

Joel

by Ross Callaghan

<http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com>



- Author** The prophet Joel. (*Joel* means *Jehovah is God*). We don't know anything about him other than what is recorded in his prophecy. He probably lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- Written to** The elders and all of the nation of Israel.
- Date** The date can't be determined accurately because Joel doesn't mention current events in his prophecy. He could have prophesied during the time of Jehoiada (835-796BC), Hosea and Amos (775-725BC), Zechariah (500BC), or Josiah (639-608BC).
- Type** Joel is a prophecy of future events including the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. See Acts 2. Joel is written in poetic form, with lots of parallels, repetition and vivid word pictures. The prophecy can relate to Israel, describing God's judgment through a plague of locusts, but it can also relate to the future establishment of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the 'Day of the Lord'.
- Themes**
- Israel has been afflicted by a swarm of locusts. This is God's judgment due to her sin.
 - Israel will be restored if she repents of her sin.
 - The Day of the Lord is at hand and it will be a day of judgment.
 - God will deliver those who repent of their sin and will bless them.
 - The Holy Spirit will be poured out bringing in a new age of God's grace and blessing for those who follow Him.
- Purposes**
- To assure Israel of God's blessing if she will repent.
 - To promise the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - To prepare God's people for the Day of the Lord

Occasion

The land has been devastated by a locust plague. This has resulted in a national disaster affecting all aspects of community life. Joel links this with a time of coming judgment from God - the *Day of the Lord*. If God's people will repent and turn to Him they will be blessed.

Afterwards the Holy Spirit will be poured on all people then the nations will be gathered for a final time of war and judgment (at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ). This will be the time when the harvest of the earth will be reaped and those who follow the Lord will know great blessing.

Key verses

The day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 1:15

'Even now', declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning'. 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 and leave behind a blessing. 2:13,14

Afterwards 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. 2:28-32

Outline

A call to repentance 1:1- 2:17

1:1-12 A plague of locusts

A plague of locusts has invaded the land causing widespread destruction to vines, trees, field and harvests. Judah is told to wake up to what has been going on, and inform their children so future generations are aware of what has happened. For *Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.* 1:12

In the Bible locusts are often part of God's judgment. See Amos 4:9; Exodus 10:1-19; Psalm 105:34,35; Revelation 9:1-11



1:13-20 A call to repent

The land has been devastated so they must come before the Lord and repent. They need to *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.* 1:14

2:1-11 The Lord's army

The day of the Lord is at hand and it will be a time of great judgment and destruction. The Lord will lead a mighty army whose *forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?* 2:11

2:12-17 Return to the Lord

All of the people must *'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning'. 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 and leave behind a blessing.* 2:13,14 *Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is your God?'* 2:17

God's blessings for those who repent 2:18 - 3:21

2:18-27 The Lord's response

If God's people will repent He will bless them richly. He will provide abundant rains; restore fruitfulness to the land and repay them for the years lost through the locusts.

You will have plenty to eat until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. 2:26

2:28-32 The day of the Lord

Afterwards God will pour out His Spirit on all people and will show wonders in the heavens and on earth before the day of the Lord. *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* 2:32. This was initially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) and will be fully completed when Jesus returns again.

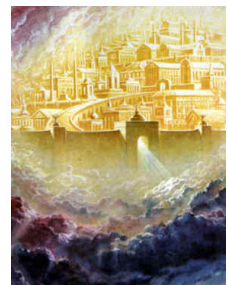
3:1-16 The judgment of the nations

When God 'restores the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem' 3:1 He will gather the nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Armageddon) for judgment. There will be a great battle in which the harvest of the earth will be reaped and those who oppose the Lord judged. There will be *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.* 3:14 *But the Lord will be a refuge for His people; a stronghold for the people of Israel.* 3:16

Joel's account of end-time events reinforces those given in other parts of the Bible. See *Isaiah 65, 66; Daniel 9, 12; Zechariah 12-14; Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4,5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2; Revelation 6-22.*

3:17-21 The new Jerusalem

Then there will be great blessings for God's people. The Lord will dwell in Zion, Jerusalem will be holy, Judah will be inhabited forever, and the sins of God's people will be pardoned.



