

Joel Chapter 1

The book of Joel is penned by the prophet Joel. He was a prophet in Judah. The name "Joel" means Jehovah is God. Joel was trying to call the people to repent of their sins, and be brought back into good standing with God. The one message that really stands out in the book of Joel is "the Day of the Lord". Joel is unique in the fact of the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.

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

“The word of the LORD”: This introductory phrase is commonly employed by the prophets to indicate that the message was divinely commissioned (Hos. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zeph. 1:1). Slightly varied forms are found (in 1 Sam. 15:10; 2 Sam. 24:11; Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3; Jon. 1:1; Zech. 1:1; Mal. 1:1).

“LORD”: A distinctively Israelitish designation for God; the name speaks of intimacy and a relationship bonded metaphorically through the covenant likened to marriage and thus carries special significance to Israel (Exodus 3:14).

“Joel”: His name means “the Lord is God.”

“Pethuel”: His name means “openheartedness of/toward God” and is the only occurrence of this name in the Bible.

There is very little known of Joel, the person. He was believed by many to be one of the earliest prophets in Judah. Notice again, this is the LORD's Word in the pen of Joel. There is nothing more known of Pethuel, than the fact that he is the father of Joel.

Verses 2-20: The prophet described the contemporary Day of the Lord. The land was suffering massive devastation caused by a locust plague and drought. The details of the calamity (verses 2-12), are followed by a summons to communal penitence and reformation (verses 13-20).

Joel 1:2 "Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?"

“Hear ... give ear”: The gravity of the situation demanded the undivided focus of their senses, emphasizing the need to make a conscious, purposeful decision in the matter. The terminology was commonly used in “lawsuit” passages (Isa. 1:2; Hosea 4:1), intimating that Israel was found guilty and that the present judgment was her “sentence.”

“Old men ... inhabitants”: The former term refers to the civil and religious leaders, who in light of their position, were exhorted to lead by example the entire population toward repentance.

The reason this is directed to the old men first, is because their wisdom of years would cause them to listen. It is also, for all the inhabitants. This message seems to be for generations to come, and not just for this generation that Joel is speaking to here.

Joel 1:3 "Tell ye your children of it, and [let] your children [tell] their children, and their children another generation."

“Tell ... children ... another generation”: The pedagogical importance of reciting the Lord’s mighty acts to subsequent generations is heavily underscored by the 3-fold injunction (Exodus 10:1-6; Deut. 4:9; 6:6-7; 11:19; 32:7; Psalms 78:5-7; 145:4-7; Prov. 4:1).

Many Scriptures in the Bible have a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment, and that is the case here. Whatever the message is, it is not an old story being told again, but is something they have never experienced before.

Joel 1:4 "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

The 4 kinds of locusts refer to their species or their stages of development (2:25), where the writer mentions them in different order. The total destruction caused by their voracious appetites demands repentance (Deut. 28:38; Isa. 33:4; Amos 7:1).

This verse describes the devastation of the “locust” plague. Moses prophesied that God would use locusts to punish His people if they were disobedient (Deut. 28:38, 42). The language may express the four stages in the development of a single type of insect.

“The palmerworm” (Hebrew *gazam*, “to gnaw”), is the stage at which the locust is first hatched and is characterized by its gnawing activity.

“The locust” (Hebrew *arben*, “to be many”), is the most common name for the locust, and is the second stage, in which the locust gets its wings and flies.

“The cankerworm” (Hebrew *yeleg*, “to lick off”), is the stage in which it does its destructive work.

“The caterpillar” (Hebrew *chasil*, “to devour or to consume”), is the final stage, in which the locust reaches its full growth and devours everything in its path.

This speaks of a famine of tremendous magnitude. This is speaking of locusts that devour the entire crop. The palmerworm, cankerworm, and caterpillar are all types of locusts.

Verses 5-12: Total destruction affected all social and economic levels. Affected were the drunkards who delighted in the abundance of the vine (verses 5-7), the priests who utilized the

produce in the offerings (verses 8-10), and the farmers who planted, cultivated, and reaped the harvest (verses 11-12).

As building toward a crescendo, the prophet noted in the first stanza that the luxuries of life were withdrawn. In the second, the elements needed to worship were interrupted. In the third, the essentials for living were snatched away.

