

# **Isagogical Review of Joel**

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The purpose of this Mini-Essay is to review what is known about the inspired writer, to review the time and circumstances of the writing, and to look at the line of thought of the Book.

## **Writer**

The writer of the Book is identified in the first verse of chapter one. Joel was a common name among the Hebrews and at least 14 are mentioned in the Old Testament including:

1. A Simeonite chief - 1 Chr. 4.35
2. The brother of Nathan of Zobah - 1 Chr. 11,33
3. The chief of the Gershomites
4. The son of Padaiah at the time of David
5. A Kohathite Levite in the reign of Hezekiah
6. One of the sons of Nebo, who returned with Ezra and had a foreign wife
7. Eldest son of Samuel - 1 Sam. 8,2

The writer of our Book is identified as “Joel the son of Pethuel”. Since nothing is known about Pethuel and nothing more is said to identify Joel, he has been called the “anonymous prophet”. The name ‘Joel’ means ‘Jehovah is God’. He was a prophet of God to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah and apparently lived in the city of Jerusalem or at least in the immediate neighborhood, an assumption based on his many references to Zion, Jerusalem, and worship in the temple.

## **Time of Writer**

As is the case with other prophets, there are differences of opinion with regard to the time when Joel lived and prophesied. The time when Joel lived, whichever date is accepted, in no way affects the message of his writing.

The dates offered for Joel’s activity vary from 850 to 350 B.C. Those who prefer a post-Exilic time, point to Joel’s mention of the “Greeks”, assuming that the Hebrews would not have known about the Greeks at an earlier date. There is no basis for that assumption.

Some, such as A.S. Kapelrud, argue for a date shortly after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, because Joel does not mention the Northern Kingdom. It is pointed out, however, that there was no reason for Joel to mention the Northern Kingdom, since his message was directed to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The more acceptable date is during the time of King Joash (Jehoash) who ruled Judah between 843-803 (or 837-797, or 878-838). Reasons for this dating are: (Quotes are from “A Survey of O.T. introduction” by G.L. Archer, Jr. pp.292.293)

1. The type of government implied by the prophetic utterances best accords with a regency. There is no mention of a king; the elders and priests seem to bear the responsibility of national leadership. This would seem to imply that the king was a minor and that regents ruled in his place. According to 2 Kings 11: 4, Joash was crowned at the age of seven and his uncle, Jehoida, is said to have exercised a controlling influence in Judah even to the day of his death.

2. There is distinct evidence of borrowing as between Amos and Joel. For example, both Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13 contain the promise, 'The mountains shall drop sweet wine...'. While Joel might possibly have quoted from Amos, the contextual indications are that it was the other way around. Another example is found in Joel 3:16 where in the midst of a prophetic discourse he says, 'The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem.' This same verse appears at the beginning of the prophecy of Amos, and it may fairly be inferred that Amos was using it as a sort of text from which he developed his first sermon. On this basis, then, Joel must have been written earlier than Amos; that is earlier than 755 B.C.

3. An even more conclusive argument is found in the array of enemies which are mentioned by the author as threatening Judah. There is no reference to the Assyrians or Chaldeans (to say nothing of the Persians), but the foes of Judah are stated to be the Phoenicians, the Philistines, the Egyptians, and the Edomites (cf. Joel 3: 4, 19). This points to a period when Assyria and Babylon posed no threat, but Egypt and the surrounding neighbors of Israel were still strong and aggressive. Even in the time of Joash, the power of Egypt was still to be feared; in Rhoboam's time (933-916) Shishak (Egyptian) ravaged the kingdom and sacked the temple at Jerusalem; and in the reign of Asa occurred the dread invasion of Zerah, the general sent by Osorkon I (925-829) of the Ethiopian dynasty.

In the time of Joash's grandfather, Jehoram, and even under Jehoshaphat, the Edomites and Philistines made incursions against Judah which were so successful that they even took the city of Jerusalem by storm (cf. 2 Kings 8: 20-22 and 2 Chron.21: 16,17). At no time after the reign of Joash was the kingdom of Judah faced by this particular assortment of enemies. It should be added that at no time after the Chaldean period could Egypt have been regarded as an aggressive power, for it had all it could do to maintain its own independence. This would seem to eliminate the possibility of a date in the Persian or Greek period.

