

JOEL

Joel 1:1-12

Prophet to the Southern Kingdom

During the early eighth century B.C. *Joel*, *Amos* and *Hosea* were among the first of the Minor Prophets to convey a message previously unheralded to the nation of Israel and the world at large. Their prophecies, unlike that of their predecessors, were not limited to Israel but encompassed the whole human race. Their united voices revealed God's grand eternal purposes for His people and for His world. Looking far into the future they spoke of deliverance for both Jew and Gentile believers!

Open Your Heart: Take a few minutes to worship God for all that He is and does and for all that He means to you personally!

Joel was a common name for an uncommon man. The name was widely used by the Hebrew people; 14 men by that name are mentioned in the Old Testament. One of these Joel's distinguished himself from all the rest by penning the prophecy that bears his name. Internal evidence from the book indicates that Joel's message was directed to Jerusalem and Judah in the south where the temple and priests were located (1:9, 13, 14; 2:15). Some have suggested that Joel may have been a priest when God called him to be a prophet.

Although opinions vary regarding the date of Joel's prophecy most conservative scholars believe an early date is the most probable. The lack of reference to a king, but to ruling elders and priests instead, suggests the book may have been written during the reign of the youthful king Joash (2 Kings 11:21). Joel's placement as the second of the Minor Prophets in the Hebrew canon also suggests an early date. Perhaps Joel makes no reference to time because his burden of prophecy transcended his own times. *In majestic strokes he paints the mural of the entire sweep of the messianic age from its beginnings to its culmination in eternity.*

What will God say to you from the message of Joel, whose name means "Jehovah is God?"

Getting Started

Reflect on "Points to Ponder" from Lesson 1—in light of your study of the book of Amos.

Review your observations concerning the book of Joel from Lesson 1.

Locate Joel and his contemporaries on the Timeline.

Read the Guidelines for Interpreting Predictive Prophecy that accompanies this lesson.

Read Joel 1:1

1. Joel reveals the source of his prophecy in the first verse that he pens. What dimension does this add to the prophet's message?

While the southern kingdom of Judah enjoyed a better spiritual heritage than Israel, her northern counterpart, the same prosperity that led to all types of flagrant corruption in the north had infiltrated Judah as well.

2. With this background in view **read** Joel's book of captivating prophecies in a single sitting. Imagine yourself as a Jewish farmer living in the days of Joel. Consider what you are observing as you read. What words and phrases especially stand out as key components to understanding Joel's message? Note them below.

Review Amos Lesson 7 for the meaning and significance of The Day of the LORD.

The Scene

On that hot summer day, as Joel tried to convince himself that a break in the dry spell would come soon, he heard a faint rumbling in the distance. The rumbling grew louder as Joel peered into the northeastern sky. He saw a small dark cloud on the horizon. As the cloud grew nearer and became larger, the rumbling turned into a roar. The sky darkened and began to blot out the sun. The darkness of the cloud hovered directly above Joel, and the showers came but it was not rain, but a shower of droppings from thousands of flying insects. They soon settled and covered everything that stood still—trees, shrubs, buildings, even animals and small babies, and still the air was filled with more. Nothing could stop them. Joel stood by and watched as they invaded his house. They covered every inch of space and devoured every morsel of food. They left only when there was nothing more for them to eat. Even the bark had been gnawed from the trees leaving them white and lifeless like skeletons. The crops had been stripped to the ground. The streams and wells were polluted. When that dark cloud moved on, the scorching rays of the sun revealed an endless expanse of destruction, desolation and death. -Manning

Reread Joel 1:1-4

3. The first thing God called Joel to do was to summon the elders and all who lived in the land of Judah to _____ because God was going to speak pointedly and with force (2a).
4. What does the rhetorical question in Joel 1:2b reveal about this catastrophic event?
5. Why do you think God instructed the people to continually retell this horrifying experience of the locust plague to future generations (verse 3)?

In powerful lines of poetry Joel now presents in summary form the facts that prompted his message (Joel 1:4). Four descriptive words are used to depict the four stages of a locust's development. The Amplified version puts it this way: *"What the crawling locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten; and what the hopping locust left, the stripping locust has eaten."*

Within your group discuss how verse 4 would help impress the facts on the minds and memories of succeeding generations.

6. What is the main point being communicated in this graphic description?

As Joel struggled to put his world back together God gave him a message for his people. It is also God's word for us. **Reread** Joel 1:5-12.

7. a. Joel's concern was that the people of Judah understand the underlying reasons for the dreadful locust plague. What groups of people does Joel single out in verses 5-7, 8-10, 11-12? List them below.
- b. In light of the present crisis how does God plead for each of these groups to respond (verses 5, 8, and 11)?
- c. Do you see any significance in the progression of the commands that are given? If so, explain.

Note: In Joel 1:6-7 the locusts are likened to a great nation with a powerful and invincible army due to their numbers and organization. The teeth of the locust are likened to those of a lion and lioness because the two jaws of the locust have saw-like teeth like the eye teeth of the lion and lioness.

For Thought and Discussion

8. Do you think this locust plague was God's intended army of judgment or was it simply a "natural" disaster? Why is this question important? Supply evidence from the text.

9. The severe consequences of the locust plague are discussed from God's perspective for each group mentioned below. Take time to reflect and comment on the devastating losses the people of Judah are facing.

Joel 1:7 - Drunkards

Joel 1:9-10 - Priests

Joel 1:11-12 - Farmers

Before the coming of the locusts Joel and his people had considered themselves quite capable of dealing with the situation of each day. It was only after the circumstances had turned against them that they discovered their need before God. Nothing had changed but their circumstances. *The truth is they were just as helpless before the locusts came.*

10. Do we need to learn that same lesson? How might God be speaking to you in this area?

Think back through all you have learned and taken in through the introductory study of Joel.

11. a. Spend some time in silent prayer. Ask God to show you where your inner life might be in crisis and how He wants you to respond.
- b. Are there specific needs in your life that if neglected, will produce dire consequences in the future? If so, what action do you think God might be leading you to take?

Guidelines for Interpreting Predictive Prophecy

The following guidelines provide important parameters that will assist you in accurately handling the prophecies of the Bible. The goal of interpretation is to discover the originally intended meaning of a passage—the way the original audience understood it.

- When a prophet spoke for God, the prophecy could refer to the following:
 - a present or near fulfillment*
 - a future fulfillment*
 - a twofold fulfillment: a near fulfillment and then a later, future fulfillment*
- As you study prophecy, it is important to remember that the prophets did not always indicate intervals of time between events. For example, an Old Testament prophecy could include the first and second comings of Christ without any indication of the time span between them.
- When reading the prophecies of the Bible, keep in mind that the message is centered primarily on five prophetic points in history.
 1. *The Prophet's own time*
 2. *Captivity and restoration*
 3. *The first coming of Christ*
 4. *The second-coming of Christ*
 5. *The new heavens and the new earth*
- Always approach a prophecy as literal (in its usual, ordinary meaning) unless one of the following occurs:
 - the grammatical context shows that it is figurative language by the use of similes, metaphors, parables, allegories, symbols, or types.
 - a literal interpretation violates common sense, is contrary to what the author is saying, or is contrary to what the rest of Scripture teaches.
- When a prophetic passage cannot be taken literally, look for what the author is trying to convey through his figurative or symbolic language. To discern what the author is saying, look for answers in the following places:
 - within the context of the book in which the passage appears
 - in any other writings of that author
 - in any other prophetic writings to which the author had access (for example, other prophetic books or passages in the Word of God).
- Remember, often when a prophet refers to future events, he does not use the future tense.

(Compiled from The New International Inductive Study Bible)