

LESSON 1 ~ JOEL

Disaster struck the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the form of a cloud of locusts. In a matter of hours, the fields were stripped bare, and the prophet Joel seized this opportunity to proclaim God's message. The plague of locusts is seen as a foreshadowing of the coming day of the Lord. In light of this, the book warns of approaching judgment, calls the people to repentance, and gives God's people hope of the coming day of salvation that will follow judgment.

The Hebrew name *Yo'el* means "Yahweh is God," a name appropriate to a book which emphasizes God's sovereign work in history.

Author

Although there are several other Joels in the Bible, the prophet Joel is known only from this book. Joel identifies himself as the son of Pethuel (1:1), and his frequent references to Zion and the house of the Lord suggest that he probably lived not far from Jerusalem. Because of his statements about the priesthood in 1:13, 14; and 2:17, some think Joel was a priest as well as a prophet. In any case, Joel was a clear, concise, and uncompromising preacher of repentance.

Date

Since the book includes no explicit time references, it cannot be dated with certainty. It has traditionally been dated c. 835 B.C., when Joash was placed upon the throne at the age of seven and Jehoiada the priest functioned as the real ruler (2 Kin. 11; 12). This period seems to fit the text of Joel since the influence of the priesthood appears to be strong and there is no mention of a king. Because of this priestly prominence, others argue that Joel is to be dated much later in the postexilic period.

Evidence also points to a sharing of material between Joel and Amos. Although some believe that Joel borrowed from Amos, it is more likely that Amos, an eighth-century prophet, borrowed from Joel. In addition, Joel's style is more like that of Hosea and Amos than that of the postexilic writers. Since Joel does not mention idolatry, it may have been written after the purge of Baal worship early in the reign of Joash under Jehoiada the priest. As an early prophet in Judah, Joel would have been a contemporary of Elisha in Israel.

Themes and Literary Structure

The book of Joel is often considered to be the most polished literary work among the prophetic writings. His careful and well-developed imagery, especially in describing the locust plague in chapters 1 and 2, and the clear structure of the book support this contention. The book of Joel can be divided into two major sections: the day of the Lord in retrospect (ch. 1); and the day of the Lord in prospect (chs. 2; 3).

This brief book develops the crucial theme of the coming day of the Lord (1:15; 2:1, 2, 11, 31; 3:14, 18)—a time of awesome judgment upon people and nations that have rebelled against God. But it is also a time of future blessing upon those who have trusted in Him. The theme of disaster runs throughout the book (locust plagues, famine, raging fires, invading armies, celestial phenomena), but promises of hope are interspersed with the pronouncements of coming judgment.¹

¹*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

Understand The Background

1. If we assume that the book was written early in the reign of Joash then we can refer to 2Kings 11:1-12:21 for the background on this period of Judean history.
2. Read Deuteronomy 28 to see what God had told Israel what would happen if they did not obey His commands.

The Outline of Joel

- I. The Day of the Lord in Retrospect 1:1–20**
 - A. The Past Day of the Locust 1:1–12
 - B. The Past Day of the Drought 1:13–20
- II. The Day of the Lord in Prospect 2:1–3:21**
 - A. The Imminent Day of the Lord 2:1–27
 - B. The Ultimate Day of the Lord 2:28–3:21

Study Questions For Joel Chapter 1

1. Is the locust army figurative for real armies that attacked Judah or is it literal story of a locust plague? Why?
2. Why were the elders told to tell the children about it?
3. What were they supposed to tell their children about?
4. What does it mean to lament? Why were they supposed to do it?
5. Why were the priests supposed to lament, wail and lie in sackcloth? What else were they supposed to do?
6. Research and Thought Question: What is sackcloth and why was it used for mourning?