

2. Joel 830-796 B.C.

The book of Joel has three chapters. It is a Pre-Exilic Northern Kingdom book.

Author

We know nothing about Joel ben Pethuel except the name Joel means “Yahweh is God.”

Date

As with Obadiah, several suggestions have been given and debated as to the date of Joel’s prophecy. Although it is not conclusive, the best argument seems to be that Joel was written during the early days of the reign of the boy king, Jehoash. Ryrie summarized the issue:

Joel, apparently wrote during the days of young King Jehoash (835–796), who was under the regency of priests when he ascended the throne of Judah at the age of seven (2 Kings 11:21).

Though some date the book after the Exile, the enemies of Judah are not identified in the prophecy as Arameans, Assyrians, or Babylonians, as would be the case if the book were written after the captivity (see 3:4, 19). [Ryrie Study Bible]

Hobart Freeman agrees:

The very naming of these particular nations [Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom (Joel 3:4, 19)] is strong evidence for a preexilic date for the book, inasmuch as they were the early preexilic enemies of Judah, not the later nations of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia.” [“An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets.” Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, p. 148; see also Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “A Survey of Old Testament Introduction.” Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 305)]

Arguments for a later date include similar passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel, but those references are not direct quotes, and there is always the question of who was referring to whom or were they both just referring to the truth revealed by God. Again, although we cannot be dogmatic about the date, internal evidence would seem to favor an early date in the 800s B.C.

Purpose

If Joel was written in the 800s, which seems most likely, then he was the first prophet to give the sequence of future events beginning with *the day of the Lord*. Isaiah and Ezekiel predict *the day of the Lord* (Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3), but Isaiah was written in the 700s (a hundred years after Joel), and Ezekiel was written in the 500s (three hundred years after Joel). So the sequence of future events, which we know as the seven-year Tribulation, followed by the Second Coming of Christ, followed by a millennial (thousand-year) reign of Christ on earth, all began with the revelation given to Joel.

Joel does not personify the Second Coming, except in the general sense that it is the day of the *Lord* and *whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered* (2:31-32). Joel does not mention a Messiah (as Isaiah does), or number the Tribulation as seven years (as Daniel does), or give the details (that Jesus does), or number the 1,000 years of the Millennial Kingdom (as the angel revealed to the Apostle John). Nonetheless, the prophecy of Joel gives the same sequence of events later repeated and developed by the revelation given to Isaiah, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostle John.

The most interesting thing about the judgment predicted by Joel is that he never mentions any specific sins, except *drunkards* (1:5), but they are not specified as the reason for judgment. That

tells us the purpose of the book is not to point out specific sins but to point out the coming of *the day of the Lord*. It is about a certainty of judgment and the sequence of judgment.

The purpose of Joel is to predict the sequence of future events, known as *the day of the Lord*.

Theme

Subject: The Judgment of God

Complement: is unavoidable

God is a judging God, His judgments are just, true, unavoidable, and include a future sequence of events.

Key Verse

Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty (1:15).

Basic Outline of Joel

Joel 1, An army (of locust or one pictured as locust) invades Israel as a judgment for the sins of God's people

Joel 2:1-17, The Future Tribulation (as in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6–18)

Joel 2:1-11, *The Day of the Lord* is the future tribulation period

Joel 2:12-17, A call to repentance

Joel 2:18-32, The Future Millennial Kingdom

Joel 2:18-27, An announcement of the future Millennial Kingdom

Joel 2:28-32, The conditions on earth during the future Millennial Kingdom

Joel 3, The Judgments of the Future Millennial Kingdom (beginning with the Second Coming of Christ).

Joel 3:1-16, The judgment of the nations

Joel 3:17-21, The restoration of the believing remnant of Israel

Commentary

Joel 1, An army (of locust or one pictured as locust) invades Israel

Verse 1, The revelation of God came to Joel, in words, not mystical or mental telepathy.

Verses 2-20, The locust plague, judgment, and a sign of judgment

In this paragraph, Joel called for the people to mourn a devastating locust plague. Three different groups are mentioned: drunkards (1:5), priests (1:9), and farmers (1:11). In verses 13-14, the priests are called upon to organize a national repentance.

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.

The basic question that needs to be decided here is, Was this locust plague...

(1) Something that has already happened (with actual or metaphorical locusts)?

(2) A prediction of an upcoming invasion (with actual or metaphorical locusts)?

(3) A reference to the future tribulation period (with actual or metaphorical locusts)?

If it was a current event, then it was a judgment for the sins of Israel. God had warned the people of a locust plague as a judgment for their unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 28:38, 42). If it is a prediction of judgment, then it was probably a warning of the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., which was over a hundred years in the future. The other possibility is that it is the same as the Day of the Lord, the future Tribulation discussed in chapter 2, since locusts are a part of that Tribulation (Revelation 9:1-12). Of course, it could be both immediate and future. Richard Patterson writing for “Expositor’s Bible Commentary” says,

...this unprecedented plague was nothing else but a display of God’s judgment and a harbinger and dire warning of a still further judgment.

Verse 15 would seem to give credibility to the idea that both a judgment and a warning are in mind.

Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Joel 2:1-17, The Future Tribulation

Verses 1-11, The Day of the Lord Is Coming

In the future, there will be a time when God intervenes and brings judgment. His judgment is pictured here as *a mighty people* which make up the Lord’s army.

Verse 2, *a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness*—sounds like the darkness of Ezekiel 30:3 and Revelation 8:12.

Verse 3, *The land is like the garden of Eden before them but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them*—possibly a reference to the prosperity the Jews developed in the Land which will be destroyed during the tribulation period.

Verses 4-5, *Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains*—possibly a reference to the horses of the Tribulation referenced in Revelation 6.

Verses 6-11 describe the events of the Tribulation as the Lord’s *army*.

Joel 2:12-17, A call to repentance

This is the most applicable portion of the book to all ages, since it reveals the heart of God.

Verses 12-13, *“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 2:18-32, The Future Millennial Kingdom

Verses 8-27, An announcement of the future Millennial Kingdom

Verse 25, *“Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among*

you. This sounds like the locust of chapter 1 could be a harbinger of the future Tribulation, restored during the Millennial Kingdom.

Verses 28-32, Conditions on earth during the future Millennial Kingdom

There are three things God told Joel He will do during the future, what we call, the Millennial Kingdom:

1. *It will come about after this [when the Jewish people have turned back to God (at what we know as the Second Coming of Christ) after this as they are going into what we know as the Millennial Kingdom] 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... [see also Ezekiel 39:29; Zechariah 12:10f; Jeremiah 31:31f].*
2. *I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, the sun will be turned into darkness before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes—the supernatural events during the Tribulation and before the Second Coming of Christ (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 6–18).*
3. *And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; for...in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, ...even among the survivors—Jesus called this the separation of the sheep [saints] from the goats [unbelievers] in Matthew 25:31-34.*

Peter quoted these verses in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when the people of many nations were hearing the apostles speak in their own languages. They said of the apostles, “*They are full of sweet wine.*” But Peter answered, “*For these men are not drunk, as you suppose...but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel*, then he quoted Joel 2:28-32. Obviously, Peter did not think the Acts 2 Day of Pentecost tongues was the fulfillment of Joel 2. There were no tongues spoken in Joel 2, and at the Day of Pentecost there were no old men dreaming dreams, no young men seeing visions, no wonders in the sky, the sun did not turn to darkness nor the moon into blood. Peter is not saying this is that, but this is like that, because it shows God said He will do miraculous things, and that is what is happening, on the Day of Pentecost, not drunken babbling. Here are some similarities and difference between the two events:

Similarities:

1. The Holy Spirit is given.
2. The Holy Spirit comes after Christ was glorified (Acts 1:9-11; 2:33-35).
3. The invitation is to *whoever calls on the name of the Lord*.

Differences:

1. In our age, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but in the Millennial Kingdom, there will be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit *on all mankind*.
2. In our age, we do not receive new revelation.
3. Our age is one of persecution, not physical prosperity.
4. After the Tribulation, during the Millennial Kingdom, believers are saved, both spiritually and physically. But in Acts 2, Peter is using the word “saved” only in a spiritual sense, as the rest of his message indicates.

Our church age is not a literal fulfillment (author’s intended meaning) of Joel 2. But Joel 2 will be literally (author’s intended meaning) fulfilled *after* what we know from other Scripture as the Tribulation, and the Second Coming of Christ, in the Millennial Kingdom. The literal fulfillment

of Joel 2 is still future.

Joel 3, The Judgments of the Future Millennial Kingdom

Verses 1-16, The judgment of the nations

Judgment is announced (verses 1-8), *“I will gather all the [Gentile] nations [at the Second Coming of Christ (Matthew 24:31-46)] and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat [the name means “the Lord judges,” the physical place is probably the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem.] Then I will enter into judgment with them.”* [Like Jesus’ description of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 24, the judgment is based on how they treated God’s people.]

Judgment is described (verses 9-16), *The Lord roars from Zion...the Lord is a refuge for His people... Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, ...so Jerusalem will be holy.*

This paragraph uses multiple metaphors (war—verses 9-12, harvest—verse 13, the heaven and earth undergo changes—verses 15-16) to describe the battle at the end of the seven-year Tribulation known as “The Battle of Armageddon” (Revelation 16:14; 19:14).

Verses 17-21, The restoration of the believing remnant of Israel

Verse 17 is the objective of the judgment, *Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy.*

Verses 18-20 describe the millennial reign of Jesus Christ over the earth.

Verse 21 has a disputed translation. Some, like the KJV, read, *For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed.* A second reading would be, as the NASB prefers, *And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged.* The second seems preferable, since blood guiltiness on the part of Judah is not mentioned elsewhere in Joel.

An Application

The gods of other religions cannot be known or are not supposed to be known. But the God of the Bible tells us we are to know Him (John 17:3). In order to know God, we need to know that He is a God of judgment. He will bring every act into judgment, and He has a predetermined plan for that judgment. So if we think we are getting away with some sin—we are not. If a government thinks it is getting away with some cruelty—it is not. If a nation thinks it is getting away with rejecting the law of God—they are not. In His own time, according to His own planned and announced sequence of events, *the day of the Lord* will come.

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).