

Joel

Day of the LORD				
“Locust” Plagues			Blessing	
1:1–2:17			2:18–3:21	
Zion’s Discipline			Zion’s Deliverance	
The LORD fights <i>against</i> His people			The LORD fights <i>for</i> His people	
Introduction 1:1-3	Repent from literal locusts 1:4-20	Repent from Babylonian/ Armageddon “locusts” 2:1-17	Forgiveness after repentance 2:18-27	Spiritual awakening 2:28–3:21
Lamentation 1:1–2:17			Salvation 2:18-32	Judgment 3:1-21
Past		Future		
Judah (c. 590 BC)				

Key Word: Locusts

Key Verse: “...The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? ‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’” (Joel 2:11b-12).

Summary Statement:

A recent judgment of Judah by locusts should cause the people to repent, as a more dreadful day of the LORD will come in a Babylonian invasion and at Armageddon, yet God promises forgiveness, deliverance, and restoration by judging the nations.

Application:

Do you need God to strip you of everything before you repent? (Huang Sabin)

Joel

Introduction

- I. **Title:** The name Joel (יֵלֹאִי Yo'e'l) is usually interpreted to mean "Yahweh is God," but other related meanings may be "strong-willed" (Nestles) and "take refuge" (Arabic; cf. BDB 222b). The reverse form of Joel ("Yahweh is Eloheim") is Elijah ("Eloheim is Yahweh").

II. Authorship

- A. External Evidence: The Joel of this prophecy is not noted elsewhere in the OT. Critical opinions on his identity relate to the time he wrote (see the Date below).
- B. Internal Evidence: The title declares the author to be Joel, the son of Pethuel (1:1), which means "persuaded of God" (BDB 834d). Although several Joels are mentioned in Scripture, nothing is known of the author of this prophecy except for the evidence in this book. Because of the many references to Zion and the Temple (1:9, 13-14; 2:15-17, 23, 32; 3:1, 5-6, 16-17, 20-21), he probably lived close to Jerusalem. The references to religious activities and priestly ceremonies (1:13-14; 2:17) may suggest that Joel was a temple prophet (LaSor, 438).

III. Circumstances

- A. Date: The time of Joel's writing remains a thorny problem since the book makes no explicit time references in the superscription (unlike most other prophetic books). Until recently, most dating estimates fell into two general periods (1 and 2 below).

1. The first date proposed is early pre-exilic, usually during the time of Joash (ca. 835 BC; cf. Keil, 169-170; *TTTB*, 240-241). Support is sought in: (a) the reference to Israel's early enemies of Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt and Edom (3:4, 19), (b) the government of elders (1:2; 2:16) and priests (1:9, 13; 2:17) which held power while Joash was still a boy as he was crowned at age seven (cf. 2 Chron. 24:1), (c) the position of Joel between Hosea and Amos in the Hebrew canon, and (d) Amos' dependence on Joel (Amos 1:2 on Joel 3:16; Amos 9:13b and Joel 3:18a; cf. Benware, 181).

Response: Even OT prophets in the Babylonian era preached against the nations mentioned above (cf. Jer. 46-47; 49:7-22; Ezek. 27-30; Zeph. 2:4-7; cf. Chisholm, *BKC*, 1:1409). The government in the book is also argued by proponents of a *late* date, which makes it inconclusive. Additionally, the LXX order differs from the Hebrew, thus rendering the order in the canon insignificant in terms of date. Additionally, it is unclear whether Amos quotes Joel or *vice versa*. Further, the Greek slave trade (3:6) was not characteristic of this time period.

