

# God Fights (Joel)

**Big Idea:** God fights for his people, but he will fight against those who reject him.

Have I told you what I really appreciate about people? I like people who care enough to fight.

Don't get me wrong. I *don't* like fighting. I hate it. I avoid argumentative people who love to start squabbles. I don't have time for that. There's a line from the movie *1917*: "Some men just like the fight." Avoid people like this. In fact, the Bible tells us to guard the church against people like this. "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11). Nobody's got time for that.

So what do I mean when I say that I like people who care enough to fight? I mean this:

- I want to be someone who will do whatever it takes to fight for the wellbeing of the people I love.
- I want to keep my wedding vow so badly that I will fight for our marriage no matter what it takes.
- I want friends who love me enough to have difficult conversations and tell me the truth, even if it hurts.
- I long for men and women who love God so much that they're willing to suffer for him even when it's hard.

I could go on and on. I don't have any time for quarrelsome people, but I have all the time in the world for people who care enough to fight for what matters most.

## **The God Who Fights**

You may be surprised to learn that God has that kind of fight in him. God cares enough to fight.

What do I mean by this?

We're well on our way through our journey through the Bible this year. Today I want to look at one of the minor – the smaller – prophets. In fact, it's one of the smallest books in the entire Bible.

We don't know much about Joel. We basically know only one thing about him: his father's name. We don't know when we wrote the book. Joel doesn't even tell us the details of the offenses of the people that led him to write this book.

But one thing's for sure: Joel is about a God who fights. God cares enough to fight. Think about this. This is very good news for us. God is not apathetic. He's not shrugging his shoulders. He cares. He cares enough to fight.

Joel tells us two ways in which God is prepared to fight. Here's the first:

### **God fights for his people.**

Joel's pretty short. The first part of the book – chapters 1 to almost the end of chapter 2 – is about God fighting against his people.

How did he fight? Joel 1:2-4 says:

*Hear this, you elders;  
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!  
Has such a thing happened in your days,  
or in the days of your fathers?  
Tell your children of it,  
and let your children tell their children,  
and their children to another generation.*

*What the cutting locust left,  
the swarming locust has eaten.  
What the swarming locust left,  
the hopping locust has eaten,  
and what the hopping locust left,  
the destroying locust has eaten.*

Verses 2 and 3 say that something catastrophic is happening. It's so catastrophic that the old guys have no memory of it. It's so extreme that they'll be talking about it for generations.

What is it? Verse 4 tells us: locusts – not just a mild version of pests, but an on-slaught that led to the total destruction of the crops. Complete and utter crop failure. It would take years to recover.

It's hard for us today to imagine how serious this would be. But locusts continue to be a major problem today. They can cover vast areas, devastating crops and causing major agricultural damage. This can lead even today to famine and starvation. A swarm can eat millions of pounds of plants every day.

The result is devastating:

*The fields are destroyed,  
the ground mourns,  
because the grain is destroyed,  
the wine dries up,  
the oil languishes.  
(1:10)*

This doesn't sound too bad for us. You have to hear this verse as it would sound back then.

*Grain, wine and oil were necessary for the staple diet of Mediterranean countries—the grain to make bread; the fruit of the vine as daily drink; olive oil for cooking, cleansing, soothing, lighting and much else besides.*

*So their whole way of life has been destroyed. We can cope with most things until our basic lifestyle is affected. (David Prior)*

It's affected everything. But Joel says that this is just the beginning. In chapter 2, he warns of more bad news:

*Blow a trumpet in Zion;  
sound an alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near,  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
a great and powerful people;  
their like has never been before,*

*nor will be again after them  
through the years of all generations...  
For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome;  
who can endure it?  
(2:1-2, 11)*

Joel is saying that the invasion of locusts is just a prelude to an invasion of a terrible army.

There's so much to unpack here, but here's the main lesson Joel wants us to consider: God is prepared to fight for his people. God is so committed to his people that he is willing to use extraordinary means to get our attention.

