

Joel

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Joel paints vivid pictures of coming judgment and calls for the people of Judah to repent.

WHO WROTE IT? Joel.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? No one knows for sure, because there are no specific events mentioned that can peg the book to a particular date. But many believe this was one of the first prophetic books to be written.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Joel prophesied at some time during the divided kingdom.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapter 1: The plague of locusts
- Chapter 2: The day of the Lord—judgment and restoration
- Chapter 3: Judgment on the nations

KEY CONCEPTS

"The day of the Lord" (Joel uses this phrase to describe a coming day when God will bring judgment but also restore his people)

READING TIME

(in hours)



1:4-2:11 The people needed to admit their helplessness before God could intervene on their behalf. Joel led them to do this in three areas. First, their physical resources were depleted by the locust plague and drought (1:4-12). Second, they were spiritually destitute and could not find God through the standard method of presenting sacrifices (1:13-20). Third, they could not rely on courage and self-defense because the locusts were too great a foe to overcome (2:1-11). Once we admit we cannot do anything to save ourselves, then we can turn to God and ask him to mercifully rescue us from our pain.

WORTH MEMORIZING

• 2:12-13

That is why the Lord says,
"Turn to me now, while there is time.
Give me your hearts.
Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead."
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with
unfailing love.

• 2:28

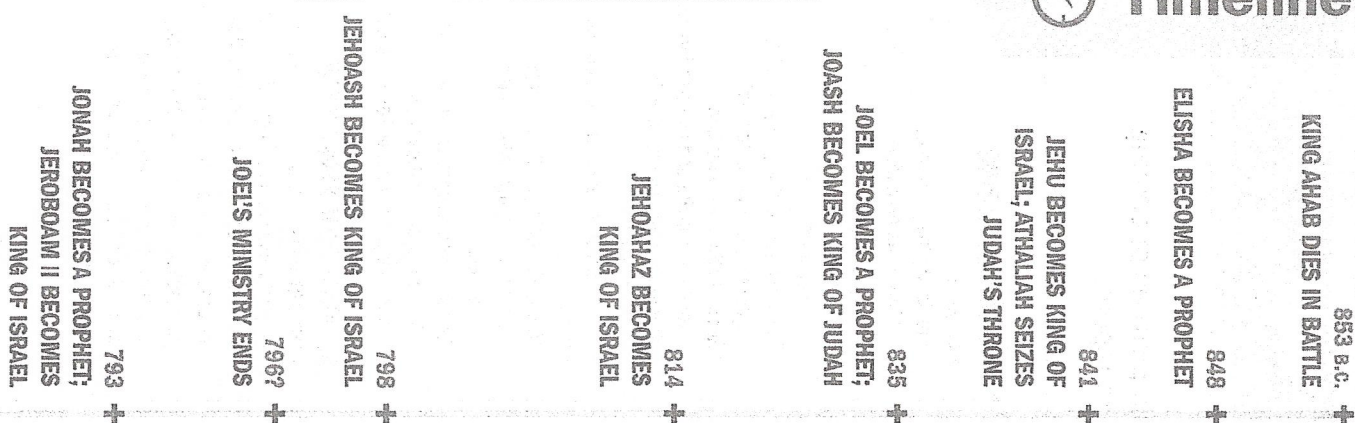
He is eager to relent and not punish.
"Then, after doing all those things,
I will pour out my Spirit upon all
people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions."

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

• **TRUSTING IN GOD.** Like many other prophets, Joel warns that greed and the thirst for power can lead to destruction. It's easy to put more trust in our possessions and abilities than in God, who gave us all we have. Joel reminds us to rely on God above all, because everything else will pass away.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF
Joel?
+ + +
Judgment
is coming—
but so is the
Holy Spirit.

Timeline





In these days when we fear a coming global economic apocalypse, it's important to be familiar with the message of Joel, a prophet who dealt with economic calamity and its aftermath. In Joel's day, the monetary devastation was caused by locusts, which could destroy a nation's economy overnight. When swarms of locusts descended on an area, they darkened the sky, sounded like a fleet of helicopters, and consumed every plant in their path. They appeared overnight and were gone the next day, obliterating a year's income and leaving devastation behind.

According to Deuteronomy 28:38, locusts were a mark of God's judgment on sin. So it became Joel's mission to tell people they were experiencing God's judgment. He also said the locusts foreshadowed something yet to come—the Day of the Lord, the culmination of history in which God's final judgment will occur. The plague of locusts was a signpost for the future.

But there's another theme in Joel—restoration. Joel 2:25 says: "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."

The easiest way to read Joel is in two parts: Chapters 1:1–2:17 describe the locust invasion and the Day of the Lord. The rest of the book describes the mercy of God in restoring Israel and judging her enemies.

If you feel your life has been devastated, read the book of Joel and consider how God can restore the elements of your life. He not only restores; He makes all things new.



KEY THOUGHT:

The locust plague of Joel's day was a divine judgment, foreshadowing the Day of the Lord which will bring destruction to the ungodly but blessings to God's people.



KEY VERSE:

"Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."