2. Others suggest a post-exilic date near the end of the exile (ca. 540 BC) or even as early as 350 BC (R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 575; R. K. Harrison, *Intro. to the OT*; J. A. Brewer, *Joel*, ICC; Wolff, *Hermeneia*). Chisholm, *BKC*, 1:1410, supports this with four arguments: (a) Joel notes Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and exile in 586 BC (3:1-2, 17) while the temple in other places (1:9, 13; 2:17) refers to the postexilic temple of 516 BC, (b) the government of elders appears rather than of a king, (c) Joel quotes the exilic prophet Ezekiel (2:3 with Ezek. 36:35; 2:10 with Ezek. 32:7; 2:27-28 with Ezek. 39:28-29), and (d) Greek slave trade (3:6) can refer only to when the post-exilic Greek empire had its greatest control of Israel.

Response: (a) Joel 3 records a future restoration following captivity and does not require captivity to have already occurred, (b) not mentioning a monarchy in the book does not disprove its existence at the time of writing, especially since elders were prominent *before* the exile (2 Kings 23:1; Jer. 26:17; Lam. 5:12, 14; cf. Kapelrud, *Joel*

Studies, 187-89), (c) dependency is speculative in parallel quotations as it is difficult to know who quoted whom, and (d) slave trade between the Phoenicians and Greeks (Ionians) flourished as early as the seventh and early sixth centuries (Ezek. 27:13; cf. Kapelrud, 154-58). Additionally, Greek control of Palestine (331-143 BC) occurred *after* the post-exilic date of 538 BC, as mentioned above.

3. A mediating late pre-exilic period between 597 and 586 BC has recently been supported by Kapelrud (explained by Chisholm, *BKC*, 1:1411-1412) due to affinities between Joel, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah, especially since Zephaniah refers to the day of the LORD as a time of darkness (LaSor, 439). Furthermore, this perspective alone explains how the sixth-seventh century Greek slave trade (3:6) could characterize Joel's time. Lastly, a date between 597 and 586 BC seems most appropriate because the invasion of 3:2b might refer to the Babylonian invasion, which deported 10,000 men in 597 BC (cf. 2 Kings 24:10-16) before the final exile and temple destruction in 586 BC, thus clarifying why the temple remains prominent in the book.
- B. Recipients: The total lack of reference to Israel indicates that Joel had those living in Judah in mind when he penned the prophecy. This is also supported by the many references to Zion and the Temple (1:9, 13-14; 2:15-17, 23, 32; 3:1, 5-6, 16-17, 20-21). That the prophecy addressed Judah may also provide additional evidence that it was written just before Judah's fall (586 BC) rather than over two centuries later (835 BC).
 - C. Occasion: Because of the difficulty in determining the correct date of the book (see above), it remains equally speculative to posit an exact occasion for the prophecy. However, it is evident that the people of Judah were recovering from a severe and recent locust devastation since Joel graphically described it (chs. 1-2). This catastrophe thoroughly (1:4) plagued the land for at least two years (2:25). Joel used this calamity to illustrate an even more serious future devastation of the land by the Babylonian army (2:1-11; 3:2). The people needed to see that the ultimate devastation was not the loss of their crops but the loss of their existence as a nation. Joel prophesied the latter loss unless the people repented of their sins.

IV. Characteristics

- A. The locust plague in Joel's prophecy (see Occasion above) was not merely a natural disaster. It was a supernatural disaster, for Moses had predicted that a locust invasion indicates a divine judgment on their sin (Deut. 28:38, 42; cf. Lev. 26:20).
- B. No date is given in the superscription or anywhere else in the book, making it difficult to date.
- C. The prophecy makes no mention of a king or of Judah's three greatest enemies: Assyria, Syria, and Babylon (LaSor, 439, n. 20).
- D. The Temple is prominent (1:9, 14, 16; 2:17).
- E. Although calls to repentance are made in the book (2:12, 15-17), never are the sins of the nation specifically spelled out.
- F. The coming day of the LORD, a time of awesome judgment upon people who have rebelled against God, is the key theme of the prophecy (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14, 18). The day of the LORD theme pervades this prophecy perhaps more than any other with the possible exception of Zephaniah (e.g., Zeph. 1:14-18, 2-3) and is noted throughout the Bible (cf. Amos 1:3-2:3; Zech. 12-14; Isa. 13:6, 9; 14:28-32; 17:1ff.; 20:1-6; 31:1-5; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3ff.; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). Joel mentions this "day" several times (1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; 3:14, 18), indicating that it actually refers to a period that "is to be a day of wrath and judgment upon the wicked and a day of salvation to the righteous" (Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the OT Prophets*, 146).

