



THE
MINOR
PROPHETS

Joel

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The Minor Prophets

Introduction to the Book of Joel

Authorship:

The author of the book is Joel. His name means “Yahweh is God”. Sometimes he is referred to as “the prophet of Pentecost”. He is the son of Pethuel (meaning “Open-heartedness” or “Sincerity of God”). Joel 1:1 is the only time Pethuel is mentioned in the bible.

Little is known about Joel, but plenty is speculated. It is believed that he lived in Judea either in or near Jerusalem. This is based on frequent references to Zion (2:1, 15; 3:16, 17), Judah and Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 16-17, 20).

It is believed by some scholars that Joel was a priest. This stems from Joel’s high regard for the priesthood (1:9, 13, 14; 2:17). However, one should note that Joel does not include himself among the priest in his writing. Therefore, we cannot confirm or deny his priesthood. There simply is not enough evidence.

Date of Composition:

Arguments for the date among scholars range from the ninth century BC to the fourth century BC. The conservative scholars lean to the earlier writing dates (around 830 BC). The reasons for the earlier writing include:

- No king is mentioned in Joel. This indicates a young king. King Jehoshaphat came to power while in his youth (2Kings 11:4). During this time Jehoiada counseled him in his reign.
- Amos quotes from Joel. (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13 / Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). Amos was written in 755 BC.

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- One of the most convincing arguments is the enemies of God's people mentioned by Joel. He mentions the Phoenicians, the Philistines, the Egyptians, and the Edomites. (Joel 3:4, 19). These nations attacked the people of God during the reign of Jehoram (2Kings 8:20-22; 2Chronicles 21:16, 17). Jehoram was the grandfather to Jehoash. During the days of Jehoash, Babylon and Assyria posed no threat to the people of God.

The scholars that take a liberal approach argue for a later date of the writing. Concerning their reasoning Gleason Archer wrote, "It is fair to say that the arguments for a late date are largely based upon humanistic philosophical assumptions rather than upon reasonable deduction from the data of the text itself." (Archer, 341).

Audience:

Joel's audience was Judah.

Theme:

The theme of Joel can be divided into two distinct parts. The first is from the prophet himself (1:2-2:17). His message is repentance. Their land had just been destroyed by a swarm of locust. If they remain stubborn, destruction will only intensify.

The second is from God (2:18-3:21). Four great blessings are to come: material blessings, spiritual blessings, defeat of their enemies, and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the last days.

Outline of the Book of Joel

I. JOEL SPEAKS -1:2-2:17

- A. THE DEVASTATION OF THE LOCUST -1:2-12
- B. LAMENTING IN THE WAKE OF
DESTRUCTION -1:13-20
- C. THE DAY OF THE LORD -2:1-11
- D. CALL TO REPENTANCE -2:12-17

II. GOD SPEAKS -2:18-3:21

- A. THE LAND REFRESHED -2:18-27
- B. GOD'S SPIRIT Poured OUT -2:28-32
- C. GOD'S JUDGES THE NATIONS -3:1-8
- D. PREPARE FOR WAR -3:9-17
- E. GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE -3:18-21

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I. **JOEL SPEAKS -1:2-2:17**

A. THE DEVASTATION OF THE LOCUST -1:2-12

1. Nothing to this level of devastation has occurred before -vs. 2, 3
 - a. There have been other locust invasions, but not like this.
 - b. “Though some locusts are encountered in Syria and Palestine almost every year, that this infestation of which Joel spoke was unparalleled is again mentioned in Joel 2:2.” (Lewis, 369)
 - c. The devastation is so intense that the people are told to pass this lesson on to future generations. Otherwise, the lesson would be lost.
2. The locust: Chewing, swarming, crawling, and the consuming locust -vs. 4.

First, there are the locusts that destroy much of the vegetation. The females lay their eggs in the hard soil, an estimated sixty-five to seventy-five thousand per square meter, hatching an estimated sixty thousand of these. Soon appear the larvae which continue the devastation. From the larva stage the locust passes thorough the pupa stage, in which small wings appear. These develop into full-fledged flying insects, which change into full-fledged locusts. In all, they pass through five molts (Conley, National Geographic Magazine, August 1969, p. 211). At times the new broods move in the opposite direction to that from which the parents came. Whiting says they come from the northeastern direction, moving southwest, which accounts for Joel’s calling them God’s “northern army.” (Hailey, 44)

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3. The wine is cut off -vs. 5-7
 - a. The locusts are described as, "...strong and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion." -vs. 6
 - b. The trees that produce the wine have been destroyed.
4. Worship is cut off -vs. 8-12
 - a. The lamenting is like a young bride who becomes widowed.
 - b. Since the fields are destroyed, the grain and drink offerings has been cut off.
 - c. The priest along with the farmers have great reason to lament, for they all share in the same devastation.