Joel 2:13



KEY ACTION:

Turn back to God from any and every sin, for He abundantly pardons and wonderfully restores.



KEY PRAYER:

God, I rejoice in You, for You are faithful.

BASIC SURVEY

JOEL

INTRODUCTION TO

JOEL

BACKGROUND

The list of blessings and curses recorded in Deuteronomy includes this curse for disobedience: "all thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume" (Dt 28:42). Joel mentions this pestilence in Judah as a sign of the "day of the Lord" (2:1).

The Hebrew form of the name Joel means "Yahweh is God." While Joel is mentioned in the first sentence, there is no further introduction than the name of Joel's father, Pethuel, whose name means "persuaded of God." The frequent remarks about Zion and the temple indicate that Joel may have lived close to Jerusalem while he served as a prophet to Judah.

MESSAGE

Joel prophesies the threat of judgment (the day of the Lord) and the promise of subsequent restoration. Repentance is encouraged for "old men" (1:2),

OUTLINE

- I. Judgment
 - A. Drought and locusts
 - B. Lamentation and repentance
 - C. Sound the alarm
 - D. Hope of forgiveness
- II. Mercy
 - A. Restoration
 - B. The giving of the Holy Spirit
- III. Rescue

"drunkards" (1:5), "husbandmen" and "vinedressers" (1:11), "priests," and "ministers of the altar" (1:13) before the coming day of the Lord. "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (2:13).

TIME

Although no specific time period is mentioned in the book of Joel, some scholars think that it was written after 722 B.C., following the destruction of Samaria. Others favor 835 B.C. for Joel's ministry, making him a contemporary of Elisha. The foreign nations Joel discusses (Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt, Edom) were more prominent in the ninth century than the sixth century. Furthermore, Joel's message seems closer to earlier prophets, such as Hosea, Amos, and Micah, than to postexilic prophets, such as Haggai and Zechariah.

- 1:1-12
- 1:13-20
- 2:1-11
- 2:12-17
- 2:18-27
- 2:28-32
- 3:1-21

AUTHOR: Joel, son of Pethuel (?). Little else is known about him.

DATE: Unclear, but possibly just before the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 586 B.C.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Locust plague pictures God's judgment on His sinful people.

DETAILS, PLEASE

A devastating locust swarm invades the nation of Judah, but Joel indicates this natural disaster is nothing compared to the coming "great and very terrible" day of the Lord (2:11 KJV). God plans to judge His people for sin, but they still have time to repent. Obedience will bring both physical and spiritual renewal: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" (2:28 KJV). God says, "When the Holy Spirit comes on Christian believers at Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostle Peter quotes this passage to explain what has happened.

QUOTABLE

- > "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (2:32 NKJV).
- > Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision (3:14 KJV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Unlike other prophets, who condemned idolatry, injustice, or other specific sins of the Jewish people, Joel simply called for repentance without describing the sin committed.

SO WHAT?

Though God judges sin, He always offers a way out—in our time, through Jesus.

READ PSALM 79 AND PROVERBS 13.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 148. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 148. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 146. →

CLOSER LOOK

LOCUST PLAGUES IN ISRAEL

Every March or April, millions of juvenile locusts leave the northern Sahara desert and swarm like immense, dark clouds throughout the Middle East. They are incredibly voracious and often devour everything in sight. In Moses' day, God sent a great swarm that "invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts" (Exodus 10:14 NIV).

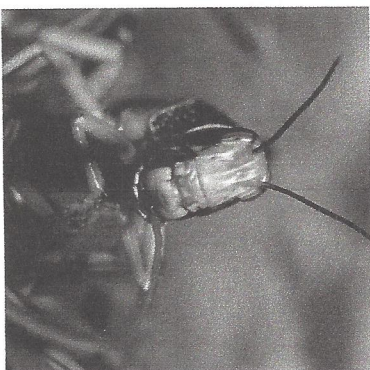
Locust plagues frequently caused devastation and destruction of crops in Israel as well. God said that He sent them as judgment (Deuteronomy 28:38–42). One such locust plague is described in the book of Joel, which depicts wave after wave of locusts descending upon the land: "What the locust swarm has 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 have eaten" (Joel 1:4 NIV).

God promised, however, that if His people repented He would heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:13–14). Locust swarms sometimes wiped out farmers' entire crops, leaving them destitute, and if this happened year after year, people nearly starved. So God promised, "Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust" (Joel 2:25 NASB). Or as the NKJV says, "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."

Locust swarms are sometimes still a problem in areas of the Middle East today.

READ JOEL 1 AND EXODUS 10:1–20.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 148.



Joel described one of the devastating locust plagues that destroyed Israel's crops.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The ancient Israelites longed for "the day of the Lord" when God would judge the wicked and provide justice and deliverance for the righteous. But the prophets warned that this day would be a cataclysmic event—nothing to look forward to. There would be terrifying signs in the heavens—the sun turned dark and the moon turned into blood (Joel 2:30–31). Besides, the people who *thought* they were righteous might also be judged. Joel warned, "The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" (Joel 2:11 NIV). And Amos added, "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you?" (Amos 5:18 NKJV; see also Zephaniah 1:14–18).

