**The Author and Date of Writing**

Joel (Hebrew - Yoáel) introduces himself in **1:1**, which means ‘Yahweh is God.’ Joel’s name speaks of God being Sovereign, with all creation and the nations under His power and control.

## Joel identifies himself only by his lineage, naming his father as Pethuel (1:1), who in turn has no further Scriptural reference. There are other references to Joel in the Bible (see end for references), yet no further personal or historical detail can link this writer to any of those references.

One argument places Joel’s ministry around 835BC - historically a period of severe drought ad locust infestation, which devastated the agricultural economies of the area.

That date is reinforced as Joel mentions no reigning monarch – because there was none. In 835BC, Judah’s only ruling queen, Athaliah died. She is the only sovereign of Judah not to descend from King David. She was succeeded by her grandson, but that accession was delayed as Joash was too young to rule. In the interim Jehoida the priest ruled until Joash came of age **2 Kings 11**.

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 may mean that he lived in Judah, or even in Jerusalem itself. The Book refers to nations such as Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt and Edom, that were prominent in the ninth century BC.

If the writing date of around 835 BC is accepted, Joel’s ministry is within 10-15 years of Obadiah, as well as being a contemporary of the prophet Elisha. This would also place the Joel’s writing prior to either the Northern or Southern kingdoms being exiled.

**Purpose of the Book**

Joel uses the combination of a recent drought and locust plague that has struck Judah, to teach the people and warn of a future invasion of Israel in the ‘Day of the Lord’ (Day of Yahweh). It is likely that in no more than a few hours, all the vegetation has been stripped bare by the locusts and Joel is saying, if the nation will repent and return to God (2:13-14), He will restore His relationship Judah and restore the country with spiritual blessing (2:28-32). But for that to happen, Israel will have to experience the judgments of the Tribulation and the outpouring of the Spirit of God, which will cause the people to return to the Lord.

## There are several verses/passages in the Book that are well known:

## 2:11 The Lord thunders at the head of his army; His forces are beyond number and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

## 2:13 Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love,

## 2:25 I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten – the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm – my great army that I sent among you.

## 2:28-32 And afterwards, 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. 29Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 32And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

The Book commences with Joel stating that the Lord has spoken to him and commanding those in authority within the land (**the elders**) and everyone else, to also listen to God’s word.

If the timing of 835BC is correct, based on the evil of her six-year reign (**2 Kings 11:3, 2 Chronicles 22:2-4, 24:7**), the judgement that followed was justly brought.

Joel describes the devastation caused by the successive swarms of locusts. Translations vary, but they are described as **chewing**, **swarming**, **crawling**, **consuming** or, **great**, **young** and **other locusts**, which will bring famine and financial ruin to Judah and will be so bad it will be noteworthy for parents to tell to their children **v2**.

Yet even throughout this judgement, God looks at the vines and fig trees of Judah and says they belong to Him, even in judgment **v7**.

Joel tells Judah that they should mourn because of what has gone on and the judgement they are undergoing – there should not be any attempt to put on ‘a brave face’ to get through the tragedy. He says that everyone should be in mourning **v8-14**, as the national pride and identity of Judah, the Temple, has also ceased to function properly because of this disaster **v13** …**the grain offerings and the drink offerings are withheld from the House of your God.**

Commentators believe that the sacrifices to the LORD at the temple only stopped when there was no more grain or wine to give to God. Even Queen Athaliah, despite her wickedness, allowed the temple ceremonies to continue during her reign, no doubt recognising the normality of ‘ceremonies’ enabled a certain order to be kept over the people, despite true faith being corrupted.

It turns to Joel, rather than the religious leaders, to say the nation needs to repent and it is those leaders who need to lead the nation in repentance. The NKJV **v13** tells the priests to **gird yourselves**, indicating that they needed to prepare to work at repentance – it would not be easy.

Joel also tells them how to prepare:

* **Declare a fast**: Eating is of lesser importance to getting right with God.
* **Call a sacred assembly**: This is for everyone to meet and repent.
* **Summon the elders**: The leaders should be at the forefront of the repentance.
* **To the house of the LORD your God**: This is where they should be meeting with God.
* **And cry out unto the LORD**: Petition the Lord for forgiveness - trust He will respond in mercy

**v15** brings the first mention of **the day of the LORD**, the meaning being that this is God’s time and His actions will be fully revealed. Ultimately, **the day of the LORD** will be fulfilled when Jesus judges the earth and returns in glory, but other occasions include this judgement by the locusts and drought in Joel’s time.