To lose the enjoyment of wine was one thing; to no longer be able to outwardly worship God was another; but to have nothing to eat was the sentence of death!

Joel 1:5 "Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it is cut off from your mouth."

“Awake ... weep ... howl”: The drunkards were to awaken to the realization that their wine would be no more. They were to weep bitterly and to wail. The severity of the devastation called for public, communal mourning.

“New wine”: The term can denote either freshly squeezed grape juice or newly fermented wine (Isa. 49:26).

This Scripture is one that stands out as a warning against drinking. The following Scripture explains a little more fully the consequences of heavy drinking.

Proverbs 23:21 "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe [a man] with rags."

There will be no new wine, because the locusts have eaten the raw material that the wine is made from. There is a spiritual meaning, as well. New wine, sometimes, symbolizes the Holy Spirit. In the spiritual sense, this could mean that drunkards cannot receive the Holy Spirit.

Verses 6-7: “My land ... vine ... fig tree”: The possessive pronoun refers to the Lord. He is the owner of the land (Lev. 25:23; Num. 36:2; Ezek. 38:16), the vine, and the fig tree (Hosea 2:9). Instead of symbols of prosperity and peace (1 Kings 4:25; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10), the vine and fig tree had become visual reminders of divine judgment.

Joel 1:6 "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth [are] the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion."

“A nation”: A literal invasion of locusts pictured the kind of destruction and judgment inflicted by human armies.

“Teeth of a lion”: Joel described these hostile, countless locusts as possessing the “fangs of a lioness,” so able were they to devour anything in their path. They are occasionally used as

symbolic of violence (Gen. 49:9; Num. 23:24), and of the violent, awesome nature of God's judgment (Isa. 30:6; Hosea 13:8).

The key word in this verse is "my". Judah was His people. This nation could not come against God's land, except God ordained it. God sent this vicious nation against His people and land.

The "teeth of a lion" speaks of the great destruction.

Proverbs 30:14 "[There is] a generation, whose teeth [are as] swords, and their jaw teeth [as] knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from [among] men."

Joel 1:7 "He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast [it] away; the branches thereof are made white."

"He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree": This describes an extremity of desolation. The locusts at first attack all which is green and succulent; when this has been consumed, then they attack the bark of trees.

When they have devoured all other vegetables, they attack the trees, consuming first the leaves, then the bark. A day or two after one of these bodies were in motion, others were already hatched to glean after them, gnawing off the young branches and the very bark of such trees as had escaped before with the loss only of their fruit and foliage."

They carried desolation wherever they passed. After having consumed vegetation, fruit, leaves of trees, they attacked even their young shoots and their bark. Even the reeds, wherewith the huts were thatched, though quite dry, were not spared.

Everything in the country was devoured; the bark of figs, pomegranates, and oranges, bitter hard and corrosive, escaped not their excessive desire to eat.

That is the locust, which spoiled the vines in Judea, by gnawing the branches, biting the tops of them, and devouring the leaves and the fruit. And so not only left them bare and barren, but destroyed them.

The fig tree symbolizes Israel, including Judah. This is speaking of the devastation that comes to Judah. Locusts would debark every tree. This is speaking of them being totally cut off from God.

Their protection (bark), is gone. The tree was actually stripped of all the leaves, fruit, and bark. The tree left would have a hard time living. This is exactly what does happen to Judah. They are left barren and helpless.

Verses 8-9: The metaphor is significant because the Old Testament speaks of the Lord as the husband of Israel, His wife (Isa. 54:5-8; Jer. 31:32). The covenantal offerings and libations could

not be carried out; Israel, the wife of the Lord, was to repent, lest her relationship with the Lord became like that of the young widowed maiden.

Joel 1:8 "Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth."

"Lament like a virgin": As with the drunkards, the religious leaders were to wail as a young maiden would upon the death of her youthful husband, wherein she exchanged the silky fabric of a wedding dress and the joy of a wedding feast for the scratchy, coarse clothing of goat's hair and the cry of a funeral dirge.

The term "virgin" lacks the notion of virginity in many cases (e.g., Esther 2:17; Ezek. 23:3), and when coupled together with the term "bridegroom," points to a young maiden widowed shortly after marriage.