READ JOEL 2:1–27 AND REVELATION 6:12–17; 16.

HIDDEN TREASURE

GOD POURS OUT HIS SPIRIT

Joel prophesied about God sending His Spirit upon believers, saying, "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28–29 NKJV). This was fulfilled on Pentecost in AD 30 when the Holy Spirit was poured out on 120 disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14–21). God continued to send the Holy Spirit upon Christians (Acts 8:14–17; 10:44–46; 19:1–6). This also empowered them to boldly preach the Gospel (Acts 1:8; 4:31).

READ JOEL 2:28–32; 3:1–21; AND ACTS 2.



Joel described how God would pour out His Holy Spirit on believers. A dove is often seen as a symbol of God's presence.

DISASTER STRIKES THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM of Judah without warning. An ominous black cloud descends upon the land—the dreaded locusts. In a matter of hours, every living green thing has been stripped bare. Joel, God's spokesman during the reign of Joash (835-796 B.C.), seizes this occasion to proclaim God's message. Although the locust plague has been a terrible judgment for sin, God's future judgments during the day of the Lord will make that plague pale by comparison. In that day, God will destroy His enemies, but bring unparalleled blessing to those who faithfully obey Him.

The Hebrew name *Yo'el* means "Yahweh is God." This name is appropriate to the theme of the book, which emphasizes God's sovereign work in history. The courses of nature and nations are in His hand. The Greek equivalent is *Joel*, and the Latin is *Joel*.

WATCH WORDS

- give ear (hear, pay attention to what follows)—1:2
- spirit (breath, wind, or breath of life)—2:28

JOEL 2:19

PERSONAL STORIES

Ralph Muncaster:

Hardcore Skeptic Turned Bible Teacher

Former business executive Ralph Muncaster once described himself as a hardcore atheist. Ralph claimed to have attended approximately 1,456 hours of Sunday school and yet was never convinced that God exists. In his words, "I once held a very strong belief in evolution, because that's what I was taught in school. Realizing that there was only one 'origin' of the universe and that 'God' is by definition that originator, I understood that both God and evolution could not be possible. I even challenged Christians by pointing to 'evidence' regarding evolution."

What changed his mind? "A colleague challenged me to prove the Bible untrue. Pride forced me to 'match wits' with him and I accepted the challenge, fully expecting to disprove the Bible. When it checked out historically and the manuscript proved reliable, I dug into creation, evolution, and historical prophecy. My life was changed forever as in-depth research indicated that God exists and He is the God of the Bible."

Ralph now shares his findings worldwide with other skeptics. He has shared his faith before Muslims in a California mosque, addressed NASA scientists on the scientific accuracy of the Bible, and consulted with business leaders about the interactions between faith and work. Wherever God leads, Ralph notes that the evidence is on the side of the Bible. Some may not believe, but that does not mean the message is untrue. Who knows? Someday you might run into a hardcore skeptic who will investigate your message and come to faith, just like Ralph Muncaster. (adapted from an online interview)

Equal

Opportunity

Joel 2:28-29

GOD ISN'T STRINGY in his gifts. Nor does he pay much attention to the recipient's status or gender.

In this powerful passage, which found its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2, Joel prophesied that God's Spirit would fall on all kinds of people, regardless of their station in life.

This must have been surprising for Joel's listeners, for in Old Testament times, societies were ordered around strict codes and conventions. Sons were typically valued much more than daughters, since they could work harder and could father future generations. Older children were valued above the younger, as they could care for other children. The firstborn son was especially valued and was given a larger share of the inheritance than other children. Young men were to submit to their elders in the community. And free people, who could conduct business and other affairs, were seen as more valuable than slaves, who were often little more than human property.

But as Joel announced the pending arrival of the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31), he also revealed that God would overturn these ancient customs. In the future, God promised through Joel, he would pour out his Spirit "upon all people" (2:28). Different roles would be given to both sons and daughters, the old and the young, but all would receive God's blessings and have important work to do.

In this way God showed that he does not discriminate between people as we do, particularly when it comes to distributing his graces and gifts: "In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants—men and women alike" (2:29).

Joel couldn't foresee what all this would mean. But he clearly saw that in God's coming Kingdom, everyone—both men and women, regardless of status—would have an important role to play.

5 Ways to Prepare for a Fast

Read: Joel 1:14 | Habit: Fasting

A national tragedy strikes Israel—a terrible locust plague has destroyed both wine (Joel 1:5,7,12) and grain (v. 10). In response, the prophet Joel calls the entire community to cry out to the Lord so that judgment might be averted: “Declare a holy fast” (v. 14).

Throughout the Bible we most often find God’s people turn to fasting as the natural, inevitable response to a grievous sacred moment in life, such as death, sin and tragedy. But other times a fast is not a spontaneous reaction and we have time to prepare to respond both physically and spiritually. How should we equip ourselves when God calls us to “declare a holy fast”?