Joel says there is only one thing he can do in response to the nation’s state. **To You, LORD, I call…** Joel acknowledges that he and everyone else (whether they are guilty of failing God, or not) are unable to fix what is going on, that is for the Lord.

In **Luke 13:1-5**, Jesus was questioned about a disaster that had killed eighteen people. Jesus used the opportunity to call for repentance by everyone, rather than saying it was ‘just an accident’. Jesus’ reaction was not to say, ‘why did this disaster happen to them?’, but rather we should be asking, ‘am I ready to face such a disaster if it happens to me?’ Jesus is telling us to be prepared, not to be caught off-guard.

One commentator states, ‘**the day of the Lord** is not a single physical day, but to a period of judgment and restoration. It consists of three basic features, which are all found in the Book of Joel, , which offers one of the most complete pictures in Scripture of this ultimately redemptive event.

* The judgment of God's people – **2:1-11**.
* The judgment of foreign nations – **3:1-16**.
* The purification and restoration of God's people despite and through intense suffering – **2:28-32**.’

## In Joel 2, God promises He will relent on the judgment to be poured out if Israel will return to the Lord (13-14), but He also promises an outpouring of the Spirit of God, the display of wonders in the sky and on the earth, the coming of the Day of the Lord and the calling on the name of the Lord (28-32).

Joel speaks of **the Day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand** (**v1**) and the response to that should be that **all the inhabitants of the land tremble**. This is dealing with a judgment that is yet to come – a mighty army that will target Judah. This is a Day that will bring **darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness** (**2**).

**v3** speaks of a **fire devours before them and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them and behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them.** The Babylonians were known to operate a scorched-earth policy, where they would destroy and burn everything behind them, so their enemies would have nothing to use in terms of supplies or shelter.

Joel describes an army that (**8**) **does not push one another; every one marches in his own column**. He is describing both its discipline and effectiveness. They will deliver a devastating attack on Judah.

But this army is nothing when compared to the Lord’s (**11**) **The LORD gives voice before His army**. Joel reminds Judah that the real authority and power supporting this army is actually God Himself. The army may invade and destroy, but only because they have been given authority by God to do so - they will be God’s tools of judgment against Judah, unless they repent.

In these verses, we do not know for certain which invasion Joel is predicting. Some commentators consider Joel is referring back to the army of locusts, but describing them poetically. However, the majority opinion is that this passage is speaking of a literal human army that will come against an unrepentant Judah.

Note that following the locusts and drought, Joel is not encouraging the people that the worst is over. On the contrary, he says that worse will come if the nation does not come to repentance.

Of the commentators that believe this invasion is by people, not locusts, there is a group who consider that the predicted invasion never took place - as Judah responded to Joel’s message to repent, meaning God held back this army. This prophecy may have spoken to Jehoiada to depose the wicked Queen Athaliah and place Joash on the throne, even though he was only seven years-old (**2 Kings 11:4-21**). Whatever happened, the 40-year godly reign of King Joash in Judah began right after the time of Joel's prophecy.

Joel tells the people to return to God and in some respects their actions are more important than their motivation. Certainly, the repentance needs to be sincere - **turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning** (**12**) - but if that repentance is driven by the prophecy of what is about to happen, the desired result has nevertheless been achieved.

One expression of mourning in Jewish culture is tearing the clothes, but in this case, Joel tells the people to **rend your heart and not your garments** – this would ensure sincerity, rather than an outward gesture. This is illustrated in saying **let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar** (**13**) – this is not normal behaviour within the Temple. It is also an indication that it is the hierarchy who must lead in repentance – repentance is required from all.

The promise that Joel gives if the people will repent, is a blessing from the Lord, who is **zealous for His land and** will **pity His people** (**18**). God promises to restore Judah’s material prosperity and also to remove the army that is threatening to invade, **I will send you grain and new wine and oil … I will remove far from you the northern army** (**19-20**).

Judah must look forward in faith and to praise God for the restoration He promises, especially as Joel prophecies fields full of grass and trees laden with fruit **the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit**: and for those things to happen, God would have to supply the rains, both **former… and latter** (autumn and spring rains), that have not been present for so long (**23**). As the country had no irrigation system, everyone relied on the rain to water their crops.

