Adam Clarke:

sermon index

Introduction

This and the beginning of the next chapter contain a double prophecy, applicable in its primary sense to a plague of locusts which was to devour the land, and to be accompanied with a severe drought and famine; and in its secondary sense it denotes the Chaldean invasion. Both senses must be admitted: for some of the expressions will apply only to the dearth by insects; others to the desolation by war. The contexture of both is beautiful and well conducted. In this chapter the distress of every order of people is strongly painted; and not only does the face of nature languish when the God of nature is displeased, vv. 1-19; but the very beasts of the field, by a bold figure, are represented as supplicating God in their distress, and reproaching the stupidity of man, Joel 1:20.

Verse 1

The word of the Lord that came to Joel - See the introduction for some account of this prophet, whose history is very obscure. Bishop Newcome thinks that he prophesied while the kingdom of Judah subsisted, and refers to Joel 2:1, Joel 2:15, (see also Joel 1:14 (note), and the note there), but not long before its subversion as his words, Joel 3:1, seem to imply that its captivity was approaching. See 2 Kings 21:10-15. He therefore favors the conjecture of Drusius, that this prophet lived under Manasseh, and before his conversion, 2 Chronicles 33:13; that is, some time from before Christ 697 to (suppose) 660.

Verse 2

Ye old men - Instead of ×"x−x§x ×[™]x• (hazzekenim) old men, a few MSS. have ×"x›x"x ×[™]x• (haccohanim), ye priests, but improperly.

Hath this been in your days - He begins very abruptly; and before he proposes his subject, excites attention and alarm by intimating that he is about to announce disastrous events, such as the oldest man among them has never seen, nor any of them learnt from the histories of ancient times.

Verse 3

Tell ye your children of it - To heighten the effect, he still conceals the subject, and informs them that it is such as should be handed down from father to son through all generations.

Verse 4

That which the palmerworm hath left - Here he begins to open his message, and the words he chooses show that he is going to announce a devastation of the land by locusts, and a famine consequent on their depredations. What the different insects may be which he specifies is not easy to determine. I shall give the words of the original, with their etymology.

The palmerworm, $x'x-x^{\bullet}$ (gazam), from the same root, to cut short; probably the caterpillar, or some such blight, from its cutting the leaves of the trees into pieces for its nourishment.

The locust, $x \cdot x \cdot x \cdot x$ (arbeh), from $x \cdot x \cdot x \cdot x$ (rabah), to multiply, from the immense increase and multitude of this insect.

Cankerworm, x[™]ל×§ (yelek), from ל×§ (lak), to lick or lap with the tongue; the reference is uncertain.

Caterpillar, $x - x_i \times \mathbb{T} \times \infty$ (chasil), from $x - x_i \times \infty$ (chasal), to consume, to eat up, the consumer. Bishop Newcome translates the first grasshopper; the second, locust; the third, devouring locust; and the fourth, consuming locust. After all that has been said by interpreters concerning these four animals, I am fully of opinion that the arbeh, or locust himself, is the gazam, the yelek, and the chasil and that these different names are used here by the prophet to point out the locust in its different states, or progress from embryo to full growth. See the note on Joel 2:2 (note).

Verse 5

Awake, ye drunkards - The general destruction of vegetation by these devouring creatures has totally prevented both harvest and vintage; so that there shall not be wine even for necessary uses, much less for the purposes of debauchery. It is well known that the ruin among the vines by locusts prevents the vintage for several years after.

Verse 6

A nation is come up upon my land - That real locusts are intended there can be little doubt; but it is thought that this may be a double prophecy, and that the destruction by the Chaldeans may also be intended, and that the four kinds of locusts mentioned above may mean the four several attacks made on Judea by them. The first in the last year of Nabonassar, (father of Nebuchadnezzar), which was the third of Jehoiakim; the second when

Jehoiakim was taken prisoner in the eleventh year of his reign; the third in the ninth year of Zedekiah and the fourth three years after, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Others say that they mean four powers which have been enemies of the Jews:

1. The palmerworm, the Assyrians and Chaldeans.

2. The locust, the Persians and Medes.

3. The cankerworm, the Greeks, and particularly Antiochus Epiphanes.

4.The caterpillar, the Romans.

Others make them four kings; Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar. But of such similitudes there is no end; and the best of them is arbitrary and precarious.

Verse 7

He hath laid my vine waste - The locusts have eaten off both leaves and bark. x—x©x£ x—x©x¤x" (chasoph chasaphah), he hath made it clean bare; x©x"x" x©x"x" (suddad sadeh), the field is laid waste, Joel 1:10; and x)x©x" xžx©x"x[™] (kesod mishshaddai), a destruction from the Almighty, Joel 1:15; are all paronomasias in which this prophet seems to delight.

Verse 8

Lament like a virgin - for the husband of her youth - Virgin is a very improper version here. The original is $x'x^ax \cdot x \otimes x$ " (bethulah), which signifies a young woman or bride not a virgin, the proper Hebrew for which is $x \notin x \otimes x \times x$ " (almah). See the notes on Isaiah 7:14 (note), and Matthew 1:23 (note).

Verse 9

The meat-offering and the drink-offering is cut off - The crops and the vines being destroyed by the locusts, thee total devastation in plants, trees, corn, etc., is referred to and described with a striking variety of expression in this and the following verses.

Verse 12

The vine is dried up - Dr. Shaw observes that in Barbary, in the month of June, the locusts collect themselves into compact bodies a furlong or more square, and march on, eating up every thing that is green or juicy, and letting nothing escape them, whether vegetables or trees.

They destroy the pomegranate, the palm, the apple, (x^ax¤x•x— (tappuach), the citron tree), the vine, the fig, and every tree of the field. See the note on Joel 2:2 (note).

Verse 14

Verse 15

Alas for the day! - The Syriac repeats this, the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic, thrice: "Alas, alas, alas, for the day!―

As a destruction from the Almighty - The destruction that is now coming is no ordinary calamity; it is as a signal judgment immediately inflicted by the Almighty.

Verse 17

The seed is rotten under their clods - When the sprout was cut off as low as possible by the locusts, there was no farther germination. The seed rotted away.

Verse 18

How do the beasts groan! - I really think that the neighing of horses, or braying of asses, is wonderfully expressed by the sound of the original: $x z x^{*} x x x - x^{*} x' x' x z x''$ (mah Neenchah behemah), how do the horses neigh! how do the asses bray! x' x'' x z x'' (behemah) is a collective name for all domestic cattle, and those used in husbandry.

Cattle are perplexed - They are looking everywhere, and wandering about to find some grass, and know not which way to run.

Verse 19

O Lord, to thee will I cry - Let this calamity come as it may, we have sinned, and should humble ourselves before God; and it is such a calamity as God alone can remove, therefore unto him must we cry.

The fire hath devoured the pastures - This may either refer to a drought, or to the effects of the locusts; as the ground, after they have passed over it, everywhere appears as if a sheet of flame had not only scorched, but consumed every thing.

Verse 20

The beasts of the field cry also unto thee - Even the cattle, wild and tame, are represented as supplicating God to have mercy upon them, and send them provender! There is a similar affecting description of the effects of a drought in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 14:6.

The rivers of waters are dried up - There must have been a drought as well as a host of locusts; as some of these expressions seem to apply to the effects of intense heat.

For x"xžx"x'x[°] (hammidbar), "the wilderness,― one of my oldest MSS. reads xžx"x'x[°] (midbar), "wilderness― simply, as in Jeremiah 14:19. Eight or ten of Dr. Kennicott†s have the same reading.