

Joel – An Old Testament Minor Prophet

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1. Overview:

- a. Joel was an Old Testament prophet who was used by the LORD to call the southern kingdom of Judah to repentance. One method used by the LORD to get our attention is to remove His blessings from us. “The Judeans [at the time of Joel] lived with a much clearer sense of their dependence on heaven. Yet they were still slow to repent, even in the face of disaster. As you read Joel, hear his alarm. Tighten your belt and take his call of repentance to heart.”¹
 - b. “The book focuses its prophetic judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah with frequent references to Zion and the temple worship (Joel 1:13–14; 2:23, 32; 3:16, 21). Joel’s familiarity with this area and the worship in the temple suggests that he lived in Judah, possibly even in the city of Jerusalem itself.”²
2. **Date of Writing:** “Dating the writing of the book of Joel remains one of the most difficult tasks for Old Testament scholars because unlike most prophetic writers, Joel gave no explicit indication of his time period. In particular, Joel refrained from mentioning the current ruling kings. One of the most compelling arguments for dating the writing of the book of Joel explains this omission by suggesting the prophecy occurred in the aftermath of Judah’s only ruling queen, Athaliah (d. 835 BC). Upon her death, she left only her young [grandson], Joash, to rule. But because Joash was too young to rule, the priest Jehoiada ruled in his place until he came of age. So if Joel prophesied during this caretaking period, it would make sense that he mentioned no official king. The book of Joel also makes ample mention of priests, temple rituals, and nations, such as Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom, that were prominent in the late ninth century BC. All of that points to a date of approximately 835 BC or soon after, making Joel one of the earliest writing prophets, as well as a contemporary of the prophet Elisha.” (Insight)
 3. **Luther on Joel:** “Joel was a kindly and gentle man. He does not denounce and rebuke as do the other prophets, but pleads and laments... But it happened to him as to the other prophets: the people did not believe his words and held him to be a fool. Nevertheless Joel is highly praised in the New Testament...” (TLSB – The Lutheran Study Bible, 1447)
 4. **Blessings for Readers:** As you read Joel’s prophecy, consider carefully his call to repentance. Consider your life, beliefs, and plans in view of God’s Holy Word. Pray for the Lord’s forgiveness, and ask for the blessing of His Holy Spirit (2:28–29), which He poured out in Holy Baptism. His Spirit will help you understand the Word and put it into practice.

When you read Joel’s comments about the day of the Lord, consider them with all earnestness. Let them encourage you to share the good news of God’s love and forgiveness with those who have not yet heard or believed in the Lord. Though He is coming to judge the world and to condemn the unrepentant, He is also coming to declare “not guilty” all who trust in His mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ (3:16).” (TLSB, 1448)

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1447). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

² <http://www.insight.org/resources/bible/joel.html#sthash.bKAeTIF1.dpuf>

Outline (TLSB, 1448):

Superscription (1:1)

I. Catastrophes Current and Coming (1:2–2:17)

A. The Current Catastrophe: The Locust Plague (1:2–20)

1. Description of the locust plague (1:2–12)
2. Call to fast at the temple (1:13–14)
3. A lament and prayer (1:15–20)

B. The Coming Catastrophe: The Day of the Lord (2:1–17)

1. Blow a trumpet in Zion (2:1–2)
2. The Lord's army as locusts (2:3–11)
3. Call to return to the Lord (2:12–14)
4. Call to fast and pray at the temple (2:15–17)

II. The Lord's Response (2:18–3:21)

A. To the Locust Plague: Healing and Restoration (2:18–27)

B. To the Coming Day of the Lord (2:28–3:21)

1. Salvation for the survivors who escape (2:28–32)
 - a. All will be prophets (2:28–29)
 - b. Ones calling on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:30–32)
2. Judgment of the Nations (ch 3)
 - a. Summons and accusations (3:1–12)
 - b. The nations are sentenced, while Judah is blessed (3:13–21)

Our Study: I intend to give an overview, focus on some passages, and make some application.

An Invasion of Locusts (1:2-12):

1. Note: Even though some believe the locust invasion is actually describing the Assyrians conquering the northern kingdom of Israel (1:6; 2:2), such is never specified in the text. Instead, the People's Bible Commentary states: *"The occasion for the book of Joel was a terrible plague of...desert locusts and then a drought, devastating the land of Judah."*³
2. 2-4: Read 2-4; the severity of the locusts is unprecedented and extremely thorough (see the People's Bible Commentary, 127-128).
3. 5-12: The destruction is thorough and should cause everyone to be sorry for his/her sins.
 - a. When we have what we need, it is easy to reject God's ways and do what pleases us.
 - b. When God removes what we need, we tend to ♦become aware of our sins, ♦be filled with sorrow, and ♦look to Him to provide what we need.
 - c. Read about the example of sorrow in v. 8 and TLSB note.
4. What about you:
 - a. Are you receiving God's blessings, *but* doing whatever you please? Y N
 - b. Are you aware of your sins *and* truly sorry? Y N
 - c. If yes, are you trying to go and sin no more? Y N

³ Paul E. Eickmann, People's Bible Commentary (PBC) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 129.

