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BACKGROUND

Perhaps during the reign of Joash (835-796 B.C., see <u>Date</u>), a terrible plague of locusts struck Judah. The prophet Joel called his people to repentance and pleaded with God to end the plague. Yet he saw in the disaster a foreshadowing of a far greater future plague: God's final judgment on sin in the Great Tribulation. Looking still farther into the future, he also saw the blessings of the Millennium. Assuming he wrote during Joash's reign, Joel was among the earliest of the writing prophets (see <u>Introduction to the Prophets</u>).

AUTHOR

Nothing is known about Joel except his father's name (<u>Joel 1:1</u>) and his familiarity with Jerusalem (see *Location*).

DATE

Determining the date of this book is difficult because Joel names no Israelite kings. It is apparent, however, that he was an early prophet:

- Joel's order of placement within the 12 minor prophets would suggest a date before 800 B.C., since these books are in roughly chronological order.
- There are thematic similarities with other prophets of this era such as Amos and Isaiah (see *Comparison with Other Bible Books*).

LOCATION

Joel ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah, as seen by his references to that area:

- the "Temple of the LORD" (Joel 1:9, 14)
- "Zion" (a hill in Jerusalem, mentioned seven times)
- several references to Judah and Jerusalem

PURPOSE

See *Background*.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Amos:

• Both speak of mountains "dripping" with wine (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13).

- Both say that the Lord will "roar" from Zion (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2).
- Both declare that the day of the Lord will be dark, not light (Joel 2:2, 10, 31; Joel 3:15; Amos 5:18, 20).

Isaiah:

- Both proclaim that "the day of the LORD" is at hand (Joel 1:15; Isaiah 13:6) and that it is a day when the sun and moon will not give light (Joel 2:10; Joel 3:15; Isaiah 13:10).
- Both speak of the pouring out of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28; Isaiah 32:15; Isaiah 44:3).
- Joel spoke of beating "plowshares into swords" in preparation for Armageddon (<u>Joel</u> <u>3:10</u>). Isaiah, writing some 100 years later, reversed the saying and made it an image of millennial peace (<u>Isaiah 2:4</u>; see <u>Micah 4:3</u>).

OUTLINE

- 1. THE PRESENT DEVASTATION (Joel 1)
- 2. THE FUTURE TRIBULATION (Joel 2:1-17)
 - A. Devastation (Joel 2:1-11)
 - B. Deliverance (Joel 2:12-17)

III.THE FUTURE RESTORATION (Joel 2:18-3:21)

- A. Restoration and the Day of Christ (Millennium) (Joel 2:18-27)
- B. The Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32)
- C. The Day of Christ (Millennium), continued (Joel 3:1-21)
 - 1. The destruction of sinners (Joel 3:1-17)
 - 2. The delight of saints (Joel 3:18-21)

TIMELINE

- 931 B.C.: Kingdom divides, Israel, Judah
- 836 B.C.: Joash becomes king, Joel begins ministry?
- 796 B.C.: Joash's reign ends, Joel's ministry ends?
- 740 B.C.: Isaiah begins ministry
- 722 B.C.: Fall of Israel
- 586 B.C.: Fall of Judah

Joel 1:1-12 *The ultimate locust plague.* God called Joel to prophesy following a severe locust plague. A mighty "army of locusts" (Joel 1:6) had stripped the entire land of produce, the worst possible calamity for a nation largely dependent on agriculture. This unprecedented disaster (Joel 1:2)

had robbed the people of their joy (Joel 1:12). Even the drunkards sorrowed because the locusts had deprived them of their wine (Joel 1:5).

In contrast with God's disobedient people, the lowly locust always does his will. God used the locust, among other things, to judge Egypt (see <u>Exodus 10:1-20</u>). Moses later prophesied that God would use locusts, among other things, to punish his people if they were disobedient (see <u>Deut. 28:38</u>, <u>42</u>). Now that prophecy was fulfilled.

Joel 1:13-20 *The ultimate response: Fast and pray!* Joel called for a national time of mourning, during which all the people would gather in the Temple and seek God's help. Joel saw the plague as a foreshadowing of "the day of the LORD," which was "on the way" and which would be a time of "destruction" (Joel 1:15).

Joel 2:1-11 Single-minded locusts, inescapable judgment. Joel called for the alarm to be sounded, warning Judah of the approaching day of the Lord (Joel 2:1, 11). That judgment, like the present plague, would be unique in its devastation, as emphasized by ominous figures such as "thick clouds and deep blackness," "fire," faces "pale with fright," and a "quaking" earth and "trembling" heavens. Judah's Eden-like countryside would become a desolate wilderness. Both the locusts and the future human invaders were single-mindedly bent on Judah's total destruction: As instruments of God's determined will (Joel 2:11), their march was orderly and unstoppable (Joel 2:7).

Concerning the "day of the LORD," often referred to as the "Tribulation," see <u>Isaiah: Background</u> and exposition on SISIB = 125-4:1.

Joel 2:12-17 "But there's still time to turn!" Joel called the people to repent, in hopes that God would remove the plague. He called for the trumpet to be blown a second time, to gather the people together so that the priests could intercede for them.