"Sackcloth": Fabric generally made of goat's hair, usually black or dark in color (Rev. 6:12), and usually placed on the bare body around the hips (Gen. 37:34; 1 Kings 21:27), leaving the chest free for "beating" (Isa. 32:11-12), and was used in the ancient world to depict sorrow and penitence (Nehemiah 9:1; Isa. 37:1; Matt. 11:21).

Because the prophets' message usually dealt with a call to repentance, it became the principal garment worn by prophets (Matt. 3:4; Rev. 11:3).

This is speaking of their sorrow, when God has removed Himself from them. This is a time of mourning. Israel was the wife of God spiritually. The groom has left them helpless and destitute. He has left them, because of their spiritual adultery (unfaithfulness to Him).

Joel 1:9 "The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn."

"Meat offering ... drink offering is cut off": To cut off these offerings, sacrificed each morning and evening (Exodus 29:38-42; Lev. 23:13), was to cut off the people from the covenant. The gravity of the situation was deepened by the fact that it threatened the livelihood of the priests, who were given a portion of most sacrifices.

These offerings had been a time of fellowship with God. These accompanied the morning and evening sacrifices. Suddenly, all of this is stopped. They have lost contact with their God. The priests "the LORD'S ministers" mourn, because they had lived of these offerings. Their livelihood is completely gone.

Joel 1:10 " The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth."

"The field is wasted": By the locust, that eats up all green things, the grass and herbs, the fruit and leaves of trees.

"The land mourneth": Being destitute, nothing growing upon it, and so looked dismally, and of a horrid aspect; or the inhabitants of it, for want of provision.

"For the corn is wasted": By the locusts, and so by the Assyrian or Chaldean army, before it came to perfection.

"The new wine is dried up": In the grape, through the drought after mentioned: or, "is ashamed"; not answering the expectations of men, who saw it in the cluster, promising much, but failed.

"The oil languisheth": Or "sickens"; the olive trees withered; the olives fell off, as the Targum, and so the oil failed. The corn, wine, and oil, are particularly mentioned, not only as being the chief support of human life, as Kimchi observes, and so the loss of them must be matter of lamentation to the people in general.

But because of these the meat and drink offerings were, and therefore the priests in particular had reason to mourn.

The offering stopped, because of the failure of the crops. We studied in the book of Isaiah that much of the devastation was from natural causes.

Isaiah 24:3 "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word."

Joel 1:11 "Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished."

"Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen": The primary emphasis of the Hebrew term connotes a public disgrace, a physical state to which the guilty party has been forcibly brought.

It is not the fault of the vinedressers, or the husbandmen that the locust has come and eaten the crops. This is speaking from a spiritual standpoint. The vinedressers and the husbandmen were those who cared for the souls of the people. This is saying that those who were supposed to be watching for the souls of the people have fallen down on their job.

The "wheat" symbolizes the believers in Christ. It would be a terrible shame for those who had accepted Christ as their Savior to be lost, because they had not been guided correctly by their ministers. The fall of Judah could be laid at the feet of the spiritual leaders. They did not teach their people the terrible dangers of falling away from God.

They not only, allowed their people to fall into false worship, but were guilty themselves. Ministers now, and priests then, were supposed to watch and warn of any danger. They should have preached about the danger of worshipping false gods.

Joel 1:12 "The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, [even] all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men."

“All the trees ... are withered”: The picture was bleak, for even the deep roots of the trees could not withstand the torturous treatment administered by the locusts, especially when accompanied by an extended drought.

This is speaking of a time, when the joy of the people has withered away. None of the fruit trees produce. There is a curse upon the fruit and vegetables, as well as on the people. The judgment of God has fallen upon them. There is no fruit on the vine.

All of the above trees have symbolized God's people at some time, when the blessings of God was upon them. The trees with no fruit, also, symbolize the fact that God has taken His blessings away.

“Joy is withered away”: Human joy and delight had departed from all segments of society; none had escaped the grasp of the locusts. The joy that normally accompanied the time of harvest had been replaced with despair.

Joel 1:13 "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God."

"Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests": Prepare and be ready to raise up lamentation and mourning; or gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn in that, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi supply the words (see Jer. 4:8).

"Howl, ye ministers of the altar": Who served there, by laying on and burning the sacrifices, or offering incense.

