

## **Book of Joel**

**Title:** The Greek Septuagint (LXX), and Latin Vulgate versions follow the Hebrew Masoretic Text, titling this book after Joel the prophet, the recipient of the message from God (1.1).

Joel is referred to only once in the New Testament (Acts 2:16-21).

### **Author – Date:**

The author of the prophecy is identified only as “Joel the son of Pethuel.”

His name combines the names Yahweh and El and means “Yahweh Is God”.

The author is one of 14 men in the Old Testament who shared this name.

Joel was a contemporary of both Hosea and Amos, though he ministered to the southern kingdom while they ministered to the northern kingdom.

Joel’s frequent references throughout the prophecy to Judah and Jerusalem indicate that he was not a priest, though he was an inhabitant of Jerusalem and was a prophet of the southern kingdom.

The prophecy provides little else about the man.

Even the name of his father is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Although he displayed a profound zeal for the temple sacrifices (1:9; 2:13-16), his familiarity with pastoral and agricultural life and his separation from the priest (1:13-14; 2:17), suggest he was not a Levite.

Extra biblical tradition records that he was from the tribe of Reuben, from the town of Bethom or Beth-haram, located northeast of the Dead sea on the border of Reuben and Gad.

The context of the prophecy, however, hints that he was a Judean from the Jerusalem vicinity, since the tone of a stranger is absent.

Dating the book relies solely on canonical position, historical allusions, and linguistic elements. Because of:

- (1) The lack of any mention of later world powers (Assyria, Babylon, or Persia);
- (2) The fact that Joel’s style is like that of Hosea and Amos rather than of the post-Exilic prophets; and

(3) The verbal parallels with other early prophets (Joel 3:16 with Amos 1:2; Joel 3:18 with Amos 9:13), a late ninth century B.C. date, during the reign of Joash (ca 835-796 B.C.), seems most convincing.

Nevertheless, while the date of the book cannot be known with certainty, the impact on its interpretation is minimal.

The message of Joel is timeless, forming doctrine which could be repeated and applied in any age.

### **Historical Setting:**

Joel was one of the earliest prophets of Judah.

The specific place from which Joel wrote is not known.

Since he was a resident of Judah and Jerusalem, he likely wrote his prophecy from there.

His frequent calls to blow a trumpet in Zion, to consecrate a fast, to proclaim a solemn assembly, and to gather the people together to come before the Lord lend credence to the view that the prophecy was issued from the temple court.

Two events are compared in the course of Joel's prophecy:

- (1) The locust plague upon Judah in the days of the prophet; and
- (2) The far greater coming Day of the Lord.

The latter is set forth in the figure of the former.

Joel is the special prophet of the Day of the Lord; he mentions it five times (1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14).

Joel has also been called the "Prophet of Pentecost" because of his most famous and well-known passage (2:28-32), quoted by Peter (in Acts 2).

More than half of the book is built around a description of the locust plague.

Joel's prophecy is to turn the nation back to God in preparation for the great Day of the Lord, the theme of his prophecy.

### **Background – Setting:**

Tyre, Sidon and Philistia had made frequent military incursions into Israel (3:2).

An extended drought and massive invasion of locusts had stripped every green thing from the Land and brought severe economic devastation (1:7-20), leaving the southern kingdom weak.

This physical disaster gives Joel the illustration for God's judgment.

As the locusts were a judgment on sin, God's future judgments during the Day of the Lord will far exceed them.

In that day, God will judge His enemies and bless the faithful.

No mention is made of specific sins, nor is Judah rebuked for idolatry.

Yet, possibly due to a calloused indifference, the prophet calls them to a bona fide repentance, admonishing them to "rend your heart and not your garments" (2:13).

Joel is a highly emotional prophecy, rich in imagery and vivid descriptions.

In it two unique events, not to be forgotten, are compared.

These two events are to be communicated to the descendants of the people.

### **Historical – Theological Themes:**

The Day of the Lord is frequently associated with seismic disturbances (e.g., 2:1-11; 2:31; 3:16), violent weather (Ezek. 13:5), clouds and thick darkness (e.g., 2:2; Zeph. 1:7), cosmic upheaval (2:3, 30), and as a "great and very awesome" (2:11) day that would "come as destruction from the Almighty" (1:15).

The latter half of Joel depicts time immediately prior to and subsequent to the Day of the Lord in terms of promise and hope.

There will be a pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, accompanied by prophetic utterances, dreams, visions (2:28-29), as well as the coming of Elijah, an epiphany bringing restoration and hope (Mal. 4:5-6).

As a result of the Day of the Lord there will be physical blessings, fruitfulness, and prosperity (2:21; 3:16-21).

It is a day when judgment is poured out on sinners that subsequently leads to blessings on the penitent and reaffirmation of God's covenant with His people (see note on 1 Thess. 5:2).

The theme of Joel is the Day of the Lord.

It permeates all parts of Joel's message, making it the most sustained treatment in the entire Old Testament (1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14)

The phrase is employed 19 times by 8 different Old Testament authors (Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20 twice; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14 twice; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5).

The phrase does not have reference to a chronological time period, but to a general period of wrath and judgment uniquely belonging to the Lord.

It is exclusively the day the Lord does not always refer to an eschatological event; on occasion it has a near historical fulfillment, as seen (in Ezek. 13:5), where it speaks of the Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem.

As is common in prophecy, the near fulfillment is a historic event upon which to comprehend the more distant, eschatological fulfillment.

## **Outline:**

Following 1:1, the contents of the book are arranged under 3 basic categories.

In the first section (1:2-20) the prophet describes the contemporary Day of the Lord.

The land is suffering massive devastation caused by a locust plague and drought.

The details of the calamity (1:2-12), are followed by a summons to communal penitence and reformation (1:13-20).

The Second section (2:1-17), provides a transition from the historical plague of locusts described (in chapter 1), to the eschatological Day of the Lord (in 2:18-3:21).

Employing the contemporary infestation of locusts as a backdrop, the prophet, with an increased level of intensity, paints a vivid and forceful picture of the impending visitation of the Lord (2:1-11), and with powerful and explicit terminology, tenaciously renews the appeal for repentance (2:12-17).

In the third section (2:18-3:21), the Lord speaks directly, assuring His people of His presence among them (2:27; 3:17, 21).

This portion of the book assumes that the repentance solicited (2:12-17), had occurred and describes the Lord's zealous response (2:18-19a), to their prayer.

Joel 2:18-20, forms the transition in the message from lamentation and woe to divine assurances of God's presence and the reversal of the calamities.

With (2:19b-20), introducing the essence and nature of that reversal.

The Lord then gives 3 promises to assure the penitents of His presence: material restoration through the divine healing of the land (2:21-27), spiritual restoration through the divine outpouring of His Spirit (2:28-32), and national restoration through the divine judgment on the unrighteous (3:1-21).