God "is eager not to punish" (Joel 2:13; see Exodus 34:6; Jeremiah 18:8; Amos 7:3, 6; exposition on [§]Jonah 3:1-10.). His judgments are therapeutic, not punitive. They are designed to bring his people to repentance (see <u>2 Peter 3:9</u>). God is "not easily angered" (Joel 2:13; see <u>Neh. 9:17; Psalm 103:8</u>; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3), and we should be slow to anger as well (see <u>Proverbs 15:18; Proverbs 19:11; James 1:19</u>).

Joel appealed to God to save the people of Judah so that their enemies would not doubt his ability to do so (Joel 2:17). Other OT saints urged God thus to act "for his name's sake" (see <u>Numbers 14:13-16; Psalm 42:10; Psalm 79:10</u>). Even the Lord himself declared this as one of his motives for rescuing his people (see <u>Isaiah 37:35; Isaiah 45:4-6; Ezekiel 20:5-9; Ezekiel 36:22-36</u>).

Joel 2:18-27 *After plague and repentance, a land of plenty!* When his people have repented, God will have pity on them. He will remove and destroy the locust army. He will care for their land, restore their crops, and remove their reproach among the nations. He will make up to the people all that they have lost, and at last they will recognize him as their God.

The permanence of this restoration ("never," <u>Joel 2:26</u>) and the people's seemingly permanent conversion (<u>Joel 2:27</u>) suggest that this passage also looks ahead to the Millennium, when the promise of <u>Jeremiah 31:31-34</u> will be fully realized.

Joel 2:28-32 *His Spirit for all who seek it!* Sometime "after" this, God will "pour out [his] Spirit upon all people" (Joel 2:28; see Isaiah 32:15; Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29). All humanity, male and female, the high and the lowly alike, will be eligible to receive the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). The only qualification will be a right relationship with the Lord (Joel 2:32).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be accompanied by signs and wonders in nature, all in preparation for the great day of the Lord (Joel 2:30-31). It will move people to seek salvation and deliverance from judgment (Joel 2:32).

Peter saw the miraculous signs and outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as a fulfillment of this prophecy (see Acts 2:1-21). Evangelical scholars generally agree that Scripture promises another such outpouring at the end of the Tribulation, which will usher in the Millennium. On OT manifestations of the Holy Spirit, see exposition on $^{\$}1$ Samuel 9:27-10:8.

Joel 3:1-10 *The armies in the valley.* When God is ready to restore his people to their land (Joel 3:1, 7), he will gather all the nations that have violated them to the valley of Jehoshaphat, where he will judge them (Joel 3:2). God taunted his enemies and urged them to come and fight him (Joel 3:10), having already declared that all their efforts and preparation will be futile: They will not escape God's judgment; they will be as helpless before God as Israel was before them (Joel 3:4).

Joel 3:11-14 *The verdict in the valley.* Once more, God invited the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat, declaring that the time was ripe for judgment (compare Joel 3:13 with Isaiah 63:1-6; Rev. 14:18-20; Rev. 19:15.) The "valley of decision" (Joel 3:14) is another name for the valley of Jehoshaphat, which means "the LORD judges" (Joel 3:2, 12). The multitudes in this valley will not be invited to make a decision for God. Rather, God himself will have already made the decision—to judge them.

<u>Joel 3:11-17</u> is generally regarded as describing the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (see exposition on [§]Joel 2:1-11).

Joel 3:15-21 *The verdict for Israel.* Announced by momentous signs in nature, God will deliver his people. The day of the Lord will have accomplished three things for them:

- All of Judah's enemies (represented by Egypt and Edom, <u>3:19</u>) will be permanently destroyed.
- Judah and Jerusalem will be permanently established as the homeland of God's people (Joel 3:20).
- They will experience national repentance and regeneration (Joel 3:17, 21).

Everything God promised the nation in the New Covenant (see <u>Jeremiah 31:31-34</u>) will be realized—because God will be personally present in Zion to guarantee it (<u>Joel 3:17, 21</u>).

JOEL

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JOEL)

Key Facts: Prophet, used locust plague to illustrate the coming Great Tribulation Father: Pethuel (Joel 1:1) Total Bible References: 2 Key References: Joel 1-3; Acts 2:16

Joel Speaks

No doubt about it, we have just experienced the worst locust plague in Israel's history. Hopefully, the season of prayer and fasting I called for has resulted in the necessary repentance. What an object lesson these insects have been, however, sent not only to chasten but also to illustrate the final battle, when human warriors will invade and devastate our land. (Joel 1:1-4, 14-20)

What a dreadful day that will be! My hand trembled as I wrote of it: "I will cause wonders in the heavens and on the earth—blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon will turn bloodred before that great and terrible day of the LORD arrives." (Joel 2:1-2, 30-31)

But my fears melted into peace and joy when he revealed how the story will end: "In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk. Water will fill the dry streambeds of Judah, and a fountain will burst forth from the LORD's Temple." (Joel 3:18)

All in all, I would say that the good news resulting from this plague far outweighs the bad!

Spiritual Lesson from Joel

• Joel effectively used a current event of his day, a terrible locust plague, to illustrate and warn about a future event, the Tribulation (Joel 2:1-11; Joel 3:9-16). Jesus often used a similar method of teaching (see Luke 13:1-5; Luke 18:18-27; Luke 21:1-4). We, too, can draw lessons from everyday life to help others learn spiritual truths.

Key Verse

"And anyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Joel 2:32).