

# The Minor Prophets

## JOEL

- I. Central Message: The Lord is angry with Judah and they shall be punished for their disobedience. Their only hope is to repent and turn back to God.
- II. Introduction
  - A. Joel prophesied in the kingdom of Judah
  - B. Name means “Jehovah” (Jo) is God (El)”
    1. sometimes called, “The Prophet of Pentecost” for his statements referred to by Peter in Acts 2
    2. nothing else known about him apart from this book
    3. 12 other men in the Bible with this name but this Joel distinguished by being called, “the son of Penuel”
  - C. Date of writing
    1. uncertain
    2. around 690 BC says Adam Clarke (285 years after division of kingdom)
    3. some say around ninth century BC before the exile to Babylon (in that case, the enemies dealt with are the Philistines, Phoenicians, Egyptians and Edomites)
    4. some say after exile into Babylon (evidences are: northern kingdom not mentioned, Israel is now only Judah, elders and priests are authorities in Jerusalem, no king mentioned, no mention of the “high place” and tendency to idolatry)
    5. Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary says in 9<sup>th</sup> century during early days of king Joash (II Kings 11:17,18; 12:2-16; II Chronicles 24:4-14)
  - D. Similar passages in Joel and other books
    1. Joel 1:15 – Isaiah 13:6
    2. Joel 2:2 – Zephaniah 1:15
    3. Joel 2:3 – Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35
    4. Joel 2:10 – Isaiah 13:10
    5. Joel 2:32 – Obadiah 17
    6. Joel 3:10 – Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3
    7. Joel 3:16 – Amos 1:2; Isaiah 13:13
    8. Joel 3:17 – Ezekiel 36:11; Isaiah 52:1; Obadiah 17; Nahum 1:15
    9. Joel 3:18 – Amos 9:13
  - E. About the book
    1. set amidst severe locust plague
    2. designed to explain plague’s significance and call the people to repentance
    3. seems to center more around one episode than an entire career of a prophet
    4. three major sections
      - a. 1:1-2:27 – the locust plague and drought call the people to repentance
      - b. 2:28 – 3:16 – the day of the Lord, heralded by the outpouring of the Spirit
      - c. 3:17-21 – the glorious future of Judah and Jerusalem

5. another possible division makes the book into two sections (1:1-2:18 and 2:19-3:21)
- III. First Section (as divided into three major sections) – The Locust Plague and Drought  
Call the People to Repentance (Joel 1:1-2:27)
- A. 1:1 – it was the Lord’s word which Joel was speaking (evidence of verbal, plenary inspiration)
  - B. 1:2 – the severity of the plague (even the oldest of the men had not seen a punishment like it)
  - C. 1:3 – the importance of fathers teaching children (cf. Deuteronomy 6:7,20; Joshua 4:6,7; Psalm 78:4-8)
  - D. 1:4
    1. some suggest that these are either four different kinds of locusts or locusts in four different stages of life
    2. the words mean “cutting, swarming, hopping, destroying”
    3. English dictionary defines “palmerworm” as type of caterpillar “so called because it wanders like a palmer or pilgrim and devours leaves and herbage; also applied to other voracious insects”
    4. English dictionary defines “cankerworm” as “worm or larva destructive of trees or plants”
    5. total destruction seen in this verse – what one does not eat, another will
  - E. 1:5 – the worldly who were so unconcerned about God would now recognize that something of great magnitude was taking place for they were about to lose their liquor
  - F. 1:6-7 – description of the destruction
    1. “the nation”
      - a. all agree that this has reference to the locusts
      - b. some say that it also has reference to the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians
      - c. others say that the four kinds of locusts represent four different attacks made on Judah
        - i. the first during the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign in Judah
        - ii. the second when Jehoiakim was taken prisoner 11 years later
        - iii. the third during the ninth year of Zedekiah’s reign in Judah
        - iv. the fourth 3 years later when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem
      - d. still others suggest that the four kinds of insects represent the four powers who were the Jews’ enemies
        - i. the palmerworm = the Assyrians and the Chaldeans
        - ii. the locust = the Medes and the Persians
        - iii. the cankerworm = the Greeks
        - iv. the caterpillar = the Romans
      - e. yet others make them out to represent four kings
        - i. Tiglath-pileser Assyrian king – II Kings 15,16)
        - ii. Shalmaneser (successor of Tiglath-pileser, who invaded Israel and carried ten tribes captive – II Kings 17,18)
        - iii. Sennacherib (Assyrian king who invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah – II Kings 18,19)
        - iv. Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian king who took Judah captive and destroyed Jerusalem)