"Come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God": That is, come into the house of the Lord, as Kimchi; into the court of the priests, and there lie all night, in the sackcloth girded with; putting up prayers to God, with weeping and lamentations, that he would avert the judgments that were come or were coming upon them.

"For the meat offering and the drink offering are withholden from the house of your God" (see Joel 1:9).

They were to gird themselves with the sackcloth of mourning. Being gird with sackcloth was an outward expression of the sorrow of their hearts. They were to pray night and day. The daily sacrifice has been taken away. In their time, this meant the loss of daily fellowship with their God. In our day, this means that all symbols of Christianity have been taken away.

Notice the mention of ministers here, which makes me believe these warnings are for their immediate future, and for our day, as well.

Joel 1:14 "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders [and] all the inhabitants of the land [into] the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD."

“Sanctify ye a fast”: The prophet called the priest to take action, first by example (verse 13), and then by proclamation (verse 14). As the official leaders, it was their duty to proclaim a public fast so that the entire nation could repent and petition the Lord to forgive and restore. Here they were admonished to “consecrate” a fast, denoting its urgent, sacred character.

“Call a solemn assembly”: Directives for calling an assembly, generally for uncontrollable purposes (2 Chron. 7:9; Neh. 8:18), are given (in Num. 10:3). Parallel in thought to “consecrate a fast,” no work was permitted on such days (Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35; Deut. 16:8).

The fast was used to show the LORD the sincerity of the prayer being prayed. The assembly was not to be one of joy, but sorrow. This is a call of prayer by all of the inhabitants of the land to reach God. The leaders and the ministers were probably, remembering the following Scripture.

2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Joel 1:15 "Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD [is] at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come."

“The Day of the Lord is at hand”: This is the first occurrence of the theme. Later in the book (2:18; 3:1, 18-21), the Day of the Lord (the occasion when God pours out His wrath on man), results in blessing and exoneration for God’s people and judgment toward Gentiles (Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:3), but here Joel directs the warning toward his own people.

The Day of the Lord is speedily approaching; unless sinners repent, dire consequences await them.

“Destruction from the Almighty” The Hebrew term “destruction” forms a powerful play on words with the “Almighty.” The notion of invincible strength is foremost; destruction at the hand of omnipotent God is coming.

Again, this had a near fulfillment. There is also, coming a Day of the Lord at the end of the Gentile age. The judgment of God was upon them for the sins in their lives. The wrath of God will fall upon the disobedient, in our generation as well. It is bad to fall into the hands of the devil or Satan, but it is much worse to fall into the hands of God, when He pours out His wrath.

Joel 1:16 "Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, [yea], joy and gladness from the house of our God?"

"Is not the meat cut off before our eyes?" Such an interrogation most strongly affirms; it was a matter beyond all question, but they could see it with their eyes. It was a plain case, and not to be denied, that every eatable thing or that of which food was custom to be made, was cut off by the locusts, or the drought.

"Yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God": The harvest being perished, there were no firstfruits brought to the temple, which used to be attended with great joy. And the corn and vines being wasted, no meat offerings made of fine flour, nor drink offerings of wine, were offered, which used to make God and man glad.

Nor any other sacrifices, on which the priests and their families lived, and were matter of joy to them; and these they ate of in the temple, or in courts adjoining to it.

The meat, corn, and fruit were all cut off. There was famine in the land. There were no sacrifices, because there was nothing left to sacrifice. This destruction really comes from God. He may use some country to finalize the destruction, but it is truly from God who is angry. The loss of foodstuff is a direct judgment from God. The war is indirect, but it comes from God, too.

Verses 17-18: "Seed is rotten ... beasts groan": From the spiritual realm to the physical realm, all was in shambles. Though innocent, in judgment even the animals suffered (Rom. 8:18-22), the loss of food.

Joel 1:17 "The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered."

"The seed is rotten under their clods". Not only was all to be cut off for the present, but with it, all hope for the future. The scattered seed, as it lay, each under its clod known to God, was dried up, and so decayed.

"The garners are desolate": The "treasuries", or storehouses, having nothing in them, and there being nothing to put into them; Jarchi makes these to be peculiar for wine and oil, both which failed (Joel 1:10).

"The barns are broken down": In which the wheat and barley had used to be laid up; but this judgment of the locusts and drought continuing year after year, the walls fell down, and, no care was taken to repair them, there being no use for them; these were the granaries, and, as Jarchi, for wheat particularly.

