

JOEL

Personal Background

The name *Joel* (Hebrew = *Yo'el*) means "Yahweh is God." He was the son of a man named *Pethuel* (or *Bethuel* in the Septuagint) which means "the open-heartedness or sincerity of God." Whether Joel received his name at birth or was given this name later as a result of his ministry, is unknown.

Joel lived and prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah. He very likely was a resident of the city of Jerusalem. He makes frequent reference to Judah & Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 17-18, 20), to their citizens (3:6, 8, 19), to Zion (2:1, 15, 32; 3:17, 21) and its children (2:23). He also shows great familiarity with the Temple and its ministry (1:9, 13-14, 16; 2:14, 17; 3:18). He was also intimately acquainted with the geography and history of the land (1:2; 3:2-8, 12, 14, 18).

Some scholars have suggested his familiarity with the Temple service may indicate he was a priest or the son of a priest. Others speculate "his castigation of the priests suggests he was *not* a member of their caste." Little is known about this man, except for what can be gleaned from the book itself. Although 13 other persons in the OT writings bear the name *Joel*, he cannot be identified with any of them.

"Joel was a man of vitality and spiritual maturity. A keen discernor of the times, he delivered God's message to the people of Judah in a vivid and impassioned style, with a precision and originality of thought that served as a veritable quarry out of which many subsequent prophetic building stones were to be hewn" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Date

There is great disagreement among scholars as to the dating of this book. Theories range from the 9th century to the 4th century BC. Some have even sought to date it as late as the Maccabean Period (during the so-called *Intertestamental Period*). The problem -- no date is given in the heading of the book, nor is there any explicit reference within the body of the work itself. The major theories are:

- **Post-exilic** --- The captivities of God's people have ended. The exiles have returned to their homeland. The Temple has been rebuilt. This view calls for a date in the mid-4th century BC.
- **Pre-exilic** --- Three general positions have been advanced by those who assign a pre-exilic date to Joel. They are:
 - **Early Pre-exilic** --- A 9th century date. It is felt the situations depicted within the book point best to the time of the boy-king Joash (835-796 BC), who began his rule through the regency of the high priest Jehoiada.
 - **Middle Pre-exilic** --- An early 8th century date. An extensive defense of this view is given in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 231-233.
 - **Late Pre-exilic** --- A 7th century date. This view seeks to find a link with the prophet Jeremiah, and to harmonize the literary forms and religious outlooks of the two prophets.

The most likely and logical of these theories is the *Early Pre-exilic*, which would date the prophecy of Joel from about 835 BC on. For an excellent defense of this view see --- *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason L. Archer, Jr., p. 304-307.

Occasion

The land has been devastated by a locust plague. Drought, famine and fires follow in the wake of the locust plague. This is far more than just a *natural* disaster -- it is also a *national* disaster! Almost every aspect of community life has been affected. The economy of the land has been all but ruined. The whole nation has ground to a halt. Even the religious life of the community is threatened by the shortage of offerings.

Joel sees a link between this natural/national disaster and a time of coming judgment from the Lord God -- the *Day of the Lord*. Not only was this locust plague an actual judgment from God, but it warned of an even greater impending judgment against the people of God --- when the enemy would not be armies of locusts, but armies of men!

This concept of further judgment also led Joel to reveal God's intention for the *last days* --- the ultimate coming of God in judgment at the end of time.

Use of Joel in the New Testament

"While this is one of the briefest books in the OT, it is at the same time one of the most profound. Both in its grasp of the relationship between historical events and the suprahistorical expectation of the day of the Lord, and also in its impact on early Christian theology, its influence has hardly been proportionate to its size" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

In Acts 2:16f the apostle Peter states that the things the people were witnessing on the day of Pentecost had been spoken of by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29).

In Romans 10:11-13 Paul refers back to Joel 2:26b and 2:32.

In Mark 4:29 Jesus makes use of Joel 3:13.

There seems to be some dependence on Joel 2:32 in Acts 2:39.

There are several references back to Joel in the Book of Revelation --- Rev. 6:12 (Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15)Rev. 6:17 (Joel 2:11)Rev. 9:7-9 (Joel 1:6; 2:4-5)Rev. 14:15, 18 (Joel 3:13).

Message

The book falls into two distinct sections:

1. Joel speaks 1:2 - 2:17

2. Jehovah speaks 2:18 - 3:21

Joel refers to the natural/national disaster of the locust and tells the people this is to be a warning to them so that they might repent. This disaster heralded the *Day of the Lord* which could only be averted by genuine repentance. If they repented, this day of judgment would come upon their enemies rather than upon themselves.

"The book is an appeal from Jehovah to the people to seek Him through repentance. Out of this repentance there would come material blessings followed by an outpouring of spiritual blessings" (Homer Hailey). Joel has often been called the *Prophet of Pentecost* because of his reference to spiritual blessings.

Other major messages of the book of Joel are:

- God is sovereignly guiding the affairs of earth's history toward His preconceived final goal --- 1:15; 2:1-4, 18, 20, 25-27, 28-32; 3:1-21.
- He is a God of grace and mercy --- 2:13, 18.
- A God of lovingkindness and compassion --- 2:13.
- A God of justice --- 3:1-8, 12-13.
- He is a God of grace and mercy --- 2:13, 18.
- A God of lovingkindness and compassion --- 2:13.
- A God of justice --- 3:1-8, 12-13.

Mere externalism in worship to God is insufficient --- 2:12-13.

When sin becomes the dominant condition of God's people, they must be judged. God may use natural disasters, or political means, to accomplish the chastisement of His people. For those who repent there will be the blessings of a restored fellowship.

"Integral to all Joel's prophecy is his teaching about the Day of the Lord. By the skillful use of this term, which gives cohesion to his entire message, Joel demonstrated that God is sovereignly operative in all that comes to pass, directing all things to their appointed end" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

God had abundantly blessed Judah, but the people had taken God and His blessings for granted. Their faith had degenerated into an empty formalism and their lives into moral decadence. "Under divine inspiration Joel told the people that the locust plague was a warning of a greater judgment that was imminent unless they repented and returned to full fellowship with God. If they did, God would abundantly pardon them, restore the health of the land, and give them again the elements needed to offer the sacrifices. The ceremonial system was designed to express a heart relationship with God. By their sin they had forfeited any right to religious ceremony" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

JOEL

Summarized Bible

Not much is known about Joel. The time he prophesied appears to have been before the invasion by Babylon as he mentions "the army of the north". Hosea appears to have quoted or referred to the statements of Joel. So, Joel probably prophesied to Judah and Jerusalem before Hosea and Isaiah.

"Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness." (Joel 1:5-6)

"Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. 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. Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty." (Joel 1:13-15)

"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming."

"It is close at hand a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come." (Joel 2:1-2)

"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, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity. Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people." (Joel 2:13-14; 18)

The Coming Messiah

"I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls." (Joel 2:28-32)

Key Points from Joel

- The Old Testament children, Israel and Judah, ceased worshiping and serving God. Many of God's New Testament children also, have from the first century until now, ceased worshiping Him.
- There is hope for salvation since God poured out His Spirit on all people when by obedience, they put their trust in Christ.