

Introduction to Joel

Where is it in the Bible?

Joel is the twenty-ninth book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Hosea and Amos. It is the second book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the Minor Prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section; they are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles.

Who wrote it?

The first verse of the book identifies the prophet as “Joel son of Pethuel.” Outside of this first verse, little else is known about Joel other than the fact that he prophesied in Judah. There are over fifteen others named Joel in the Old Testament, but none of them seems to be the author of this book.

When was it written?

Traditionally the book was thought to have been written before the Babylonian Exile because it does not mention the destruction of the Jerusalem and because it was placed between Hosea and Amos, two preexilic prophets. However, many scholars argue that the placement was due to thematic similarities with Amos and suggest that the book was written after the restoration and before the destruction of Tyre in 348 B.C. (see Joel 3:4). Collins says that it “is one of the latest books in the collection of Minor Prophets, if not the latest.”¹

What is it about?

A large part of the book of Joel describes a horrible plague of locusts which causes suffering for humans and animals. This is seen as a sign of God's judgment, a call to repentance, and a preview of the destruction to come in the Day of the Lord. The second part of the book beginning at 2:28 is a vision of what the final judgment will be like; those who have opposed the Lord will be brought to justice and God's people will be vindicated. “This is one of the first biblical passages that looks like the end-time (apocalyptic) literature found in Daniel and Revelation and occasionally in the Gospels.”²

1 John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 420.

2 Daniel Simundson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=48>

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1)
- II. Judgment and Deliverance (1:2-2:27)
 - a. The Plague of Locusts (1:2-12)
 - b. Call to Repentance (1:13-20)
 - c. The Day of God's Wrath (2:1-17)
 - d. God's Response (2:18-27)
- III. Salvation in the Day of the Lord (2:28-3:21)
 - a. The Spirit Poured Out (2:28-32)
 - b. Judgment of the Nations (3:1-16)
 - c. Restoration of Judah (3:17-21)

What are some things to look for?

- **Day of the Lord:** This term originally referred to a festival day, but Amos used it to refer to a day of judgment. In chapter 3 of Joel it is used to refer to the final judgment when God will come to judge the wicked and reward the righteous. Thus it is both a time to be fear and a time to look forward to.
- **Familiar Passages:** Although Joel is a short book, it includes two relatively familiar passages. Joel 2:28-32, which states that all will receive God's spirit and be able to prophesy, is used to interpret the events of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-21. The Old Testament reading on Ash Wednesday usually includes the call to repentance in Joel 2:12-17.
- **Meaning of Natural Disasters:** "Natural disasters are a common occurrence in every age – floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, or the scourge of crop-eating insects. Did God have a part in sending the disaster? How do we know that? And what is the message that is being sent? Joel, as people do in our day, sees the locusts as a punishment from God, though he never states clearly what sin might have caused it."³

3 Daniel Simundson at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=48>