



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Joel

Chapters 1-3

Yahweh is God

The Prophet Joel's name means YHWH is God. His book is an expression of the sovereignty of the Lord over Judah and the nations of the world. While it is difficult to precisely date the prophet's book.

There are a few clues in the text that suggest a date suggest that his prophecies were given around the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In 3:2-3, Joel speaks of the exile as a past event and in 3:17 mentions the conquest of Jerusalem. His references to the devastating impact of the judgment on the temple sacrifices and the ministry of the priests reveal that his primary focus was Judah and Jerusalem. Because of the call for a solemn assembly (2:15) and for priestly repentance at the altar in (2:17), it is likely that these warnings of doom and impending judgment were uttered just prior to the destruction of the temple in 586 when such acts of repentance were still possible.

Literary Structure

Joel: Judgment and Restoration		Chapters 1-3
Judgment: The Invasion of the Locust		1:1-12
The Call to Repentance		1:13-20
Judgment: The Day of the Lord		2:1-11
The Call to Repentance		2:12-17
Restoration: From the Locusts		2:18-27
Renewal & Vindication: In the Last Days	Renewal: Blessing to All Flesh	2:28-32
	Vindication: Final Judgment over the Nations	3:1-21

The Prophet Joel addresses the people of Judah on two levels: Judgment and Restoration.



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Judgment (1:1-2:17)

First, he addresses the near term crisis of the invasion and conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Like a plague of locusts which destroys everything in an instant (chapter 1). The destruction of Jerusalem and Judah will be a swift and devastating “Day of the Lord” (2:1-11).

Some interpreters see Joel as recounting a literal plague of locusts that is “like an army”. It is more likely that the locusts were the metaphor for the invading Babylonians. Regardless, the call to the people is to deep heartfelt repentance (1:13-20; 2:12-17):

*“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
Who knows whether he will not turn and
relent, and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the Lord your God? -- Joel 2:12-14*

The “who knows” of 2:14, underscores that YHWH is sovereign. The actions of deep repentance may or may not prevail upon the LORD’s kindness--“who knows?” Indeed, the Prophet does not presume the Lord’s mercy.

Restoration (2:18-3:21)

The final section of Joel is one of restoration in the near and long term.

In the near term, the northern invaders will be removed and destroyed (2:20) and there will be a reversal of the total devastation in the land. The land will regain its former “Eden-like” quality which had been destroyed by the locust/army (2:22 cf. 2:3).

*I will restore to you the
years
that the swarming
locust has eaten,
the hopper, the
destroyer, and the
cutter,
my great army, which
I sent among you. –Joel
2:25*



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Ultimately, the restoration of the land of Judah will give rise in the latter days to international blessing. The Lord will spiritually renew “all flesh” (2:28-29) and finally and ultimately judge the evil in the nations of the world (3:1-21).

On the Day of Pentecost recorded in the book of Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit is powerfully poured out on the Jews gathered from all the nations in Jerusalem. The Apostle Peter stands and proclaimed that the words of the prophet Joel had been fulfilled in their presence.

*“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
29 Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*

The gift of the Holy Spirit poured on “all flesh” is happening in the present age of the church. The apostles taught that these are “those days” of which Joel spoke.

*30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of
smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to
darkness, and the moon to blood, before the
great and awesome day of
the Lord comes. 32 And it shall come to pass
that everyone who calls on the name of
the Lord shall be saved. Joel 2:28-32*

Peter and Paul would recognize that the Lord was calling the peoples of both Israel and the nations to himself. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he quotes Joel 2:32 again: “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

*¹⁴How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”
—Rom10:12-15*