How should we equip ourselves when God calls us to “declare a holy fast”?

Here are five suggested steps to prepare:

1. *Have a Biblical reason*—Fasting is not an end unto itself, but a means of focusing our minds and bodies for a spiritual reason. Whenever you fast, you should do so for one of these Biblical purposes: to strengthen prayer (see Ezr 8:23); to seek God’s guidance (see Jdg 20:26); to express grief (see Isa 31:13); to seek deliverance or protection (see 2Ch 20:3–4); to express repentance and the return to God (see Isa 7:6); to humble oneself before God (see 1Ki 21:27–29); to express concern for the work of God (see Ne 1:3–4); to minister to the needs of others (see Isa 58:3–7); to overcome temptation and dedicate yourself to God (see Mt 4:1–11) or to express love and worship for God (Lk 2:37).¹ (See also “10 Biblical Purposes for Fasting” on page 317.) Fasting is unbiblical and even spiritually harmful when we do it to show off our spirituality (see Mt 6:16–18) or when we focus more on our own fasting than on the clear needs of others (see Isa 58:1–11).
2. *Pray and confess your sins*—A necessary step before fasting is to humble yourself before God (see Ps 35:13) and confess your sins (see Isa 7:6). Prayer should be our sustenance throughout the fast, but it is imperative we begin the fast with a contrite heart.
3. *Turn to Scripture*—Spend additional time meditating on God’s Word, before and during the fast.
4. *Keep it secret*—Don’t boast about your fast; tell people you won’t be eating only if necessary (Mt 6:16–18).
5. *Prepare your body*—Fasting, especially for days or weeks, can have unexpected and even detrimental effects on your health. Be sure to consult a doctor before starting any fasting regimen to make sure you can fast in a healthy manner.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Before we fast we must have a God-centered purpose and a contrite heart.

Fasting in Response to Grief

Read: Joel 2:14–17 | Habit: Fasting

In the first chapter of Joel, we learn Israel had been struck by a devastating plague of locust that destroyed both the vineyards and the grain fields. In response, the prophet Joel called the people to “declare a holy fast” (Joel 2:15) so that the continued judgment of God might be averted.

In Joel 2:12, we are given a picture of what such repentance and returning to the Lord should look like: “Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” The inclusion of fasting seems out of place.

For centuries, most Christians have considered fasting to be a form of “spiritual disciplines.” But when we examine Scripture, we find Joel 2:12 fits the Biblical pattern of fasting as a natural, inevitable response to a grievous sacred moment in life, such as death, sin or tragedy.

When we examine Scripture, we find Joel 2:12 fits the Biblical pattern of fasting as a natural, inevitable response to a grievous sacred moment in life, such as death, sin or tragedy.

“Books on fasting rarely do more than mention fasting and grief,” notes Scot McKnight, “even though grief may be the thread that connects all kinds of fasting.”² What many modern Christians might not be aware of is that fasting, like weeping and mourning, is one of the ways the human body expresses grief. Of course, in a stressful or tragic situation, there’s no way to know how our bodies might react. But it’s okay to acknowledge the natural urge to fast for a short period of time. Western culture has a curious, sometimes perverse, relationship with food. We often eat in response to emotional triggers rather than to satiate a growing stomach. Emotional eating, however, can even affect our spiritual formation if we turn to “comfort food” when our bodies are telling us to fast. But as always, it’s important to stay properly hydrated and give our bodies the proper nourishment they need.

Recognizing fasting as our body’s reaction to grief can help us incorporate the practice more naturally into the rhythms of our life.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Biblical fasting, like weeping and mourning, is one of the ways the human body expresses grief.

Joel

It's scary watching the news on TV, or reading or watching it online, isn't it?

Uh-oh, what's the headline today? A tsunami wipes out a coastal population. An earthquake juggles houses and city buildings until they tumble into a heap. A deadly disease reaches epidemic proportions. Economic indicators look bleak and people are losing their jobs. The experts warn of another terrorist attack—this time possibly worse.

It makes you wonder if you should even bother checking up on the news—maybe it's better not to know. But worse than that, it makes you wonder if you're going to get the chance to finish growing up and live a happy adult life, or if the end of the world is indeed at hand.

Well, it may not be time for Armageddon just yet, or so we hope. But if life's tragedies make you stop and think about what God is up to and whether you're living the way He wants, then some good has come out of a bleak situation.

It was the same in the time of a Jewish prophet named Joel. The scary event on people's minds at that time wasn't a tsunami or the threat of an exploding bomb. It was a locust plague, combined with a drought that had wiped out the nation's harvest—a pretty serious deal in an agricultural society that survived from harvest to harvest.

Historians are not able to pinpoint when this particular locust plague or drought took place. But it is known that such events did occur from time to time in the semi-arid land of Israel. Everything in the book of Joel alligns with known facts about life in Judah at that time.

In the face of the suffering from this particular famine, which was a kind of judgment from God, Joel called on the people to repent from their sins. He also took the occasion to look far into the future and describe a "Day of

the Lord" (1:15; 2:1-31; 3:14)—a much greater time of judgment that will come at the end of history as we know it.