- f. Adam Clarke suggests that the best explanation is that “a nation” refers to the locusts only
- 2. the power of the locusts is seen in the comparison to a lion’s teeth
- 3. the completeness of the destruction
  - a. vines ripped up
  - b. trees have bark torn off
  - c. the branches chewed to a nub
- G. 1:8-13 – the emotional response to the destruction
  - 1. vs. 8 – lamenting – like a new bride who loses her husband
  - 2. vs. 9 – mourning – not even enough left in the field with which to offer God a sacrifice
  - 3. vs. 11 – being ashamed and howling – the farmers have no harvest to present to the public
- H. 1:14 – action advised
  - 1. fast
  - 2. gather together as one
  - 3. cry unto the Lord
- I. 1:17-20 – the drought
  - 1. the seed has rotted due to dryness
  - 2. the garner (treasuries) are empty because there is nothing to sell
  - 3. the barns are of no use because there is no corn to gather
  - 4. the animals are confused because they cannot find anything to eat (it has either been eaten up by the locusts or dried up)
  - 5. vs. 19 – could have reference to the destruction by the locusts for those who have observed their infestation have said they left the land looking as if it had been destroyed by fire
  - 6. vs. 20 – anthropomorphism used to show the extreme of the agony in the land
  - 7. in short, all of the current crops destroyed by locusts and no hope of growing any new ones because of the drought
    - a. the Lord was trying to get their attention
    - b. He wanted them to turn their minds and hearts away from themselves and back to Him
- J. 2:1-11 – further description of the locusts and their destructiveness
  - 1. vs. 1 – warning sounded for people to humble themselves before God
    - a. notice conspicuous absence of any instructions on how to fend off the locusts
    - b. Joel’s emphasis is on the spiritual, not the physical
  - 2. vs. 2
    - a. some have compared swarms of locusts to clouds
    - b. “as the morning spread upon the mountain” = “coming up over the hill, stretching as far and wide as the eye can see
  - 3. vs. 3 – the land before they get to it is like Eden compared to how it looks when they are finished
  - 4. vs. 4 – their heads have a shape similar to the heads of horses
  - 5. vs. 5 – the deafening noise of the humming of their wings and the chewing of the plants
  - 6. vs. 6 – the sorrow of the people
  - 7. vs. 10 – hyperbole describing the devastation the would effect; second part perhaps literal as they covered the sky

8. vs. 11
  - a. they came at the command of God
  - b. this was not an accident or a freak of nature
  - c. it was God's destruction, designed to bring the people to repentance
- K. 2:12-17 – what the people are expected by God to do
  1. vs. 12 – the heart must be involved in their turning
  2. vs. 13
    - a. tearing of the garments was a show of agony
    - b. God was interested in their inner change first (see Psalm 51:16,17)
    - c. why should they turn to Him, repenting from the heart and giving up their sinful ways?
      - i. He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness and He will stop the punishment
      - ii. notice that, "He will punish" is not one of the motivations for turning
        - A. they already knew that God could punish
        - B. any words regarding it at this time would be superfluous
        - C. the Lord did not waste words
  3. vs. 14 – if they repented at that time, the Lord might stop the locusts and leave the people something, even enough to be able to make an offering to Him
  4. vs. 15 – urgency exhorted
    - a. blow the alarm
    - b. try to stop the destruction now
- L. 2:18-27 – the Lord WILL bless if they will repent (notice "will" in vss. 18-21)
  1. vs. 20
    - a. the locusts apparently would come from the north
    - b. God would drive them into the sea but the smell of their dead carcasses would remain for a time, probably as a reminder
  2. vs. 27 – the very purpose of the plague, to teach them to follow God and never be ashamed of Him