Another way of interpreting the Book of Joel

Joel is sometimes interpreted as being a prophesy of what will happen in the Church from the day of Pentecost through to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The great falling away

1:1-12 The early glory of the Church is lost.

1:13-20 The Day of the Lord is near so we must repent.

The great restoration

2:1-11 The Lord is returning in a time of great judgment.

2:12-32 If the conditions for revival are fulfilled the Lord will bring great blessing. This will take place through the former rain (when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost) and the latter rain (when the Holy Spirit is poured out in a great world-wide revival). There will be wonders in heaven and on earth and *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* 2:32

The great harvest

3:1-16 The nations will be judged at the Battle of Armageddon (in the Valley of Jehoshaphat) and there will be a great harvest of souls won for the Lord (including Israel).

3:17-21 Then there will be wonderful blessings for God's people and they will dwell with Him forever in the New Jerusalem.

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*).

Joel is referred to directly or indirectly in the following New Testament passages:

- In Acts 2:16-21 Peter says 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 quotes from Joel 2:26 and 2:32.
- In Mark 4:29 Jesus uses Joel 3:13.
- Acts 2:39 could be based on Joel 2:32.
- There are several references 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).

Lessons

Major lessons from the book of Joel are:

- God is guiding events on earth towards His ultimate goal at the 'day of the Lord' which is near at hand. The day of the Lord will be a time of judgment when sin will be dealt with and God's people will live with Him throughout eternity in the new heavens and new earth. See 1:15; 2:1-4, 18, 20, 25-27, 28-32; 3:1-21.
- God is a God of grace, mercy, love, compassion and forgiveness. But He is also a God of justice and so must judge sin. He may use natural disasters, political situations etc. to bring about this judgment but will always give people the opportunity to repent and come back into relationship with Him. See 1:13-18. 2:12-17, 3:1-16
- It is easy to take relationship with God for granted. God had abundantly blessed Judah, but they soon focused on themselves and their faith degenerated into empty formalism and their lives into moral decadence, with disastrous effects on the land. 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 repented, God would forgive them, restore their relationship and heal their land. See 1:1-20, 2:1-11

- God will richly bless His people materially and spiritually, as they walk in fellowship with Him. This fellowship has to be real, though, and not just external. See 2:13,14, 18-27, 3:17-21.
- The Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people with mighty power, and *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. This was initially fulfilled at Pentecost and will be completely fulfilled when Jesus comes again. See 2:28-32

Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God. Joel 2:23

Discussion questions

A key theme in Joel's prophecy is God's judgment on nations for their sinfulness. Does God still judge nations today? If so, how does He do it and why does He do it? If not, why are so many nations seemingly getting away with all sorts of wickedness?

When a plague of locusts destroys crops over a large area we would probably call it a natural disaster, rather than the judgment of God. Why do we view natural events differently these days compared to Biblical times?

The former and latter rains have often been applied to the outpourings of the Holy Spirit on the early Church (the former rain) and on the Church during the Pentecostal and Charismatic revivals in the 20th Century. Is this a valid application? Why?

Joel often speaks of the 'day of the Lord'. What is the day of the Lord? What is its purpose and will happen on that day? Why are so many Christians not concerned about the day of the Lord? What can we do to be prepared for the day of the Lord?

How can you reconcile the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8) with the awful judgments described in Joel's prophecy?

Peter quoted from Joel 2:28,29 on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured on the early Church. (See Acts 2:16-21). How were the details in Joel's prophecy fulfilled at that time? Is the prophecy still relevant today? How?

What have you learned from your study of Joel? How will you apply this in your life?