The fact is, all other judgments that may come from time to time should remind us of the final judgment that still lies ahead. And each periodic judgment should make us examine ourselves and repent and turn to the Lord, just as Joel preached.

But there's something else to remember. Joel not only *warned* the people of his day; he also *reassured* them. If they would turn to the Lord, he said, then the Lord would restore their well being. Everything taken away would be returned—and more.

The Lord will bless us, too, in this life and the life to come, if only we will learn to love and obey Him in all things.

Author: Joel

Date: Joel prophesied during the time of the kings of Judah, sometime between 835–789 B.C.

What in the world is going on?

841–814 B.C. Jehu reigns in Israel

ca 835 B.C. Joel begins to prophesy in Judah

835–796 B.C. Joash reigns in Judah

814 B.C. The city of Carthage is founded by the Phoenicians; afterward, the Phoenicians settle down in southern Spain

814–798 B.C. Jehoahaz reigns in Israel

800 B.C. A new kingdom begins in the Cush region and is ruled by Kashta

800 B.C. The Phoenicians are the first settlers of Sardinia

800 B.C. Corn is grown and harvested in the Amazon flood plain

800–700 B.C. Italy begins to be inhabited

800–700 B.C. During the Ewart period of Bronze Age Britain, leaf-shaped swords are in vogue

ca 800–600 B.C. Iron Age in the early Germanic region of Wessenstadt

800–400 B.C. La Venta, the Olmec settlement on the Gulf of Mexico (around Tabasco and Veracruz), is at its height

798–782 B.C. Jehoash reigns in Israel

796–767 B.C. Amaziah reigns in Judah

793 B.C. Jonah is called to be a prophet to Israel and to Nineveh

792–740 B.C. Uzziah (Azariah) rules in Judah (overlap with Amaziah from 792–767 B.C.)

782–753 B.C. Jeroboam II rules in Israel

776 B.C. First Olympic games held in Greece

Repentance and Restoration

Within the book of Joel, the Lord makes a profound promise to "His people" (2:18): "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust ate" (v. 25). Consider the metaphor of the locust. There are nine different Hebrew words for locust. Attempts to identify the scientific species to which the four different Hebrew words used in 1:4-11 and 2:28 might refer have not been particularly helpful in interpreting the verse. They are descriptive of common characteristics of the locust. More likely, the use of repetition with some variety builds the rhetorical effect of emphasizing the extent to which the creatures had destroyed all vegetation in the land. Certainly such a picture of a literal swarming of locusts would prepare Joel's hearers for chapter 2 and the invading armies described. Such metaphorical use is effective, for example, in describing Assyria's destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel which was followed by repeated foreign invasions:

- Egyptian domination (2Kg 23:29,33-35);
- "Chaldean, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders," as well as Babylon's seizure of control from Egypt (2Kg 24:1-7);
- Babylon's siege of Jerusalem and deportation of the city's residents;
- Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, leaving only "some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and farmers" (2Kg 2:4:20-25:26; 2Ch 36:1-7:20).

Joel does not spell out, as do some of the other prophets, what Israel had done to incur the devastating consequences described in Jl 1:2-2:11. His immediate audience undoubtedly knew the reasons. You or a woman you know may have experienced or may be currently struggling through devastating circumstances that may be the result of years of rebellion and disobedience, the result of years of trying to do life in your own way. Although the Lord's judgment is to be feared, the God of Scripture declares that "He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger; rich in faithful love, and He relents from sending disaster" (2:13). To continue doing life in your own way leads away from the Father's loving arms and into hopeless dead ends of sin. However, God pleads with women to give up hoping for self-made happiness and instead to:

- "turn" to Him "with all your heart" (v. 12);
 - "tear your hearts" (i.e., publicly declare your spiritual bankruptcy); v. 13; cp. Mt 5:3), acknowledging that doing life your way instead of God's way is hopeless; and
 - "return to the Lord your God" (Jl 2:13).
- This is a picture of repentance. When women turn their devastated, hopeless, "locust-consumed" lives over to God's Son, Jesus Christ, He is faithful not only to forgive sin but to restore the wholeness, peace, joy, and hope previously devoured by the enemy (vv. 25-27; cp. Rm 8:28; 1Jn 1:9).

Untying the Knot of Anger

Ami pretended to be asleep as Kenny's alarm sounded at 4:30 a.m., and he stumbled to the closet to don his hunting clothes. Throughout their eleven years of marriage, he had done the same thing every deer season. And every year they had almost come to blows the night before.

Ami was still seething. She calculated the cost of that venison at fifty dollars a pound if she included the cost of gear, ammunition, gas, and the license. They could afford it, but that wasn't the point. Why did men want to leave their wives for three days and run off with their buddies to kill Bambi?

Ami and Kenny did not resolve their issue, and it continued to fester in their relationship—a problem that poisons many marriages. All of us are conditioned by our pasts. From our parents and our families, we inherit or develop viewpoints and ways of doing things. These can lead to strong feelings in certain areas, and when our partner's viewpoints or actions don't match up with these feelings, it's a formula for conflict.

