



Introduction

Background

Name & Author: Joel, the son of Pethuel. Nothing else is known of Joel.

Date: No one knows exactly when Joel prophesied. The book mentions no king but addresses his message to the elders and priests. For some biblical scholars, this suggests a post-exilic date (485 BC-400 BC). For other scholars, the early placement in the Twelve Minor Prophets, suggests that it was written as early as the reign of the boy-king, Joash, when his uncle and high priest Jehoiada ruled (835 BC).

There are passages in both Amos and Isaiah which are also in Joel (Compare Amos 1:2 with Joel 3:16 and Is. 13:6 with Joel 1:15). Therefore most conservative scholars assume that Amos and Isaiah borrowed from Joel, placing the writing of Joel prior to Amos and Isaiah.

Audience: From the prophecy itself, we may gather that Joel was a prophet of Judah and that he probably prophesied in Jerusalem (based on the references to the sanctuary in Jerusalem in Joel 1:9,13,14; 2:15).

Structure

The structure of Joel's prophecies center around the concept of *The Day of the LORD*. He describes three Days, each with different circumstances, but all followed with a call to repentance and a time of deliverance for God's people.

The First Day of the Lord The Locust Plague			The Second Day of the Lord The Coming Mighty Army			The Third Day of the Lord The Final Judgment		
Day of the Lord Described	Call to Repentance	Deliverance for God's People	Day of the Lord Described	Call to Repentance	Deliverance for God's People	Day of the Lord Described	Call to Repentance	Deliverance for God's People
1	13 14	18 19 20	1	11 12	17 18 29	2:30	13	14 15 21
Chapter 1			Chapter 2			Chapter 3		

Purpose

A terrible plague of locusts has covered Judah and destroyed the crops. Joel sees the devastation wrought by these creatures is but a foretaste of the coming judgment of God, the "day of the Lord." Joel therefore urges the people to turn from their sin and turn back to God.

Theme

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. (Joel 2:12-13)

First Day of the Lord (Chapter 1)

The Day of the Lord Described (1:1-13)

(Joel 1:4 NASB) "What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten."

Joel describes a locust plague which seems to have hit Judah. The plague is unlike anyone has seen before, and Joel uses this tragic event to warn of future events which will be even more horrible. This *Day of the LORD* will be nothing compared with the coming *Days of the LORD* (1:15).

Joel calls upon the people of Judah to mourn. The drunkards are to wail, for there will not be anymore wine (1:5-7). The priests are to wail, for there can be no grain or drink offerings (1:8-9, 13). The farmers are to mourn, for the harvest has been destroyed (1:10-12).

Call to Repentance (1:14-18)

Joel calls for Judah to use this tragic event as a spiritual wake up call.

(Joel 1:14 NASB) "Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD."

It is human nature for people to have more of an interest in spiritual things when tragedy hits. It causes them to understand their own mortality and their need for intervention by God. Joel uses this fact to bring people to repentance in light of the locust plague.

Deliverance for God's People (1:19-20)

Then Joel himself cries out to Yahweh, asking for help in light of the destruction wrought by the locusts. Joel calls upon God to restore the nation from this Day of the Lord.

The Second Day of the Lord (Chapter 2)

The Day of the Lord Described (2:1-11)

In chapter 2, Joel describes a coming *day of the LORD*, which will be far worse than the recent locust plague.

(Joel 2:1-2 NASB) "Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, [2] A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and

mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations."

This second Day of the Lord involves the coming a great army like has never been seen before (2:2). The army will bring total destruction (2:3). The army will be highly disciplined (2:6-9) and are ferocious (2:10). Most importantly, the army is called by God to be his judgment in a coming great and awesome day of the Lord (2:11).

There is a great deal of speculation as to what events Joel is describing. It could be the captivity, perhaps the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, or some events yet future. We will discuss these possibilities later.

A Call for Repentance (2:12-17)

The purpose of God's judgment as seen in this *Day* is to bring people to repentance.

(Joel 2:12-13 NASB) "'Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; [13] And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, And relenting of evil."

This is a beautiful picture of our God. His character is not one of judgment and vindication. Rather, Yahweh gives every opportunity right to the last ("Yet even now") to allow people to repent. Destruction is God's last resort.

Joel calls upon the priests to bring the congregation together that they all might plea that God would spare them from the mighty army. The motivation for this plea is so Israel will not be shamed by the surrounding nations and so those nations will not ask "where is their God" (2:17). The people's plea goes back to the fundamental calling of Israel to be the light unto the nations so that all the world might know that Yahweh is the one true God (1 Kings 8:60).

Deliverance for God's People (2:18-29)

Deliverance from Shame (2:18-27)

When the people do repent, God responds by restoring the land (2:18). He brings about bountiful harvests (2:19, 24-26) and He removes the occupying armies (2:20). God will cause rain to fall again (2:23), and He will reveal himself to the people.

(Joel 2:27 NKJV) "Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, And that I am the LORD your God And there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame."

Compare this with 2:17, where the people's plea for deliverance was so the nation would not be ashamed and the surrounding nations would wonder where their God was. Now, God will restore Israel so his people will not be put to shame, and so the surrounding nations will know that Yahweh is the God of Israel.

God's Spirit Poured Out (2:28-29)

Sometime after God delivers the nation, God will pour out his Spirit upon, not just Israel, but all mankind. Men, women, children, adults, slaves and free will all receive the Holy Spirit, and they will prophecy and see visions from the Lord.

(Joel 2:28 NASB) "'And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters

will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions."

This verse is quoted by the Apostle Peter in his sermon on Pentecost. Forty days after Christ ascended into heaven, His disciples gathered in an upper room on the Day of Pentecost. There they received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and began speaking to the visiting people from other nations in their languages. This perplexed the people, and they were accused of drunkenness. Peter stands up before the people and says that these people are not drunk, but that this is what Joel was speaking of in this prophecy. The day of Pentecost is the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

The Third Day of the Lord (Chapter 3)

The Day of the Lord Described (2:30 - 3:1-13)

After the fulfillment of God's Spirit being poured out is, it will be followed by what Joel describes as "the great and terrible day of the LORD." (2:31). This third Day of the Lord begins with astronomical signs and wonders (2:30-31) and includes the deliverance of those who will call upon the name of the Lord (2:32).

All the nations will gather in the valley of Jehoshaphat where they will be judged for having enslaved Israel (3:1-8). God calls the nations of the world to raise up armies and to come down face the Lord in the valley.

(Joel 3:12 NASB) "Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, For there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations."

A Call for Repentance (3:14)

Yet, again, even right up to the end of this terrible *Day of the LORD*, God provides for people to repent. In 2:32, God promises that those who call on Him shall be saved. The purpose, again, of this judgment, is not to condemn, but to give the final ultimatum to the people. Decide now, or face the consequences.

(Joel 3:14 NASB) "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

Even the valley of judgment here is described as a time for decision.

Deliverance for God's People (3:15-21)

God will deliver those who call upon Him in the valley of decision. He will serve as a refuge and a stronghold for his people in the midst of the great final battle of judgment (3:16b). The purpose of His deliverance is the same as in the second Day of the Lord (2:27): that the people will know that Yahweh is their God (3:17a), and that He dwells in their midst (3:17b, 21b).

(Joel 3:16-17 NASB) "And the LORD roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem, And the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people And a stronghold to the sons of Israel. [17] Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, Dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, And strangers will pass through it no more."

After deliverance from the nations rising against the Lord, God will dwell in Jerusalem (3:17), and he will bring great prosperity to the nation (3:18). The surrounding nations will no longer threaten Israel (3:19), and Judah will never again be exiled from the land (3:20).