

An Overview of Joel

I. How do we begin studying a book like Joel?

II. **Method:** Have you every tried to put a 1000 piece puzzle together without looking at the picture and by starting in the middle of the scene?

A. History:

1. **Author** - little is known about Joel besides that he was the son of Pethuel.
2. **Date** - the dating of the book is next to impossible to determine. Scholars have spent a lot of time discussing when they think the book was written, late preexilic to early postexilic. All attempts to determine the date are based upon ambiguous information. Probably the best guess is that the book was written early preexilic, sometime during the 7th century B. C. However, this is subject to question as well.

Duane Garrett writes this about the date, “We need not regard any date as theologically or hermeneutically troublesome. We have no clear historical context for Joel—but in Joel this is not a major obstacle to interpretation.”¹ Some have suggested that Joel didn’t include historical data so that this books message would not be historically bound.

3. **Audience** — because the dating of the book is difficult to determine, it is consequently more difficult to determine the exact audience. It would appear that this book is directed toward Judah, given that Israel may have already been taken into exile (722 B. C. while Judah falls in 586 B. C.).
4. **Covenants** — Can you name some of the different covenants? What is the biggest difference between each of these covenants?
5. **Significant dates**
 - a) 922 B. C. - Kingdoms Divid
 - b) 722 B. C. - Israel in Exile
 - c) 586 B. C. - Judah in Exile

B. Literature - There is a lot that could be discussed about prophetic literature, however we will focus on answering one basic question, what is the surrounding context?

1. **Structure within the Book of Twelve (the minor prophets)**. We call them the minor prophets, but they are better called the book of Twelve. We don’t know for certain the date of Joel, but we do see that those who compiled the book of Twelve strategically placed it toward the beginning of it. Hosea starts the book with the theme of spiritual adultery and that Yahweh wants his wayward wife to return. Joel introduces the Day of the Lord. Both of these themes are significant throughout the rest of the book of Twelve. This will come up in Obadiah as well.

¹ Garrett, 294.

2. **Structure²** - The complexity of Joel is seen by the overlapping double chiasm.
 - a) 1A - Judgment on Israel: When locust invade (1:2-20)
 - (1) The people are called to mourn (1-14)
 - (2) Lamentation (15-20)
 - b) 1B - Judgment on Israel (2:1-11)
 - c) 1C - Repentance (2:12-17)
 - d) 1B'/2A - Yahweh Relents/Judgment on Nations (2:18-20)
 - e) 1A'/2B - Yahweh Restores/Grace: Locust plague reversed (2:21-27)
 - f) 2B' - Grace: The Spirit is promised (2:28-32)
 - g) 2A' - Judgment on the Nations (3:1-21)

C. Theology

1. **Message of the book** — The Day of the Lord: When God Invades³
2. **What is the day of the Lord?** We will discuss this more at length in weeks to come. Briefly stated, the Day of the Lord can mean both blessing and cursing. It's not a specific moment in time, but is better understood as a theological idea.⁴ It is a time when Yahweh intervenes “powerfully and effectively into the affairs of this world.”⁵

There is another view of the Day of the Lord that sees it more as a specific day rather than a theme. This is probably because of the use of “Day” in the phrase. However, it seems best to see it as a theological theme running throughout Scripture, being used by various prophets to demonstrate God's intervention in a specific way.

Note: This does not mean that God set the world in motion and only occasionally intervenes. This is just a phrase that the prophets used to connect specific events to the ultimate Day of the Lord.

3. The book of Joel is about a current event in the history of Israel; a locust plague. God uses this locust plague to drive His people to Himself and to point them to an even greater day that is coming — the day of the Lord. This day will be terrifying, but God has provided a way for people to come to Himself. Those who turn to God in repentance, who call upon His name, will not only be saved from this terrible day, but will have His very presence indwelling them. God will pour out His blessing on those who are His. Yet, those who reject God will face His unstoppable, fierce wrath and will not be able to endure.
4. **There are several themes:**
 - a) **God's Sovereignty**
 - b) **God will right all wrongs**

² Garrett, 310.

³ Robert Spender, “The Message of Joel: When God Invades.”

⁴ Duane Garrett, 306.

⁵ J.D. Baker, in *Diction of the Old Testament Prophets*, 142.