

INTRODUCTION TO 29TH BIBLEBOOK

JOEL (800 B.C. or between 500-400 B.C.)(1st / earliest book of the Prophets)

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A. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF JOEL.

Joel is the second of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name 'Joel' means '*the LORD is God*'. Joel was most probably a citizen of the southern kingdom of Judah and ministered in Judah. Because he called Judah '*Israel*' (3:1-2) he directed his prophecies against all the tribes of Israel. The northern kingdom of Israel still existed.

1. Early date.

Arguments for an early date: during the childhood of Joash (about 800 B.C.):

- The second of the 12 Minor prophets suggests an early date for this prophet.
- Joel mentions no king, but that is not necessary in such a short prophecy.
- Egypt was more often the enemy of Israel (3:19) before the exile. After the exile Egypt was a place of refuge for Jews.
- Joel 3:2-3 must then be regarded as a later addition.

2. Late date.

Arguments of the majority of scholars is for a late date after the exile: between 500-400 B.C.

- The Minor Prophets are not arranged in chronological order.
- There is no mention of earlier conditions, especially the gross idolatry on the hills. The temple is the centre of worship (1:14; 2:1,17). This does not prove that there was no idolatry.
- There is no mention of kings. The state is governed by elders (1:2,14; 2:16). However, Israel was governed by 'elders' since Moses (about 1487 B.C.)
- There is no mention of the northern kingdom of Israel. 'Judah' is called 'Israel', because Judah with the royal house of David was the legitimate continuation of the theocracy and this was also true before the exile (2:27; 3:2).
- The geography is Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings seems a much smaller area than before the exile. The trumpet call from mount Zion to assemble the people could be heard in the whole country (2:1). All people could be gathered at/in the temple (1:14; 2:16). Sounding the trumpet could have been in a relay from mountain to mountain.
- Reminders of past history: Foreigners invaded Jerusalem (3:17), divided up the land, sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks as slaves (3:3,6) and scattered God's people among the nations (3:2). This probably refers to the Babylonian invasion and exile to Babylon. But Joel 3:2-3 is a possible later addition.
- While Amos (2nd), Hosea (4th), Isaiah (6th) and Jeremiah (9th prophet) have a religious-ethical emphasis, Joel (1st) has a more cultic emphasis: sacrifices (1:9,13; 2:14), fasting, weeping and mourning (2:12-13). However, sacrifices (in Leviticus) and fasting¹ definitely existed before the exile.
- The eschatological expectation is a characteristic after the exile.

The main elements of the end-time (eschatological) expectation of Israel shortly before, during and after the exile were:

- the Day of the Lord" (1:15; 2:1; 3:14)
- the return from exile (2:32; 3:1-2)
- the restoration of the city and land (3:1)
- the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28-29)
- the genuine salvation of the survivors (remnant)(2:32)
- the judgement of the nations (3:2,12)
- the great changes in nature (2:30-31; 3:15-16)
- and finally the new heaven and new earth described in terms of the glorious fruitfulness of the land (3:18)
- the eternal inhabitation of the new Jerusalem and new Israel (3:20)
- and the Lord dwelling in Zion forever (3:17)

The book of Joel is therefore regarded as the forerunner of the Jewish end-time revelation (apocalyptic) literature of the last centuries before Christ.

However, *Deuteronomy 28 (1407 B.C.) prophesied that the LORD would set an unknown nation over Israel (28:36). These aliens would rise above the Jews (28:43-44). The Jews would not understand the language of that nation (28:49). The Jews would be uprooted from the land and scattered among the nations from one end of the earth to the other (28:64).*

¹ 1 Kings 21:9; Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 36:9

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF JOEL.

The book of Joel may be given the title, “**The plague, repentance and promise of God.**” Note the contents are ‘salvation’ and ‘judgement’. The book of Joel has two parts:

1. Joel 1:1 to 2:17. Preaching of repentance.

1:1-12. The plague (an invasion of locusts) has already happened in the land of Israel. “A nation has invaded my land It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark ... leaving their branches white (1:6-7).”

1:13-20. A call to repentance. “Put on sackcloth Wail before the altar Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Cry out to the LORD (1:14) ... The day of the LORD is near (1:15) ... Food has been cut off ... The storehouses are in ruins ... The herds have no pasture. Flames have burned up all the trees of the field ... The streams of water have dried up.

2:1-10. The plague still threatens Jerusalem to motivate repentance. “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy hill. The day of the LORD is close at hand (2:1). ... A large and mighty army comes such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.... Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste - nothing escapes them (2:2-3).”