When is this day? The mention of apocalyptic phenomena such as wonders in the heavens (i.e., the sun being turned to darkness and the moon to blood in 3:20-21) indicate that while to some extent *near* judgment would strike Judah for disobedience, the *ultimate* judgment would befall the nation at Christ's second advent (cf. Matt. 24:29-30). However, this will not just be a day of wrath upon the unbelieving but of blessing as well for the righteous (Joel 2:32; Zech. 14; Zeph. 3:8-20; Isa. 2, 11, 65-66; Amos 9:11-15; Ezek. 20:33-44, etc.; idem., 147). For more here see page 639.

- G. The difficult relationship between the literal locusts in chapter 1 and the "locusts" in 2:1-11 now has at least 15 different views. Who are these "locusts" in 2:1-11? The following views are adapted from a chart by John Martin, "Views on the Locust Plague in Joel 2" (cf. Freeman, 150-54):

Supernatural Creatures (Figurative View)

1. Distant Future (Scorpions/Supernatural Insects; cf. Rev. 9:3-10; Wolff, Pfeiffer)

Armies (Allegorical View)

2. Near Future (Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome; cf. church Fathers, Jewish rabbis, Cyril of Alexandria, Luther, Hengstenberg, Pusey)

Armies (Literal/Apocalyptic Views)

3. Near Future (Assyria)
4. Near Future (Egypt) referring to Pharaoh Shishak (1 Kings 14:25; 1 Chron 12:2-9)
5. Near Future (Egypt) referring to Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 35:20-36:4)
6. Distant Future (Armageddon)
7. Distant Future (Gog and Magog)
8. Distant Future (other end-time armies)
9. Near Future (Assyria) and Distant Future (Armageddon; cf. Patterson, Martin)
10. Near Future (identity unknown) and Distant Future (Armageddon; cf. Chisholm)
11. Near Future (Babylon) and Distant Future (Armageddon; cf. Freeman, Griffith)

Locusts (Literal Views)

12. Past (same locust invasion as in chapter 1; cf. LaSor, Allen, Driver, Thompson, Fleenor, Keil, Heater, NIV Study Bible)
13. Near Future (in Joel's Day)
14. Distant Future (in the Tribulation)

Locusts and Army (Combination View)

15. Near Future (literal locusts) and Distant Future (figurative army at Armageddon)

As stated above, the present study holds to the apocalyptic view (#11) that sees a near army (Babylon) and a far army (Armageddon) in view. This finds support in several lines of evidence (cf. Freeman, 152-54), four of which are listed here:

1. The imagery of chapter 2 far exceeds the description of a locust plague, such as an earthquake, signs in the skies, and ominous events (2:10, 30-31; Matt. 24:29).
2. The invaders of chapter 2 are called "people" (2:2), an "army" (2:11), and "the northern army" (2:20).
3. Literal locusts never invade Israel from the north as does this "army" (2:20).
4. The term "northern one" (2:20) would be an unsuitable designation for locusts since it is an adjective ("northern") with a prefixed article, thus meaning "the northerner," or "the northern one." However, Israel's eschatological enemies are often said to invade from the north (cf. Zech. 6:8; Jer. 1:14-15; 6:1, 22; Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2; Isa. 14:31; Zeph. 2:13).

H. Another difficult issue in Joel's book is how Joel 2:28-32 relates to the day of Pentecost:

1. Joel 2: Joel's prophecy details a future "day of the LORD" which follows a recent locust invasion in Judah. The prophet's point is that while the people are concerned about the existence of their *crops* due to the locusts, even more serious "locusts" (eschatological armies) are coming, which threaten the existence of their *nation*.

