

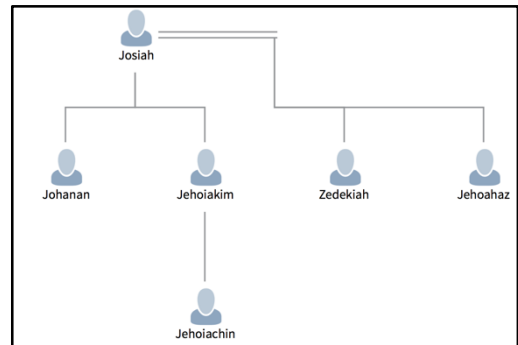
SPENDING TIME WITH THE PROPHETS

the book of Joel

Introduction To The Book

Little information is given about Joel other than the opening verse of the book: “The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel”. Even less information is given about the historical context of the book. No kings are listed for either Judah or foreign powers, no major battles or dominate empires are mentioned. This makes it very difficult to date Joel’s prophecy and several dates have been proposed. We will adopt a late pre-Babylonian captivity date for the book (~610-587 B.C.), likely sometime after the reign of Josiah. We will adopt this date for the following reasons:

1. It seems that the northern kingdom of Israel was no more during the days of Joel. Israel is mentioned in Joel 3.2, but in that passage they are synonymous with “Judah and Jerusalem” in 3.1. Thus, the book would be after Israel’s fall in 722 B.C.
2. The walls of Jerusalem still stand (Joel 2.7,9), so the prophecy is before Jerusalem’s destruction in 587 B.C.
3. Furthermore, the Temple was still standing and normal service was taking place there (Joel 1.9; 2.17). This also argues for a date before Jerusalem’s destruction.
4. Finally, the Lord promised to “restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem” implying that the kingdom of Judah had declined significantly. This also fits a date after Josiah and before Jerusalem’s fall.



One more issue needs to be addressed at the beginning: does the invading army in Joel 2.1-11 refer to an actual army (i.e. Babylon) or to the locusts described in Joel 1.4-12? We will treat the army in 2.1-11 as the Babylonians rather than locusts. First, the verb tenses are different. Joel 1.4-12 speaks of the locust invasion as having already occurred, but the invasion in 2.1-11 is yet to come. Second, while the army in 2.1-11 are given attributes similar to those of the locusts (intentionally so), they act more like men. The people would try to defend against this army with weapons (2.8) and their objective is the city rather than the fields (2.9). However, Joel’s description of two armies (one of locusts, one of men) is intentional as will be seen in our outline of the book.

The Message Of Joel

1. Intro (1.1)
2. God’s punishment of Judah for their sins: the plague of locusts (1.2-12)

3. How Judah should respond: repentance (1.13-20)
4. God's judgment if Judah did not repent: invasion from the north (2.1-11)
5. God again calls for Judah to repent (2.12-17)
6. God promises to respond with grace when Judah repents (2.18-27)
 - a. He would have pity and respond to His people (2.18-19)
 - b. He would remove the invading army (2.20)
 - c. He would pour out rain to restore the land (2.21-27)
7. God promises to respond in the future (2.28-3.21)
 - a. In the future He would pour out His Spirit (2.28-32)
 - b. In the future He would judge the nations (3.1-21)

Lessons From Joel:

1. The Day of the Lord is any day He decides to act: Joel refers to several events as "The day of the Lord". The destruction of the locusts is a harbinger of the day (1.15); the invasion of the army from the north is "the day of the Lord" (2.11); the Lord would pour out His Spirit on "the day of the Lord" (2.31); when the Lord would bring His judgment on the nations it is described in terms of His day (cf. 3.15,18). Thus, "the day of the Lord" is any day when the Lord acts.
2. Punishment is meant to prompt repentance: why did the Lord allow the locusts to decimate the land? As we noted in the outline of the book, the locusts should have prompted repentance from the people. And if the people had repented, they would have been spared from the invading army from the north (Babylon). *"For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights."* (Proverbs 3:12, NASB95)
3. Peter's use of Joel 2.28-32: For Christians this is the matter of greatest significance in Joel's prophecy because Peter referred to this passage when revealing why he and his fellow apostles could speak in tongues (Acts 2.16-21). A few things to note:
 - a. First, there is significance in God saying He would "pour out" His Spirit. This promise followed His promise to restore the land with rain (Joel 2.23). Pentecost was a harvest celebration, occurring at the end of the spring grain harvest. So, it was as the people celebrated the fruit of the earthly rain that God "poured out" a greater blessing: His Spirit.
 - b. Joel said that God's Spirit would be poured out on "all mankind". The book of Acts makes a point of showing how this happened in a visible way upon the apostles (2.1-4) and upon the Gentiles (10.44-46), and in a spiritual sense upon all who would come to Christ (2.38).
 - c. Joel's description of two kinds of grace (the rain and the Spirit) is significant to our understanding of the New Testament. Israel had benefitted from God's grace in numerous areas, but God's greater grace was poured out on Pentecost. It was now that salvation could be found, it was now that whomever "called on the name of the Lord" would be saved. It was this greater grace that Peter continued to speak about in Acts 2.

- d. Finally, God's promise that He would pour out His Spirit (2.28-32) occurred after His call for the people to repent (2.13-17). Significantly, Peter would call for His audience to repent so they could receive what God had promised (Acts 2.38-39).
- 4. Grace precedes judgment: Joel's prophecy does not end with the promise of the Spirit. Rather it ends with God judging the world. His people (Israel) would be saved, the nations would be punished. This too prefigures the message of Acts. The apostles went out to proclaim the gospel, the grace of God that was now available to all. And people were urged to respond because judgment was coming! (see Acts 2.40; 17.30-31)