B. LAMENTING IN THE WAKE OF DESTRUCTION -1:13-20

1. A call to godly sorrow -vs. 13, 14
 - a. The priest should be in great mourning for the grain and drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord.
 - b. They should be clothed in sackcloth. "Sackcloth was a coarse, hairy material uncomfortable to the skin, but worn next to it, as symbolic of the misery of the soul of the individual." (Hailey, 45)
 - c. The greatest concern for the priest should be the spiritual condition of the people before God. Therefore, they should proclaim a fast and cry out to God.

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2. A warning of greater destruction to come -vs. 15-18
 - a. Joel states, “For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.” (vs. 15)
 - b. Unless the people of God heed the warning of the destruction they currently can see, the devastation will only intensify.
 - c. All the food, seed, and vegetation has been cut off.
 - d. Even the animals are suffering because of man’s sin.
3. A cry out to God -vs. 19, 20
 - a. During these days of desolation, the only place the people can turn is back to God.
 - b. This is applicable for man today. Sometimes man has to hit rock bottom before he will ever look up.

C. THE DAY OF THE LORD -2:1-11

1. “Blow the trumpet in Zion...” -vs. 1
 - a. Trumpets were used to gather the people together, begin a journey, or to warn them of impending danger -Nu 10:1-10.
 - b. The day of the Lord is at hand. The only safety for them is to be right with God.
2. The picture of destruction -vs. 2, 3
 - a. Darkness. This is a reminder of the darkness cast upon Egypt (Ex 10:21-24) and also of Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:16).
 - b. A comparison is made between the Garden of Eden and the desolation left behind the wake

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of the locust. -vs. 3. Man lost the Garden of Eden because of sin. Now he has lost the “land flowing with milk and honey” due to his sin.

3. The imagery of the locust continues -vs. 4-11
 - a. They are compared to a mighty army, unlike anything seen before.
 - b. They can climb walls and enter through windows; there is no escape from their destruction.
 - c. Joel uses prophetic language to describe them -vs. 10, 11
 - 1) Similar language used by Jesus in describing the destruction of Jerusalem -Mt 24:29; Mt 13:25; Lk 22:25-28
 - 2) John uses similar language in his description of the fall of the Roman Empire -Re 6:12-14.

D. CALL TO REPENTANCE -2:12-17

1. Joel make a plea for Judah to repent based on God’s love and forgiveness.
 - a. Turning to God with all your heart. God has desired man to follow and love Him from his heart -cf. De 6:5, 10:12, 30:6
 - b. “Rend your heart and not your garments” -vs. 13
 - 1) Rending the garments was an outward expression of grief.
 - 2) God desired true repentance to take place from the heart.
 - 3) E.g. King David -Ps 51:16, 17

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- c. If Judah will repent from the heart, God would have mercy upon them.
2. This level of repentance calls for a solemn assembly -vs. 15-17
 - a. This time blowing the trumpet is not for alarm, but for the assembly to fast before the Lord.
 - b. All the congregation from the nursing babes to the elders were to come. Even the bridegroom and his bride were to put off the joy of marriage to assemble.
- c. The plea is made before the Lord -vs. 17

II. GOD SPEAKS -2:18-3:21

A. THE LAND REFRESHED -2:18-27

1. If His people repent, He will restore the land to its former glory -vs. 18, 19
 - a. They will have new grain and oil.
 - b. They will be satisfied and no longer a reproach among the nations.
2. The locusts will be completely removed -vs. 20
3. The land will rejoice -vs. 21-24
 - a. The pastures will be fertile again and the beast of the field will benefit.
 - b. Rain will be given faithfully and they would have plenty of wheat, new wine and oil.
4. All that the locust has destroyed will be replenished -vs. 25
5. The people of God would never be put to shame -vs. 26, 27
 - a. This is after repentance and through faithful living.
 - b. The benefits:

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- 1) There is only one true and living God.
- 2) He would be on their side continually.
- 3) This has great application for us today. We would live faithfully to God, He would always be on our side and we too would not know shame.