Then Joel declares that in the last days the LORD will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (all of Judah) so that young men will dream dreams and old men will see visions (2:28-32). This is a clear prophecy of the Spirit's coming and eschatological dimensions. In other words, Joel sees deliverance happening in the end times.

2. Acts 2: When Peter and the apostles experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, many unusual things also occurred. Each of the apostles praised God in new languages that could be understood by pilgrims to Jerusalem visiting at that time (e.g., from Pontus, Cappadocia, Rome, and other distant places). Further, tongues of fire appeared on their heads. With these new languages and strange fiery phenomena, the accusation came that the apostles were drunk with wine. Peter refuted this claim by quoting Joel 2:28f. He declared that they were witnessing an actual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the giving of the Spirit. This is clear in his designation, "This is *that* which was spoken..." (Acts 2:16), which leaves no question that the reception of the Spirit was what Joel had in mind.

However, Joel's prophecy also noted strange events in the sky as well—the sun darkened and the moon turned blood red. Acts 2 records no such phenomenon because the prophecy was left incomplete due to Israel's unbelief. These certain elements are reserved for a future time when the nation will believe just prior to the return of Christ. (For a study of five views on this issue, see Freeman, 154-56.) This shows that the end times had already begun in Peter's time.

Argument

The prophet Joel masterfully illustrates both God's judgment and grace in the recent devastation of a locust plague in the land of Judah. In the first of two major movements in the book (1:1-2:17), Joel declares that the recent judgment of Judah by locusts should cause the people to repent, as a more dreadful day of the LORD is coming upon the land in the Babylonian army invasion. This is followed by the second part (2:18-3:21), in which Joel notes God's forgiveness and promises that He will ultimately deliver His people by judging the nations and restoring Judah. Therefore, the book follows the popular judgment and blessing pattern typical of prophetic writings and is written to encourage repentance based on God's mercy.

Synthesis

Day of the LORD

1:1–2:17	"Locust" plagues
1:1-3	Introduction
1:4-20	Repent from literal locusts
2:1-17	Repent to avoid Babylonian/Armageddon "locusts"
2:18–3:21	Blessing
2:18-27	Forgiveness after repentance
2:28–3:21	Spiritual awakening
2:28-32	Indwelling of the Spirit
3:1-16	Restoration/judgment of nations
3:17-21	Fruitfulness

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The result of Judah's repentance over God's recent judgment of Judah by locusts and the future day of the LORD by Babylonian and Armageddon invasions will be forgiveness, deliverance by God judging the nations, and national restoration.

I. The response in Judah from a recent judgment of locusts and the future day of the LORD with Babylonian armies should be repentance (1:1–2:17).

A. Joel affirms the divine authority of his prophecy and the uniqueness of the events he will describe so the people will pass his words on to future generations (1:1-3).

1. This prophecy came to Joel from God Himself, so it carries divine authority (1:1).
2. Nothing like what God would reveal here has ever happened, so the people should tell it to succeeding generations (1:2-3).

B. Readers should mourn and repent to seek God's deliverance from a terrible locust invasion and drought (1:4-20).

1. God calls Judah to mourn over terrible locusts that ate their crops, followed by a drought (1:4-13).
 - a) A terrible locust invasion has eaten everything in the land of Judah (1:4).
 - b) A call to mourn is given to the drunkards, land, farmers, and priests for the uncountable invading pests and subsequent drought (1:5-13).
2. Judah should repent and seek God's face from this day of the LORD, as both locusts and drought led man and animals to seek God's deliverance (1:14-20).
 - a) The religious leaders should call the people to repent through fasting and gathering at the temple to pray for God's mercy (1:14).
 - b) The locust invasion shows that an even greater day of the LORD judgment is imminent from God's hand (1:15).
 - c) The locust plague is supplemented by a severe drought that limits food for both people and animals (1:16-18).
 - d) The locusts are like a fire that destroys everything in its path, so both man and animals must trust God for deliverance (1:19-20).