**SUMMARY:** The internal evidence agrees more closely with the period of 835 B.C. for the composition of this prophecy than with any other. The lack of reference to any reigning king on the throne of Judah, the implication that the responsibility of government rests upon the priests of Judah and the elders, the allusion to the neighboring nations as the current foes of Judah (rather than Assyria, Babylonia or Persia), all these factors point quite conclusively to the period of Joash's minority.

The linguistic evidence perfectly accords with this early date, and makes a theory of Post-Exilic composition quite untenable. It is fair to say that the arguments for a late date (609 or 350 B.C.) are based largely upon humanistic philosophical assumptions rather than upon reasonable deduction from the data of the text itself."

### **History**

The history of the time when Joel prophesied and wrote is interesting. A summary follows: Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, was married to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. When her husband Jehoram died, their son Ahaziah became king of Judah. Ahaziah was killed by Jehu, and Athaliah seized the throne. Opposition to her was led by the high-priest Jehoida.

In order to eliminate all opposition, Athaliah tried to massacre the members of the royal house of David. Jehoiada was able to rescue an infant son of Ahaziah by the name of Joash.

In the years that followed, the temple was given over to idolatry, 2 Chron. 24:7: "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim."

Jehoiada sponsored a plan by which the child Joash (now 7 years old) was made king. The plan succeeded and Athaliah was killed.

Joash “did right all the days of Jehoiada”, but after his death, Joash turned to idolatry and with him the people of Judah also became guilty of the sins of idolatry. As a result it is not surprising that a plague, such as the one Joel writes about, afflicted the people.

Various outlines of the Book of Joel offer themselves. This is my suggestion:

Chapter 1, vs. 1-3 3: Introduction  
4: Plague of locusts  
5-20: Effect of plague  
Chapter 2, vs. 1-11: The Day of the Lord cometh  
12-17: Call to repentance  
18-27: Promise of deliverance  
28-32: Prophecy of Pentecost (Outpouring of the Holy Spirit)

Chapter 3, vs. 1-15: Warning to the Gentiles  
16-21: Blessing for Jerusalem (The Church of Believers)

### **Comparison Passages**

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|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Joel 2, lb.2 | - Matthew 24,29 |
| 2. Joel 2, 2    | - Amos 5,18-20  |
| 3. Joel 2, 4    | - Rev. 9,7      |
| 4. Joel 2,28-32 | - Acts 2,17-21  |
| 5. Joel 2,32    | - Rom. 10,13    |
| 6. Joel 3,18    | - Acts 15,17.18 |

### **Line of Thought of the Book**

The prophet identifies himself and calls to the inhabitants of the land with an urgent voice.

He refers to a plague of locusts which had attacked and ravaged the land. He calls on the people to repent of their sins.

In the terrible destruction of the land by the locusts, the prophet sees a picture of the final judgment of the world by the Lord God. 2: lb-3.

While the judgment will be all inclusive, and a special warning is given to the heathen, there is a promise of deliverance and blessing to the believers (the church).

Joel’s prophecy of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2,28-32) is applied by Peter (Acts 2, 17-21) to the Day of Pentecost and the ushering in of the New Testament era.

### **Interpretations**

Three types of interpretation have been applied to the Book of Joel. The allegorical, apocalyptic, and literal.

According to the allegorical view, the locusts are to be interpreted as foreign armies which ravaged Judah. The four words for ‘locust’ (1: 4) are applied to the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Macedonians, and Romans. Some have equated the four types of locusts with four chief passions which successively attack the heart.

According to the apocalyptic view, the locusts are creatures who will leave catastrophe in their wake at the day of the Lord. However, the writing shows that Joel was a witness to the devastation by the locusts for he writes it has taken place “before our eyes (1:16)”.

According to the literal view, the locusts were actual insects which the author compares with an invading army.

There can be no doubt the literal view is correct and Joel uses it to warn his people of the coming Day of the Lord when all shall be judged.

### **Outstanding Thoughts for Sermons**

1. Judgment for sin
2. Call to repentance
3. Fulfillment of prophecy (Inspiration)
4. God's mercy and grace
5. Pentecost and New Testament era
6. Judgment Day