Look, life is complicated. I'm not saying that every time something bad happens that God is trying to get our attention. But he could be. Joel suggests that sometimes God will take dramatic action to get our attention, to awaken us from our lethargy, so that we turn back to him. God is willing to fight for us. He is more committed to our holiness than he is our comfort.

Years ago, C.S. Lewis said, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

So here's the question: could God be fighting for you? Could he be using even the hard events of your life to get your attention so that you turn back to him? Could it be that God uses calamity to save us from an even greater calamity later?

Because here is his agenda:

*"Yet even now," declares the LORD,  
"return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;*

*and rend your hearts and not your garments.”*

*Return to the LORD your God,*

*for he is gracious and merciful,*

*slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;*

*and he relents over disaster.*

*(2:12-13)*

God's ultimate purpose is restoration. His aim is to restore his people. Even the hard things that we go through are for our good.

*Then the LORD became jealous for his land*

*and had pity on his people.*

*The LORD answered and said to his people,*

*“Behold, I am sending to you*

*grain, wine, and oil,*

*and you will be satisfied;*

*and I will no more make you*

*a reproach among the nations.*

*(2:18-19)*

God fights for us, not because he is against us, but because he is for us, and because he wants what is best for us, even when it causes us temporary pain.

Singer-songwriter and author Jennifer Rothschild lost her sight due to a retinal disease. She hated it.

*I thought, I'm not going to be able to drive a car. I'm not going to be able to be an artist. I remember the disappointment of that. And I questioned, Are boys going to want to date me? How am I going to finish high school? Will I be*

*able to go off to college? Sitting in the back seat of our family car, I felt my fingertips and wondered if I would have to read Braille someday.*

Reflecting on this, she wrote:

*One of the hardest lessons I've had to learn is that God uses painful circumstances in our lives for good. My hero, Joni Eareckson Tada, who has been in a wheelchair since she was a teenager, makes this point well when she says that God allows what he hates in order to accomplish what he loves. I know that God's heart is broken when he sees our hearts break. I believe that just as Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, Jesus weeps when he sees us cry tears of loss. I'm convinced that God is well acquainted with the sorrow and struggles that I experience. Yet, at the same time, he loves me enough—and this is why I'm so loyal to him—to let me encounter sorrow, taste bitter emotions, and feel loss. He trusts me to be a good steward of that sorrow. He loves me enough to let me experience that pain so that he can accomplish something he loves—which for me has been a deeper character and a more eternal perspective.*

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Do you get this? Do you see that, right now, God could be fighting for you in your pain? That’s what Joel suggests: God cares enough to fight for us, and his agenda is to draw us back to him.

That’s the first thing that Joel teaches us: God fights for us.

But here’s the second:

## God will fight against those who reject him.

That's why the message of this book is so important. It's much better to have God fight to get our attention now than to fight against us one day in his judgment.

You can't read Joel 3 without getting a sense of terror at what will happen to those who reject him:

*I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land... (3:2)*

And then verse 16:

*The LORD roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,  
and the heavens and the earth quake.  
But the LORD is a refuge to his people,  
a stronghold to the people of Israel.  
(3:16)*

Joel helps us lift our eyes from our immediate crises to see the bigger picture, a picture with two sides. Those who turn to God can expect salvation and blessing. Those who persist in their rebellion can expect judgment and destruction.

Friends, so much of the Bible is about the reality of the coming day of universal judgment. We will all stand before God, accountable for our sins. Judgment will be done, perfect judgment. How will anyone stand?

There's only one way.



*Call on the coming Judge to be your present Savior. As Judge, he is the law, but as Savior he is the gospel. Run from him now, and you will meet him as Judge then—and without hope. Seek him now, and you will find him (for “he that seeketh findeth”), and you will then discover that you are looking forward to that future meeting with joy, knowing that there is now “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). ([J.I Packer](#))*

God is a God who fights. **God fights for his people, but he will fight against those who reject him.** So call on him, and he will have you. That’s the message of Joel.