C. The people should repent since a more dreadful judgment (day of the LORD) will come soon by the Babylonian army and Armageddon in the distant future (2:1-17).

1. Judah should repent, as the locust plague prefigures a near future day of the LORD judgment by the Babylonians and the distant future Armageddon (2:1).
2. Joel reiterates the locust plague imagery to prefigure the future judgment (day of the LORD) through the Babylonian army and Armageddon (2:2-11).
 - a) The locust plague of God's judgment prefigures the worse judgment of armies that the world has ever known (2:2).
 - b) Havoc will be brought about by the invasion of "locusts," leaving the land totally devastated (2:3-5).

- c) The people's reaction to the "locusts" is one of terror as the organization of the "army" causes them to advance quickly and thoroughly (2:6-9).
 - d) The approaching "locust army" even has cosmic disorders (2:10-11).
- 3. God and Joel both call Judah to sincere, inner repentance shown in fasting because of God's character that repents from calamity (2:12-17).
 - a) God Himself calls Judah to sincere, inner repentance demonstrated outwardly in fasting, weeping, and mourning (2:12).
 - b) Joel adds that due to sincere repentance, God may send blessings instead of calamity because of His grace, compassion, patience, and love (2:13-14).
 - c) Joel calls Judah to national repentance, shown in gathering the nation together for fasting and prayer (2:15-17).

II. The result of Israel's repentance will be that God will forgive and deliver Israel by judging the nations and restoring Judah in the Tribulation period (2:18-3:21).

- A. After Judah repents, God will forgive and physically bless His covenant people (2:18-27).
 - 1. After Israel's repentance in verses 12-17, God will bless the people through fertility of crops, good reputation, and removal of the Babylonian army (2:18-20).
 - 2. God promises to make up for the years of food lost to the locusts so that the people will know He is the only God and so they will never be ashamed again (2:21-27).
- B. God will deliver His restored people by judging the nations and will send a great time of spiritual awakening to motivate His people to repent now (2:28-3:21).
 - 1. On the day of the LORD, God will send the indwelling of the Spirit upon all Jews and celestial signs when Israel repents at Christ's return (2:28-32; Hebrew text = 3:1-5).
 - a) The outpouring (indwelling) of the Spirit, prophecy, dreams, and visions will characterize Jews of every class (2:28-29).
 - b) God will marvelously intervene on His people's behalf through celestial signs and an offer of salvation that will deliver some of His people (2:30-32).
 - 2. When God restores Israel as a nation, He will judge the nations for abusing Judah (3:1-16).
 - a) God gives hope to Judah by promising a restoration to the land (3:1).
 - b) God will judge the nations for scattering Judah to comfort Judah with His loyal love and justice (3:2-8).
 - c) Joel describes the warfare between God and the nations so that the people would know that God's judgment would be complete (3:9-16).
 - 3. Joel describes the fruitfulness of Judah in contrast to the desolation of Edom and Egypt as an indication that Judah will be inhabited forever (3:17-21).
 - a) The land of Judah will be fruitful, but Edom and Egypt will be desolate wastelands (3:17-19).
 - b) The land of Judah will be inhabited forever due to God's vindication and forgiveness (3:20-21).

Contrasts Between Joel 1 and 2:21-27

Adapted from an Anonymous Handout at Dallas Theological Seminary, about 1985

	In Joel's Day	In the Day of the LORD
Land	Mourned (1:10)	Will rejoice and be glad (2:21)
Animals	Groaned, wandered, were hungry (1:18)	Will not be afraid (2:22a)
Fields & Orchards	Were barren & nonproductive (1:7, 10-12)	Will grow and be fruitful and productive (2:22)
Rain	Drought with dryness causing fire (1:20)	Will pour down in abundance (2:23)
Grain, Wine, Oil	Ruined and dried (1:10)	Will be plentiful (2:24)
Crops	Damaged by locusts (1:4)	Damage will be replaced with productivity (2:25-26)