

The Book of Joel

The Title, Author, and Date of Joel

1. Title: Joel
 - a. Hebrew – יוֹאֵל
 - b. Greek – Ἰωὴλ
2. Author: Joel
 - a. *Possibly* one of the earliest of the minor prophets. Very little information on him.
 - b. Name means: “YHWH is God”
3. Date: c. 835 B.C., c. 597-586 B.C., or c. 516 B.C (see Interpretive Issues, below).
 - a. The book is difficult to date because there is no mention of the world powers of the time, and no real information about Joel himself. Not even his father is mentioned (unusual for the prophets).
 - b. The date of the book is based on its position in the Hebrew canon, allusions to possible historical events, and linguistic style. (see *MacArthur Study Bible* and *Bible Knowledge Commentary* for more information)
 - c. What is most important here, is that the message is timeless: it applies to every age. And perhaps that is why God did not make the date clear.

The Background and Setting of Joel.

1. The person – “Joel, the son of Pethuel” 1.1
 - a. It is not entirely clear whether he was from the north or the south, nor which kingdom he prophesied to. However, the tone of his writing to Jerusalem does not sound like one who is a stranger to it, but one who is a resident. So, he was probably from Judea.
 - b. He seems to be very zealous for the service of the temple (1.9; 2.13-16), but he was not a Levite/priest.
 - c. He was also familiar with pastoral and agricultural settings (1.13-14; 2.17)
2. His ministry
 - a. No account is given of his calling to be a prophet.
 - b. He seems to have been a Judean, but he seems to prophesy to both the North and South, as well as to the Gentile nations.
 - c. An important distinction of Joel is his prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 2.28-32, which Jesus alludes to in *John 7.39*, and which is quoted in *Acts 2.16-21*.
3. Setting
 - a. The kings and nations of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia were constant ongoing threats to God’s people (ch. 3).
 - b. The severe locust plague in chapter one had stripped the land of the Southern Kingdom, bringing a catastrophic devastation. (locust plagues were a sign of judgment - cp. the Exodus, and Deuteronomy 28)
 - c. God uses this natural catastrophe as an illustration of a greater catastrophe to come: The future *Day of the Lord*, which will totally change the world.
 - 1) The locusts of chapter one are likened to the coming armies of other nations, which would be a judgment on the nation for their idolatry and sin.
 - 2) So, this present judgment foreshadows the *future* judgment of the Day of the Lord.
 - 3) MacArthur: “As the locusts were a judgment on sin, God’ future judgments during the Day of the Lord will far exceed them.” *MSB*, p. 1240

The Purpose and Message of Joel

1. The **message** of the book of Joel is: “**Repent, because the Day of the Lord is coming.**”
2. The **purpose** of the book of Joel is to **call God’s people (all people, in fact) to submit themselves to God.**
 - a. Though the times seemed peaceful, the people still need to get proper perspective.
 - b. Key Verses: 2.12-13; 2.28-32

The Outline of Joel

1. Historical section – the “day of the Lord” in Joel’s day – 1.1-20
 - a. Locusts caused massive destruction. This is call to repentance.

2. Transitional section – the future “Day of the Lord” illustrated in the present “day of the Lord” – 2.1-17
 - a. The “day of the Lord” (locusts) illustrate the future “Day of the Lord” (worldwide judgment).
 - b. The present calls for repentance now, before the future comes. A promise of present blessing for those who are repentant.
3. Eschatological section – the future “Day of the Lord” will be the *final Day of the Lord* – 2.18-3.21
 - a. YHWH will come with greater judgment than mere locusts.
 - b. This section is a warning of future destruction, as well as a promise of restoration and blessing (especially by the Holy Spirit), in which God shows blessing to those who repent.

The Themes of Joel

1. The primary theme of the book is **the Day of the Lord**.
 - a. This theme permeates the entire book, and is the most sustained treatment of theme in the entire Old Testament. n.b. *1.15; 2.1, 11, 31; 3.14*
 - b. “*Day of the Lord*” – (the “Lord’s day”) describes an irruption of God into human history (especially of the nation of Israel), to deal with His people directly.
 - 1) A period of wrath and purification *uniquely under God’s direct involvement. God is King/Ruler.*
 - 2) Destruction is a key aspect, and often involves *natural events* (like, locusts) which God brings in judgment.
 - 3) It is a day of *Reckoning*, when God swiftly and decisively exercises victory over His enemies, and blesses His faithful ones, thus displaying His glory to all, once for all.
 - c. The “*day of the Lord*” (small “d”) occurs many times in the OT, at a limited geographical and contemporary level (such as, chapter one).
 - d. The “*Day of the Lord*” (big “D”) is a unique, singular, and final time when God alone will be the center of attention, and will *once and for all establish His will in His universe*.
 - 1) *It will no longer be the “Day of Man,” but “The Day of YHWH”!* n.b *Zp 1.14-18*
 - 2) It begins with the Rapture of the church, followed by “Daniel’s 70th week” (the Tribulation), the Second Coming, the Messianic Kingdom (the Millennium), and the Great White Throne judgment.
 - 3) Within that “Day,” God will completely vindicate *and* purify His name, His Son, His Nation, and bring in eternal blessing.
 - e. The phrase “day of the Lord” is used 19x in the OT – *Is 2.12; 13.6, 9; Eze 13.5; 30.3; Joel 1.15; 2.1, 11, 31; 3.14; Am 5.18, 18, 20; Obad 15; Zp 1.7, 14; Mal 4.5*
2. The corollary theme (though not as large) of the book is **Blessing and Restoration**. cp. *2.21ff; 3.16-21*

Interpretive Issues

1. The locusts of chapter one – Are these to be understood as real locusts, or figurative?
 - a. They are real. There is no indication in the context that they are figurative.
 - b. Note the words “as” and “like” in chapter two, which *is* figurative.
2. The prophecy of the giving of the Holy Spirit in 2.28-32 – Is this fulfilled in Act 2 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?
 - a. No. The use of this passage by Peter in Acts 2 is that the events of Acts 2 are a *preview* of the future fulfillment of the passage.
 - b. MacArthur: “. . . but clearly Joel is referring to the final terrible Day of the Lord. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not a fulfillment, but a preview and sample of the Spirit’s power and work to be released fully and finally in the Messiah’s kingdom after the Day of the Lord.” *MSB* p. 1241.
3. The date of the book – Is the book written early in the Minor Prophets (c. 835-796 B.C.) or late in the pre-exilic period (c. 597-586 B.C.), or in the post-exilic period (c. 515 B.C.)?
 - a. As mentioned under “Date” above, the problem is a lack of clear evidence in the text which helps us to know the date precisely.
 - b. See the good discussion by Dr. Robert Chisholm in the Bible Knowledge Commentary intro to Joel, as well as MacArthur’s discussion in the MacArthur Study Bible.