"For the corn is withered": That which sprung up withered and dried away, through the heat and drought: or was "ashamed"; not answering the expectation of the sower.

This speaks of a time, when the farmers have given up. The seed rots in the ground, and does not produce. There is nothing to put in the barn, so the farmer has let it run down.

Joel 1:18 "How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate."

"How do the beasts groan?" For want of fodder, all green grass and herbs being eaten up by the locusts; and also for want of water to quench their thirst.

"The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture": The larger cattle, as oxen; these were in the utmost perplexity, not knowing where to go for food or drink.

"Yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate": Which have shepherds to lead and direct them to pastures, and can feed on commons, where the grass is short, which other cattle cannot. Yet even these were in great distress, and wasted away, and were consumed for want of nourishment.

Not only are the people out of food, but even the grass of the field is not producing, and the cattle and sheep are starving. The drought and the locusts have destroyed everything that even resembles grain.

Joel 1:19 "O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field."

"O Lord, to thee will I cry": As the first to call to repentance, the prophet had to be the first to heed the warning. He had to lead by example and motivate the people to respond. In the midst of proclaiming judgment, God's prophets often led in intercessory prayer for mercy and forgiveness (Exodus 32:11-14; Jer. 42:1-4; Dan. 9:1-19; Amos 7:1-6).

This is the same problem we read about in Isaiah. There was a drought. There was fire that burned what did spring up, and there were swords which killed, as well. It seems that all of nature was in opposition to them. The truth is that God has sent a curse upon man, and beast, and the crops of the field.

Joel 1:20 "The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness."

"The beasts of the field cry also unto thee": As well as the prophet, in their way; which may be mentioned, both as a rebuke to such who had no sense of the judgments upon them, and called not on the Lord; and to express the greatness of the calamity, of which the brute creatures were sensible, and made piteous moans, as for food, so for drink.

Panting thorough excessive heat and vehement thirst, as the hart, after the water brooks, of which this word is only used (Psalm 42:1); but in vain.

"For the rivers of waters are dried up": Not only springs, and rivulets and brooks of water, but rivers, places where there were large deep waters. By the excessive heat and scorching beams of the sun, by which such effects are produced.

"And the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness" (see Joel 1:19). Whereas the word rendered pastures signifies both "them" and "habitations".

This drought has been so severe, that the rivers and streams have dried up. There is no water for the crops. There is no water for the people or the cattle either. Their only chance for help is to cry out to God.

We read in Jeremiah of a drought where the cows had their calves early and lost them. This was no ordinary dry period. This was a drought so great that nothing could live. This speaks of horror beyond our imagination.

Joel Chapter 1 Questions

1. Where was Joel a prophet?
2. What does the name "Joel" mean?
3. What was the purpose of his prophecy?
4. What one message stands out in Joel?
5. How were Joel's prophecies unique?
6. Who was Joel's father?
7. This is the _____ Word in the pen of Joel.
8. Who was this prophecy directed to?
9. How long was this prophecy to be told?
10. What is verse 4 speaking of?
11. What do the palmerworm, caterpillar, and cankerworm have in common?
12. Awake ye _____, and weep, and howl.
13. Why were they to weep?
14. New Wine, sometimes, symbolizes the _____.
15. What is the key word in verse 6?
16. What does "teeth of a lion" speak of?
17. The fig tree symbolizes _____.
18. What does the fact that the tree is debarked show us?
19. Lament like a _____ girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.
20. The meat offering and the drink offering accompanied the _____ and _____ sacrifices.

21. Why are the priests mourning?
22. From the spiritual standpoint, who were the vinedressers and the husbandmen?
23. The wheat symbolizes the _____.
24. The fall of Judah could be laid at whose feet?
25. They should have preached about the danger of _____.
26. What has happened to the joy of the people?
27. In verse 13, what are the priests told to do?
28. How does the fast differ from normal prayer?
29. When is the Day of the LORD?
30. What can be even worse than falling into the hands of Satan?
31. Why were the sacrifices stopped?
32. What is verse 17 speaking of?
33. What gets hurt, besides the people?
34. What happened to the rivers?
35. This was a drought so great, that _____ could live.