A Call to Repentance (1:13-20):

1. 13: Read parts a and b to see the call to the spiritual leaders.
2. 14: They are to gather the others to cry to the LORD for mercy; read v. 14.
3. 15: Here “the day of the LORD” refers to the judgment in Joel’s day, but it also points ahead to the final judgment that will take place when Jesus’ returns.
4. 18: Read how the cattle and sheep suffered; they did not sin and yet they endured the consequences.
5. What about you:
 - a. Has your sin caused others to suffer? Y N
 - b. If yes, have you gone to their aid *and* sought their forgiveness? Y N

The Day of the LORD (2:1-11): “...the locust plague, the present event, is transparent and prophetic to Joel’s eye. He speak of the locusts and the Lord’s coming day of judgment in one breath, much as Jesus mingles his warning about the fall of Jerusalem with his words about signs of the world’s endtime (Luke 21:20-28).” (PBC, 142-143)

1. 1:
 - a. Both in Joel’s time and in ours, there is a need to “sound an alarm” to those who are continuing without repentance (*not sorry and/or not trusting in Jesus as Savior*).
 - b. “the day of the LORD” is when He “executes His judgment by condemning the wicked and delivering the righteous.” (TLBS, 1079) “Here, the expression refers simply to the day when God will punish Judah by sending the locusts.” (TLSB, 1450) Yet all such preliminary judgments are pointing ahead to the final judgment (Rev. 20). For all who do not repent, they will suffer in this life and forevermore!
2. 2-11: Read and visualize the terrifying picture of the LORD’s judgment.

Return of the LORD (2:12-17): Even though everyone deserves the LORD’s judgment and no one can stand up against it, He still loves us, has provided our forgiveness through Jesus, and is enabling us to receive it.

1. 12-13: Read about the components of repentance and the reasons to repent.
2. 15-16:
 - a. Read about the solemn assembly and its participants.
 - b. “Consecrate. Entailed having the people prepare themselves for worship by abstaining from work, food, and sexual relations (1:14; Ex 19:15). *gather the children, even nursing infants*. This sacred purification included everyone, regardless of age or circumstances. *Let the bridegroom ... bride*. Even newlyweds were to postpone their honeymoon in order to observe this sacred fast.” (TLSB, 1452)

The LORD Had Pity (2:18-27): Notice how many times the LORD said that He would take positive action to bless the people. He wants to do the same for us!

The LORD Will Pour Out His Spirit (2:28-32):

1. 28-29: They point ahead to what happened on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus was raised from the dead.
2. 30-31: “wonders. Refers to the signs that accompany the coming “day of the LORD.” *darkness ... blood ... great and awesome day of the LORD*. Cosmic disturbances will serve as unmistakable signs on the Last Day, when Christ comes to judge the world. In anticipation of

that final day, however, the Lord periodically sent similar signs while revealing judgment on His enemies and saving His own people, e.g., the heavenly disturbances and earthquake on Good Friday (Mt 27:45, 51–54).” (TLSB, 1453)

The LORD Judges the Nations (3:1-16):

1. 1: *“those days and at that time.* Envisions not only the restoration of Joel’s generation after the locust plague but also the final deliverance of God’s people and the judgment of all nations on the Last Day (cf Mt 25:31–46). (TLSB, 1454)
2. 2: *“Valley of Jehoshaphat.* Wordplay. Jehoshaphat means “the judgment of Yahweh.” Tradition has regarded this as the Kidron Valley. The site is best taken symbolically, signifying the place of the final judgment...” (TLSB, 1454)
3. 3: Read what the present enemies did.
4. 4: The present enemies are named (PBC, 167).
5. 5: Read how the LORD took their plundering personally.
6. 8: Read what the LORD will do to the enemies.
7. 9-12: The LORD provokes the enemies to come so that He can judge them.
8. 13: *“sickle ... winepress.* Just as the wheat falls before the sickle and the ripe grapes are mashed in a winepress, so God’s enemies will be cut down and crushed on the Day of Judgment. (TLSB, 1454-1455)
9. 16: Read how the LORD terrifies His enemies, but is a refuge to his people!
10. What about you:
 - a. Do you know the LORD as your Savior? Y N
 - b. If you do, then you are certainly in regular conversation with Him: Listening to Him through the Bible – *to know, understand, believe, and apply*, and talking to Him in prayer. Does that describe your life? Y N
 - c. Don’t let these passages describe your life: Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 7:13-14 (regarding those on the broad path who think they are doing okay).

The Glorious Future of Judah (3:17-21): *“The Lord is prophesying New Testament truth in the terms of Old Testament history. He is speaking not about the present earthly city of Jerusalem but about what the apostle Paul calls “Jerusalem that is above” (Galatians 4:26), the holy Christian church.”* (PBC, 174)

1. 17: *“strangers shall never again pass through it.* There shall be no unbelievers in God’s everlasting kingdom. There will be no enemies left to torment God’s people in paradise (Rv 21:4, 8).” (TLSB, 1455)
2. 18: *“mountains shall drip ... hills shall flow.* Picture language describing the overflowing abundance and well-being enjoyed in God’s presence.” (TLSB, 1455)
3. 19: *“Egypt ... Edom.* Traditional nemeses of Israel represent all those opposed to God and His people.” (TLSB, 1455)
4. 20: *“inhabited forever.* The heavenly Jerusalem will be a place of undisturbed peace and eternal life for God’s people.” (TLSB, 1455)
5. 21: *“avenge.* The Lord will not allow any evil committed against His people to go unpunished. Thus Satan and his cohorts will be cast into the lake of fire (Rv 20:7–10).” (TLSB, 1455)