B. GOD'S SPIRIT POURED OUT -2:28-32

1. God's Spirit would be poured out on all flesh -vs. 28, 29
 - a. This would occur after the repentance and the material blessings.
 - b. The specific fulfillment of this prophecy occurs on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:17-21
 - c. The Spirit was poured out upon the apostles - Ac 2:1-4
 - d. Later, the Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles -Ac 10:44-48
 - e. "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy" vs. 28
 - 1) Philip had four daughters that prophesied - Ac 21:9
 - 2) Paul mentions some women who prophesied -1Co 11:5
 - f. Under the New Covenant there would be no distinction between slave and free -Ga 3:28
2. There would be signs in the heavens and on earth -vs. 30, 31
 - a. The language in these verses reflect the judgment of God.

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- b. On the Day of Pentecost, many would obey the gospel message. They would be spared of the eternal wrath to come. As they live out their lives, they would become a judgment upon those who do not obey -cf. Jn 3:19-21
- 3. Salvation for the remnant -vs. 32
 - a. Salvation is for everyone. “That whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”
 - b. Calling on the name of the Lord is to obey the gospel
 - 1) Peter was asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” -Ac 2:37
 - 2) Peter replied, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Ac 2:38)
 - 3) See also Acts 22:16.
 - c. Mt. Zion and Jerusalem are referred to as the spiritual dwelling place of God where His people find refuge. -cf. Heb 12:22-24

C. GOD’S JUDGES THE NATIONS -3:1-8

- 1. Joel indicates the time of judgment to be sometime after the outpouring of the Spirit. His use of the word “For” shows the link between the end of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three. He also states, “...in those days and at that time...” further indicating the time reflects a post Pentecost. -vs. 1

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Therefore, this cannot refer to the return from Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, for this bringing back referred to by Joel is to be in the time of the Spirit (cf. 2:28-31). Also, Amos uses the expression, "I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel" (9:14) in a Messianic context period under Christ (Acts 15:14-18, further strengthening the position that the judgments are after Pentecost. (Hailey, 56)

2. God will judge the nations at "the Valley of Jehoshaphat". The location of which is not known. The emphasis of the passage is on the fact that God will judge the nations for their treatment against His people. -vs. 2
3. The heathen has no regard for the sanctity of human life -vs. 3
 - a. They cast lots for His people, they sold a boy for a harlot, and they sold a girl for wine to drink.
 - b. Both Amos and Ezekiel condemned Tyre for their slave trade (Amos 1:9, 10; Ez 27:13)
4. God is bringing judgment against Tyre and Sidon -vs. 4-8
 - a. God is returning their retaliation upon their own heads -Pr 26:27; 28:10
 - b. They took away the silver and gold from His temple.
 - c. They sold His people to the Greeks.
 - d. God would deliver His people and sell off their sons and daughters -vs. 8

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D. PREPARE FOR WAR -3:9-17

1. Joel returns to the universal judgment of God against all nations that have opposed His people.
2. Tools of agriculture turned into weapons of war - vs. 10. “This is opposite to the character of the kingdom of God, for in that kingdom its citizens are to convert to the implements of war into instruments of peace (Is 2:4). (Hailey, 59).
3. God judges all the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat -vs. 12, 13
 - a. The harvest and the wine press -vs. 13
 - b. These are expressions of judgment used by John to describe wrath against the enemies of the bride of Christ (ie. The church) -cf. Rev. 14:14-20
4. The valley of decision -vs. 14-16
 - a. The imagery is once again used of the sun and moon growing dark. This reflects the coming judgment of God.
 - b. Joel begins with judgment against God’s people through the locusts. Now His judgment is against all the nations.
 - c. In the midst of all the judgment, there is a place of refuge. That place is only in the Lord. He will be a shelter for His people -vs. 16
5. Spiritual Zion -vs. 17
 - a. It is a kingdom that cannot be shaken -Heb 12:28; Dan 2:44
 - b. It is a possible reference to the eternal Zion -cf. Rev. 21:27; 22:14, 15

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E. GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE -3:18-21

1. The time of spiritual plenty -vs. 18. Note also the words of Paul -Co 2:10; Ep 3:19
2. The people of God are in contrast with those of Egypt who have judgment brought against them for the evil deeds -vs. 19
 - a. They shall be desolate
 - b. Their innocent blood they shed would include (but not be limited to) the death upon the male babies -Ex 1:22
3. Judah would find forgiveness for their sins and a dwelling place with God.

Conclusion:

God renders judgment upon His people in effort to lead them back unto Himself. The judgment is never pleasant, but when one heeds to it, blessing richly flow.

In the book of Joel, we have seen judgment come against the land of Judah. We have also seen the prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit of God which came to pass on the Day of Pentecost. Joel then reveals that when God's people follow Him, He is on their side and His face is against their enemies. Ultimately however, the greatest blessing of all is the bright and eternal future that awaits all who are faithful to Him to the very end.

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