When couples face such differences, it's common for a husband or wife to punish the other with lingering anger expressed in cold words . . . and a cold bed. But unresolved anger only makes the difference worse. It puts a crack in the dam that can grow to threaten the marriage. We need to avoid this. This does not mean we should bury our feelings. Partners should speak openly about their feelings without resentment. They must realize, however, that two individuals, even bonded in marriage, will never see eye-to-eye on everything. If one partner responds to such differences with anger, the solution is to ask for or grant forgiveness and restore the warmth of love before the sun goes down. Untie any knots of anger before they undermine your marriage.

7 minutes on
communication

Today's Thought:
based on Joel 2:13

"Anger restricts and binds us, tying us in internal knots. Forgiveness, on the other hand, sets us free from those bonds, untying the knots that hold us captive."

Gary Smalley and Greg Smalley,
Winning Your Husband Back Before It's Too Late

Read Together:

He Readers: Ephesians 4:2-3
She Readers: Ephesians 4:29

Pray Together:

Father, teach us to work through our anger so that conflict results in a stronger relationship where our differing viewpoints are honored and respected.

For more on this topic, turn to page 1015.
For the next reading, turn to page 1015.

Joel

| | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|---|
| Timeline | 722 BC | 722–605 BC | 700 BC |
| World Events | Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians. | If an early date is assumed, Joel likely prophesied between 722 and 605 B.C. | Greeks established trading posts in Philistine territory on the Mediterranean coast (Jl 3:6). |
| Biblical Events | | | |

“After this I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions.” (2:28).

Who wrote Joel?
The prophet Joel (1:1)

Who were the recipients?

The immediate context of Joel suggests the recipients as those living in and around Jerusalem and Judah. But the overall eschatological message of Joel is intended for all generations of believers, and many argue that the message extends beyond the prophecies.

When was Joel written?

Suggested dates range from 800 B.C. (preexilic) to 400 B.C. (postexilic)

Where did it happen?

The book of Joel takes place in Judah after a horrific locust plague had delivered destruction on the economy and society at a time when Judah (the southern kingdom) was experiencing spiritual decay. There is much debate as to the dating of Joel, but its message is not dependent on an exact date.

What is Joel about?

- Judgment.** The people of Israel were reaping the consequences of their sin and would experience further punishment unless they heeded the voice of Joel.
- Repentance.** Joel called the people of Israel to turn from sin and return to the Lord.
- The future “Day of the Lord.”** Joel gives some details of God’s judgment in the last days and describes the final restoration of Judah and Jerusalem.

Why should women read Joel?

Before repentance comes confrontation. Joel is a lesson in confrontation. The people in Joel’s day were experiencing the judgment

of God in their lives through a locust plague. Had they heeded the warnings about their disobedience earlier and repented, perhaps judgment would have been delayed or even averted. Just as the people of Judah in Joel’s day, women have a tendency to avoid confrontation, but a Christ-following woman must learn to be thankful for confrontation when it comes from the Holy Spirit. Your spiritual growth will be stunted if you avoid dealing with sin, but perhaps worse, short or prolonged disobedience leads to the Lord’s discipline in your life. The book of Joel reminds women to welcome prophetic confrontation about sin in their lives.

How do you read Joel?

The book of Joel should be read as poetic prophecy. Yet it has a specific purpose—to proclaim a message from God and confront His people with their sins. There is imagery and metaphor. For example, the locust plague is an image of the judgment of God on Judah. Joel’s recipients had experienced a disastrous locust plague that affected the economy and every level of society. Joel differs from other prophets. He does not give much attention to specific sins. Rather, he focuses on the motivation behind the sin. Their faith had become empty religious ritual. As with any prophetic book, Joel calls on his readers to change their hearts and to return to the Lord. The first two chapters of Joel deal with the devastating locust plague and the need for repentance. While chapter 3 reveals some details of God’s judgment in the last days and describes the final restoration of Judah and Jerusalem. The end of chapter two constitutes the beginning of the second part of Joel’s book. The events described in this part of the book are set almost entirely in the future. The nation’s destructive behavior toward Israel and their future destruction are discussed in this part of the book. This second part of the book is dominated by themes of material and spiritual blessings given to Israel.

> WORD | study

1:2 Elders (Hb *zāqān*, “old men” cp. v. 14) may refer to the tribal or family leaders governing the Jewish remnant in Israel after the exile. If so, the audience included both the leaders and all the people who lived in the land (cp. Is 3:14; Lm 2:10). The term may refer, however, to the senior citizens of the community since the message begins with a rhetorical question appealing to the memory of the audience (cp. “the aged” J 21:6; “old men,” 2:28). The implied answer to the question is that nothing “like this [Judah] ever happened.”

1:4 Powerful (Hb *šāḥān*, “strong, mighty, numerous”), especially when coupled with the phrase “without number,” indicates the overwhelming numerical strength of this ferocious and violent force, whether people or insects. Elsewhere in the book of Joel, the word describes “a great and strong people” (2:2), “a mighty army” (2:5), and “those who carry out His command . . . [as] powerful” (2:11).

