

The Day of Disaster and Call to Repentance

Joel 1

Today we start our study of the book of Joel. He is only mentioned in this book and in Acts. He cannot be confused with any other person named Joel in the Bible. It is most likely that Joel lived somewhere around Judah or Jerusalem and his ministry dates between the late 8th and early 5th centuries. There is also nothing known about his father even though he is mentioned here.

Much like Hosea this book speaks about judgement and repentance. One thing interesting though is that Joel does not use any metaphors when he speaks. Everything is literal.

Now bear with me while I give you a bit of a history lesson as it shows how this text is dated.

The prophet Joel spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah without making reference to the northern kingdom of Israel. It's hard to know when he prophesied because Joel doesn't mention any other kings or prophets. Many scholars date the book of Joel to 835 B.C.

This makes Joel a *pre-exilic* prophet, who served before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (721 B.C.) and the southern kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.). Other pre-exilic prophets include Obadiah, Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Joel is one of the earliest prophets – only Obadiah prophesied before his time (845 B.C.).

835 B.C. was a time of turmoil and transition in Judah, at the end of the reign of the Queen Mother Athaliah and the beginning of the reign of King Joash. Athaliah seized power at the sudden death in battle of her son Ahaziah, who only reigned for one year.

We see this in 2 Kings 8:26, ²⁶*Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri king of Israel.*

Athaliah killed all her son's heirs, except for one who was hidden in the temple and escaped – one-year-old Joash. 2 Kings 11:2-3, ²*But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram^[a] and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. ³He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.*

Athaliah's six-year reign of terror ended in 835 B.C. when the high priest Jehoiada overthrew her and set the seven-year-old Joash on the throne. (2 Kings 11:4-21)

During her six years as queen over Judah, Athaliah reigned wickedly. She was the granddaughter of the ungodly King Omri of Israel – making her daughter or niece to Ahab, one of Israel's worst kings. Athaliah raised her son Ahaziah to reign in the wicked pattern of Ahab, and even brought in Ahab's counselors to advise him.

2 Chronicles 22:2-4, ²*Ahaziah was twenty-two^[a] years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. ³He too followed the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him to act wickedly. ⁴He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done, for after his father's death they became his advisers, to his undoing.*

When Ahaziah was killed in battle Athaliah seized power and set her other sons to do evil, even desecrating the temple and its sacred things. 2 Chronicles 24:7, ⁷*Now the sons of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into the temple of God and had used even its sacred objects for the Baals.*

If I am accurate in thinking that Joel prophesied in 835 B.C. then the judgment he described came toward the end of the six-year reign of ungodliness under Queen Athaliah. No wonder God brought a heavy hand on Judah!

See how this all ties in with Hosea?

Let's dive in ...

1 *The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.*

The name Joel means "The Lord is God". So his name alone was a confession of his faith. I believe that God gave him this name because of His plan to use him as a prophet from the beginning.

***2** Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? **3** Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.*

So, Joel is telling them that what is coming is going to be so devastating, like something never seen before, that you had better pass this on for generations so that they do not make the same mistakes you have.

***4** What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts^[a] have eaten.*

In these first four verses Joel is telling them about an invasion of locusts that is coming and calls the people to repentance.

Now let me explain about this invasion just a bit. Swarms of locusts are a significant threat to agriculture. It is said that a swarm of locusts can be 460 square miles in size. It can have 80 to 160 million locusts in each square mile. Each locust can eat its weight in plants every day. That means a swarm of this size would eat 423 million pounds of food every day.

Then you have to take into account that the female locusts would begin to lay eggs up to 100 at a time. This would equate to as many as 75,000 eggs that would hatch in a few weeks. This means that these locusts would devour every speck of vegetation along the way.

So this scripture is speaking about the adult, young, and unborn locusts.

⁵ Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. ⁶ A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.

Joel tells the drunkards to wake up and see the devastation that the locusts had caused. When he says drunkards, he means all the people. The locusts came like a mighty nation, an army without number, and snatched everything away from you.

⁷ It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.

God is telling them that they are His vines and fig trees and even in judgement they belong to Him.

⁸ Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the betrothed of her youth.

Joel told Judah that they should look at their condition and mourn, with all the emotion and passion of a young widow.

⁹ Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD.

There is absolutely nothing left to offer to God as a sacrifice. They can do nothing but mourn.

¹⁰ The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the olive oil fails. ¹¹ Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

¹² The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree— all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the people's joy is withered away.

There is nothing left for them to even eat. This even indicates that they may have suffered from a drought along with the locusts. Everyone is in despair and have nothing to be happy about.

This should show us that Satan is more interested in corrupting believers than eliminating them.

¹³ Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴ Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

Joel called the religious leaders to lead the nation in repentance. He told the priests to mourn and wail for repentance, the idea being “prepare to do the work of repentance.”

Joel also told them *how* to do the work of repentance.

- A. **Declare A Fast** - Make getting right with God so important that you forget about the lack of food.
- B. **Call A Sacred Assembly** - Call for God’s people to come together and repent.
- C. **Summon the Elders** - Bring the elders together to lead in this act of repentance.
- D. **The House Of The Lord** - Come to the place where you *should* meet together with God.
- E. **Cry Out To The Lord** - Finally, simply cry out to God and trust that He will respond in mercy.

¹⁵ Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.

The phrase “The day of the Lord” appears 5 times in Joel and is the dominant theme of the book. This term refers to the decisive intervention of God throughout history. Such as the invasion of locusts. However, it also refers to the coming of Jesus.

The idea behind the phrase is that this is *God’s* time. Man has his “day,” and the LORD has His day.

¹⁶ Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes—joy and gladness from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. ¹⁸ How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering. ¹⁹ To you, LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. ²⁰ Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness.

Joel vividly described a devastating drought. It affected everything in Judah, and there was nothing left. Even all their herds are suffering because of the locusts and drought. Even wild fires have come along and destroyed everything that might have been left.

In this time of devastation, all Judah could do was cry out to God. They were powerless to solve the problems they were facing. God sent them to a place where only heaven could help them, so they would look in no other place.

Jesus used all of this as a wakeup call to repentance for a fallen nation.

We all have faced some sort of devastation in our lives. Nothing of this magnitude yet but it is coming. The book of Revelation talks about the plagues that will come and the utter devastation of the world.

We don't need to ask ourselves "Why is this going to happen?". We need to ask "Am I ready to face such a disaster?"

We can only face them if we look up to the heavens and ask God not only to forgive us but to guide us.