁹ For there is no grain or wine
to offer at the Temple of the LORD.**

**So the priests are in mourning.
The ministers of the LORD are weeping.**

**¹⁰ The fields are ruined,
the land is stripped bare.**

**The grain is destroyed,
the grapes have shriveled,
and the olive oil is gone.**

**¹¹ Despair, all you farmers!
Wail, all you vine growers!**

**Weep, because the wheat and barley—
all the crops of the field—are ruined.**

**¹² The grapevines have dried up,
and the fig trees have withered.**

**The pomegranate trees, palm trees, and apple trees—
all the fruit trees—have dried up.**

And the people's joy has dried up with them.

**¹³ Dress yourselves in burlap and weep, you priests!
Wail, you who serve before the altar!**

**Come, spend the night in burlap,
you ministers of my God.**

**For there is no grain or wine
to offer at the Temple of your God.**

God had been trying for years to get His children to obey and be His people. He had entered into a covenant with them, but they were keeping up their end of the contract. They had disobeyed at every turn, often justifying their evil. They had traded the worship of the one true God who had delivered their ancestors countless times from captivity, slavery, and brought them victory in battle...and they swapped God for stone, wood, and rock idols. God had tried to get their attention over and over. A whole series of prophets, one after the other, were sent to the Kings and the commoners to remind them of God's goodness and power, remind them of the blessings He had bestowed over their history, and to warn them where their evil actions were going to take them. Hebrews 11 tells us that many of the prophets of God were persecuted, tortured, and put to death for their obedient service.

The time was coming near for God's judgment to fall on Judah. Evil Israel had already fallen for their disobedience to God. They had entered captivity. God, in His love for his people, was giving the people opportunity to turn back to Him and the vehicle for this love came in a locust plague of biblical proportion. They had never seen a plague this bad. Everything was being destroyed. This affected them economically...their economy was based on agriculture. No harvest...no way to buy needed supplies for the winter months. You may not realize that it was also a hit spiritually. The people were doing what we modern Christians often do...they were going through the motions and applauding their efforts. They were actively sinning against God but HEY! They went to temple every week where they said the right words and sang the right songs. Because of the locust plague, they were unable to bring what is called the grain offering to the temple. The grain offering was an offering given to God that represented how the people were dependent on God for daily life and how they were dependent on God spiritually. It was also one of the ways the priests were taken care of. The grain offering was used as food for the priests. I want to go a bit of a different spin on this portion of scripture today.

WHAT IF WE ACTED MORE LIKE THE LOCUST!

When the Children of Israel were keeping up their end of God's covenant, when they were obediently following and serving God, they were a force to be reckoned with. God blessed them in life and in service. God stretched the borders of their nations. The nation under King David was the most powerful nation of its day. About 60-70 years later, his Kingdom was divided and about 300 years after that they were in captivity. This is ALL due to disobeying God – not stepping up to the role they given.

What about the church today? Is God using our situation today as an object lesson to get our attention. Everything has changed! How we do business, school, shop, fellowship, how we relax, how we worship! Instead of shaking our fist to God (proverbially or literally) and shouting "WHY, God, WHY?" What if we asked, "WHAT GOD, WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO?"

What would happen if we behaved like locust when we grouped together and decided to take our worship and service to God to the next level! We have an example of this. Remember the story of Pentecost in Acts 2. The followers of Jesus gathered to pray and the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was given to them. The result was empowered service and growth of God's kingdom! Scripture tells us:

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

A report came out in 2019 that said it is expected that 9000 churches will close in Canada in the next decade (Nation Trust for Canada). In the United

States it is said that 6000-10000 churches die each year. When you hear that...what is your response? Shock, anger, sadness...?

One of the lessons found in scriptures like Acts 2, I believe is that God wants His church to grow! If this is the case...why are so many dying? It is because so many churches have moved away from their God-ordained purpose! We have lost sight of the commission Jesus himself gave us:

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:16-20).

We are living in a day when we prefer the world's praise and acceptance over God's. We don't chase after truth because it is politically incorrect and we have bought into wrong being right because we want to be liked. We need to need to take in every word of scripture and hide it in our hearts so we don't sin against God!

When churches come back together, let's show God that we got the message of the pandemic. We have the opportunity to do a course correction – to improve what we do well and get rid of the baggage that is taking us away from our calling. Let's pray more. Let's worship more. Let's learn about Jesus and draw closer to him daily! Let's make this a priority. While we do this we look at our neighbourhoods where God has put us and let's be a blessing to them. Instead of having a worship service that makes us comfortable...what if thought about the seekers outside of our walls. What can we do to introduce them to Jesus. Are we willing to sacrifice our comforts and preferences for their needs?

When we make it a point to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey, I believe that God will start adding to his Kingdom daily. Do we love those who are without God enough to step outside of our comfort zones so that they will hear of God's love for them. LET'S PRAY!