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|---------------|---|------------|--|--------|--|--------|--|------------|---|
| 700 BC | Philistines and Phoenicians sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem as slaves to the Greeks. | 605–586 BC | Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah three times and took many into exile. | 538 BC | Cyrus allowed return of Jews from exile. | 536 BC | Construction of the second temple began. | 445–400 BC | If a late date is assumed, Joel likely prophesied from 445–400 B.C. |
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God reveals Himself as both a God of judgment and faithful love. The Lord’s goal in confronting sin is not to be vindictive but rather to redeem and restore. Jesus Himself confronted the people of His day with their sin and continues to do so today. There is no godly repentance without godly sorrow, which is inspired by the Word of God. Read and meditate on His Word daily, so you may, as did Joel, confront the sin in your life and so be restored through the love and grace found in Jesus Christ.

Outline

- I. The Locusts in the Land (1:1–1:14)
 - A. The Call to Attention (1:1–1:4)
 - B. The Call to Mourn (1:5–1:14)
- II. God’s Judgment on the Land (1:15–2:11)
 - A. The Devastation of the Locust Invasion (1:15–2:0)
 - B. The Invasion of the Lord’s Army (2:1–11)
- III. God’s Mercy on the Land (2:12–2:7)
 - A. A Call to Repentance (2:12–17)
 - B. The Lord’s Response (2:18–27)
- IV. God’s Wonders in the Earth (2:28–3:2)
- V. God’s Judgment on the Earth (3:1–2:1)

1:2 give ear

(Heb. *hāzān*) (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 1:45; Is. 64:4) H0238: This verb, often translated “give ear,” derives from a noun meaning “ear.” This term occurs primarily in poetry, in imperative forms, and in parallel with verbs meaning “hear” and “pay attention.” It typically functions as a summons to give heed to what follows. It introduces prayers (Ps. 5:1; 17:1; 84:8), songs (Gen. 4:23; Deut. 32:1; Judg. 5:3), wisdom sayings (Job 34:2; Ps. 49:1; 78:1; Is. 28:23), and prophetic words (Num. 23:18; Is. 51:4; Jer. 13:15; Hos. 5:1; Joel 1:2). The heavens and earth are each commanded to give ear to God’s message (Deut. 32:1; Is. 1:2). All too frequently, the very people of God failed to give ear to Him (2 Chr. 24:19; Neh. 9:30).

2:1–2:47 Instead of responding to God’s judgment with the prescribed ritual (tearing garments), God wanted the people of Judah to come to him with broken hearts, admitting their guilt and helplessness. The people needed to commit themselves to God, examine themselves, and ask God to change them. Since God is known for his mercy and compassion (2:13), it makes sense to surrender our lives to him. He can change our pain into joy.

JOEL

A. LOCUST PLAGUE FROM CATASTROPHE TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL (1:1 — 2:27)

1. Locusts terrify the land (1:1–15)
2. God judges the land (1:16 — 2:17)
3. God has mercy on the land (2:17–27)

B. THE DAY OF THE LORD: JUDGMENT OR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL (2:28 — 3:21)

1. Power to live uprightly: The Gift of the Spirit (2:28–29)
2. Terror on the Earth: The Day of the Lord (2:30–31)
3. Deliverance From Judgment: An Invitation to All (2:32)
4. Judgment on the Earth: The Wars of God (3:1–16)
5. Restoration of the land: God's Kingdom (3:17–21)

THE BIG PICTURE

Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes. Natural catastrophes of various kinds make us feel helpless. We can't stop them. We can only try to avoid them and then pick up the pieces after they have passed. The first part of Joel's prophecy concerns two natural disasters that led to great suffering for God's people: a major drought and a plague of locusts. God used these natural events to warn his people of their impending destruction if they refused to recognize their need for him.

Disasters sometimes result because of our own behavior. Joel realized that Judah's natural disasters were God's way of getting his people's attention. Centuries earlier, Moses had warned God's people that disobedience to God's plan would lead to such catastrophes (see Deuteronomy 28:38–39). God sought to restore his people to himself. Using these natural disasters, God broke through their illusions of security and self-sufficiency and showed them the importance of their relationship with him.

Some of us have suffered from disasters in our own lives. We may suffer painful consequences because of our own mistakes and find ourselves unable to combat the powers that assail us. As we recognize our own limitations and accept responsibility for our sins, we should realize that this turmoil is a wonderful opportunity for a new start! Recognizing our need for God's power in our lives will lead us to seek God afresh and surrender to him again. This will help us continue with the ongoing process of spiritual renewal.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE POWER OF CONFRONTATION

God's people had lost sight of their need for God. They had become complacent about following the plan God had laid out for them. To break through their spiritual blindness, God let them suffer a series of disasters. Through their sufferings and the words of the prophet Joel, God let his people know that they were headed for disaster and needed to make some changes in their lives. God often intervenes in our lives in similar ways. He may allow us to suffer the consequences of our sinfulness in order to awaken us from our spiritual blindness and complacency. He may confront us with the painful reality of our choices and actions. We should find comfort in this process because God confronts us not to destroy us but to initiate our restoration.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Joel stated that "the day of the Lord" was coming (see Joel 1:15). But along with his message of warning and judgment, Joel also brought his listeners hope. By confessing their sins, accepting responsibility for their wrongdoing and seeking to redirect their course, God's people could experience the healing available to them through God's forgiveness. Some of us want to undo some of our past actions and choices. Rather than change the past, God provides a means of resolving our past sin and failure through forgiveness. Our spiritual renewal is built upon the foundation of both receiving and granting forgiveness.