2:11-17. The plague becomes a part of the day of the LORD. “The day of the LORD is dreadful. Who can endure it? Even now, return to me with all your heart ..., with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing” (2:11-14). “Declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people ... Bring together the elders. Let the priests weep (2:15-17). “Why should they say among the peoples: Where is their God?” (2:17)

2. Joel 2:18 to 3:21. Promise of salvation.

2:18-27. Prophecy concerning the termination of the plague. “Never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations... The LORD has done great things... The trees are bearing their fruit ... He sends you abundant showers, The threshing floors will be filled with grain; The vats will overflow with new wine and oil... Never again will my people be shamed.

2:28-32. Prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord unto salvation. Afterward I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (2:28-29)... “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (2:31-32).

3:1-21. Prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord unto judgement. “I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgement against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land” (3:2)... “You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks (3:6)... Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!... Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears... (3:9-10)... “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes. For the winepress is full (3:13)...”Multitudes in the Valley of decision! ... But the LORD will be a refuge for his people.”

C. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF JOEL.

1. The locust plague points to the Day of the Lord and motivates to repentance.

Chapter 1 describes a plague of locusts that had already come over the land. Chapter 2:1-10 describes the plague of locusts as a threat to the city of Jerusalem, which was happening or about to happen and which eventually coincides with the Day of the Lord. Thus, while the plague of locusts was a real plague, *the description took on end-time (eschatological) elements* in chapter 2:11-17 and became a warning concerning the Day of the Lord (1:15; 2:1).

The prophet Joel threatens Israel with the Day of the Lord, because he wants to shake them awake.

2. Repentance will result in the termination of the plague.

Chapter 2:18-27 is not a historical description, but a prophetic message. The prophet Joel predicts what would happen if Israel repented. The prophesied termination of the plague was intended *to motivate Israel even more to repent*. If Israel repented, God would be zealous for the land and take pity on his people (2:18).

3. The Day of the Lord begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Joel motivates Israel to repent by prophesying the Day of the Lord. *The Day of the Lord would begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. According to Acts 2:1-33, this was literally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

From then onwards, the gospel of salvation was preached and is still preached. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will certainly be saved (2:32)².

4. The Day of the Lord ends with the Final Judgement.

Joel motivates Israel to repent by prophesying the Final Judgement. *Only in Jerusalem and only for those who called on the name of the Lord there would be salvation*, because all the nations would be destroyed in God's Final Judgement.

In the New Testament the Last Judgement is described as Satan deceiving the nations (unbelievers) in the four corners of the earth to gather for battle (the final war, Armageddon) against the camp of God's people, the city he loves (the Church). Fire from heaven will devour the enemies. Only those whose names are written in the book of life will be saved³.

5. The Old Testament prophecies in the light of the New Testament teachings.

The nation of Israel and the other nations in the light of the Old Testament revelation.

Because *Old Testament prophecy did not know God's plan concerning the Gentiles⁴*, the prophets could only describe the future glory of God's kingdom as happening in and through Israel and its institutions.

- They described the coming Messiah in terms of his coming for the nation of Israel.
- They described the future salvation in terms of the restoration of the nation of Israel (3:1,20).
- They described the future kingdom of God in terms of Israel, Zion or Jerusalem.
- They described the future worship of God in terms of the Old Testament temple and its ceremonies.
- They described the future judgement in terms of the judgement of the Gentile nations (3:2,12,14).
- They described the future new earth in terms of the renewed land of Israel (3:17-18).

The Old Testament revelation was therefore limited by the national character of the nation of Israel, which regarded Israel as the people of God and the other nations as not the people of God. The other nations were regarded as enemies, because they promoted idolatry and tried to destroy Israel. The prophet Joel prophesied that Israel would be restored, but the nations would be judged in the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2,12,14).

The nation of Israel and the other nations in the light of the New Testament revelation.

- *The Old Testament 'nations' are a type of the New Testament 'evil world'* as described in John 15:18-25.
- *The Old Testament 'Israel' is a type of the New Testament 'people of God'*, who are gathered from every nation in the world, as taught in Revelation 5:9⁵.

The Day of the Lord.

Old Testament prophecy saw all the end-time events together as one great event on 'the Day of the Lord'. They saw the restoration of Israel as immediately connected to the Day of the Lord. *The Day of the Lord teaches the biblical view of history.* Because for the Lord a thousand years is like one day, therefore what happens in many centuries in human history is like one day in divine biblical history.

'The Day of the Lord' began with the first coming of Jesus Christ⁶ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit⁷ and will end with the second coming of Jesus Christ⁸ and the final judgement⁹, as Joel clearly shows. Thus, in a sense *we are now living in the last days!* And all the centuries of human history must be viewed from the point of view of God's salvation and God's judgements. Or as Joel said, the locust plague is a present judgement of God and warns that the final judgement of God is at hand!

² Romans 10:12-13

³ Revelation 20:7-15

⁴ Ephesians 3:2-6

⁵ Cp. Galatians 6:12-16

⁶ 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 1:1; Hebrews 9:26

⁷ Acts 2:17

⁸ John 6:39

⁹ John 12:48