This pouring forth of God’s blessing will restore the crops (**24**), those destroyed by the locusts that had previously been sent by God (**25**). God **will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten**. God’s restoration is able to put life back into what appeared dead after the locusts had been and after that has occurred, Joel prophecies an even greater blessing to come, with an outpouring of God's **Spirit on all flesh** - not just for the few.

OT scripture records only a few people were filled with the Holy Spirit, but Joel prophecies God **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 menservants and on maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days** (**28-29**). This outpouring will be for everyone, not the spiritual leaders.

Joel’s prophecy had fulfilment on the Day of Pentecost **Acts 2:4** and Peter spoke of it in his sermon **Acts 2:14-21**, but it was only partial fulfilment, **v30-31** say there will also be **wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.**

Joel is saying that God’s outpouring of His Spirit will continue until **the great and awesome day of the LORD**, which will also include those heavenly signs. When that Day does arrive, the ones who will be saved will be those who have called **on the name of the LORD**. This has a great bearing on Gentiles, as this promise of salvation will not depend on being Jewish, instead it is a matter of the heart and acceptance of God’s offer of salvation through the Messiah.

Chapter 3 is a continuation of what he was saying previously, but is aimed at the surrounding nations. The Lord’s statement concerning the return of **the captives of Judah and Jerusalem**, was fulfilled in the short-term, when the Jewish people returned from Babylonian captivity (**Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah**), but in the longer term is seen as the end-times regathering of Israel. This could also include prophetic passages such as **Romans 11:26-27**, when salvation comes to Israel as a whole. This clearly has not happened yet, as Joel says the Lord **will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat**. There is no place in Israel known as the **Valley of Jehoshaphat**, so the name must be symbolic, however, the name **Jehoshaphat** means ‘The Lord Judges’, so this will be a place of judgment, much worse than that brought by the locusts on Israel.

This judgement will be based on the mistreatment of God’s people by the **nations** and by extension individuals - **I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people**. A description of that judgement is in **Matthew 25:31-46**, where the criteria for a guilty/not guilty verdict depends not on faith in Jesus, but how the nations have treated God’s people.

God challenges the nations to **prepare for war** against Him - Revelation 16:12-16 records this – but ultimately, nothing or nobody can stand against God and be victorious (**Psalm 2** expresses this futility) and He will subsequently **sit to judge all the surrounding nations**.

Joel begins to conclude his message by describing the **multitudes in the valley of decision**, people facing their eternal fate, whether to accept God’s message (and His Messiah), or to fight against Him. Joel returns to heavenly events as he says **the heavens and earth will shake**, but it is only so that he can reassure God’s people that **the LORD will be a shelter for His people and the strength of the children of Israel** (**16**).

The final words of Joel continue God’s blessing of Israel (**…the mountains shall drip with new wine …all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water 18**). After the desolation caused by the locusts and drought, there will be everlasting abundance, but in contrast for God’s enemies, the likes of **Egypt …and Edom will be desolate**.

Joel’s writing pre-dates both **Ezekiel** and **Zechariah**, but all three speak of water flowing from God:

* **Joel 3:18** - a **fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD**.
* **Ezekiel 47:1** describes **water coming out from under the threshold of the temple**.
* **Zechariah 14:8** states living water will flow out of Jerusalem.

Joel’s final words are **Judah shall abide forever …for the LORD dwells in Zion**. God will show mercy to His people and grant them forgiveness. A prophecy which began with the destructive drought and plague of locusts, ends with a promise of restoration and redemption, with God and Jesus living with their people.

**A message for us**.

The book of Joel gives valuable messages to Christians today:

* Physical hardships should remind us of God and encourage us to draw closer to Him (**Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:4-7**).
* God always provides blessings for those who remain faithful to Him (**1 Peter 5:6-10; Revelation 2:10**).
* The last and ultimate ‘Day of the Lord’, the Judgment Day, has yet to arrive, so we should continue to be prepared for it (**Matthew 24:42-44; 25:1-13**).

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**Biblical references to Joel**

1 Samuel 8:2,

1 Chronicles 4:35, 5:4, 8 & 12; 6:28, 33, & 36; 7:3; 11:38; 12:7; 15:7, 11 & 17; 23:8; 26:22; 27:20

2 Chronicles 29:1,

Ezra 10:43

Nehemiah 11:9

Joel 1:1

Acts 2:16