THE LIMITLESSNESS OF GOD'S POWER

We can easily be overwhelmed by the power of nature when it unleashes its fury in an earthquake, volcano or hurricane. When we look at the coastline and see how the waves have carved out cliffs and caves, we marvel at the power of the ocean. But none of these powerful acts of nature can compare to the overwhelming power of God. When we feel powerless, God invites us to repent and come to him for help. In him we have all the power we need to overcome our weaknesses.

GOD'S POWER WITHIN US

Joel predicted a time when the limitless power of God would be poured out upon us through the Holy Spirit. God would then be directly available to his people. This prophecy was fulfilled when God's Spirit was poured out after Jesus' ascension into heaven. In the process of spiritual renewal, we must remember that God is with us. His power is always available to us as we persevere in our struggle to grow.

Essential Facts

PURPOSE: To warn God's people of impending judgment and to urge them to admit their sins and turn back to God.

AUTHOR: The prophet Joel.

AUDIENCE: The people of the southern kingdom of Judah.

DATE WRITTEN:

Though Joel does not give us historical markers to help assign a date for the book, some believe Joel penned these words about 800 BC during the reign of young King Joash (see 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 23–24).

SETTING:

Jerusalem during a period of prosperity; the people had become complacent about their relationship with God.

KEY VERSE:

"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" (2:13).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Political and religious leaders, parents and children, bride and groom, Joel and God's people.

1:4 Locust

(Heb. *arbeh*) (2 Chr. 6:28; Ps. 105:34; Prov. 30:27; Joel 2:25) H0697: This voracious and destructive insect was well known in Old Testament times. Here the developmental stages are differentiated by characteristics Joel notes. According to Leviticus 11:22, locusts were clean, or edible, creatures. These are the same judgment instruments God used in the eighth plague against Egypt (Ex. 10:4, 12–14, 19). Nahum 3:15–17 uses locusts as a symbol of useless numbers. God promises (Joel 2:25) to restore, for the repentant, even what the locusts have destroyed.

BY THE NUMBERS

3 CHAPTERS
73 VERSES
1,839 WORDS

IN A NUTSHELL

Although the warning of

Joel was of impending disaster, the message was of repentance and returning to the Lord (2:12-14).

JOEL

What's in a Name?

The name Joel means "the Lord is God." Joel was the son of Pethuel, whose name means "persuasion of God." The book is a prophecy of calamity, calling for the people to return to God.

NOT KIDDING

It is believed that Joel prophesied during the time of King Joash, who was seven years old when he began to reign.

KEY PASSAGE

"And 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. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 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." (2:28-32; see Acts 2:17-21, where this passage was quoted on the day of Pentecost).

LIFE LESSONS: Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:32).

JOEL IN REVIEW

"?" CRYPTIC PHRASES

1. What word is the name of a valley and means "the Lord Judges"?
- A. Jehoshaphat
- B. Mediterranean
- C. Sabeen
- D. Judy

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. "Wake up, and weep you _____." (Fill in the blank.)

HOT SEAT

3. Some day we will be put on trial for scattering God's people and dividing up God's land. Who are we?

HOT SEAT

4. God's people talked about us when they said, "A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number." Who are we?

"?" CRYPTIC PHRASES

5. What did God say he would repay Israel for?
- A. Lives lost
- B. The years the locusts have eaten
- C. What was destroyed in the earthquake
- D. The grain offerings cut off from the house of the Lord

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. According to Joel, which of these offerings has been cut off from the house of the Lord?
 - A. Grain offering
 - B. Fellowship offering
 - C. Burnt offering
 - D. Sin offering

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

7. "I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans." Which of the following was God not talking to when he said this?
 - A. Tyre
 - B. Sidon
 - C. Moab
 - D. Philistia

HOT SEAT

8. The Lord has spoken to the nations to beat me into swords! What am I?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

9. "A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a _____." (Fill in the blank.)

HOT SEAT

10. After God pours out his Spirit on all people, he said we would dream dreams! Who are we?
 - A. Old men
 - B. Young men
 - C. Fighting men
 - D. Politicians

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

11. According to Joel, who will be saved?
 - A. The priests and prophets of Israel
 - B. Descendants of the tribe of Judah
 - C. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
 - D. All who returned to Babylon and Assyria

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

12. "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with _____." (Fill in the blank.)
 - A. Water
 - B. Blood
 - C. Cattle
 - D. Honey