IV. Second Section – The Day of the Lord, Heralded by the Outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-3:16)

- A. 2:28-32
  1. several passages in the Bible which are explained by other passages in the Bible
    - a. when this is done, we can properly call it, "A Divine Commentary"
    - b. though men's commentaries may err, Divine Commentaries do not
  2. this passage explained in a Divine Commentary in Acts 2:16-21
    - a. day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension
    - b. establishment of the church
    - c. Acts 2:16 – Peter making reference to the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit which he and the other apostles there were immersed in and which others would later experience said, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" and then proceeded to quote Joel 2:28-32

3. vs. 28
  - a. “afterward” = “in the latter days,” a phrase which always had reference to the days of the Messiah
  - b. “pour out of my spirit”
    - i. not a reference to immersion in the Holy Spirit alone but to all of the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit in the first century
    - ii. the immersion in the Spirit limited to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8; 1:26-2:4)
    - iii. but this prophesy speaks of women and old men and young men having the Spirit
    - iv. for Christians who were not apostles, the ability to perform miracles was given by the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:12-19)
    - v. thus, this prophesy is not limited to the immersion in the Holy Spirit experienced by the apostles; though it included this, it had reference also to how the Lord would pour out the Spirit upon several Christians and would use that outpouring to ground the church in the truth (I Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 4:13,14)
4. vs. 29 – shows that this would not be limited to any one class of people
5. vs. 30-31
  - a. the key to these verses is the final phrase, “the great and terrible day of the Lord come”
    - i. some suggest that this has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70
    - ii. others say it has reference to the day of judgment
  - b. in either case, the description of events is highly figurative, although some, believing the former to be true, make literal some of the statements
    - i. the Jewish historian, Josephus wrote of some “signs” that were seen prior to Jerusalem’s destruction
    - ii. from Josephus, “Wars of the Jews,” Book VI, chapter V, paragraph 3:  
 “Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year.”  
 “Thus also, before the Jews’ rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus (Nisan), and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round about the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which light lasted for half an hour.”  
 “At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.”  
 “A few days after that feast...before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about the clouds, and surrounding of cities.”

- c. the most reasonable explanation of the passages seems to be that the day of the Lord here spoken of is the destruction of Jerusalem and the events mentioned are figures, rather than signs, which demonstrate the horribleness of and the awful extent to which the destruction would go
    - 6. vs. 32
      - a. for meaning of “call on the name of the Lord” see Acts 22:16 and Romans 10:13,14
      - b. the church, the Christian dispensation, the New Testament age, began in Jerusalem (Acts 1, 2)
      - c. for how the Lord calls, see II Thessalonians 2:14
  - B. 3:1-2
    - 1. vs. 1 – disagreement concerning the time of “those days”
      - a. some apply it to Gospel times
      - b. others assign earlier time to it, perhaps when God’s people returned from captivity (this seems more likely to me – mrg)
    - 2. vs. 2
      - a. “the valley of Jehoshaphat”
        - i. no such place in Judea
        - ii. likely that this was a symbolical place
          - A. “Jehoshaphat” = “Jehovah judges”
          - B. thus, the nations who had persecuted God’s people were now going to be seeing God’s judgment upon them
      - b. God will exhort the nations to cease their troubling of the Jews
  - C. 3:3-6 – what the enemies of Judaism had done to God’s people
    - 1. sold them as slaves (vss. 3, 6)
    - 2. ripped apart the temple in Jerusalem and took the goods to place in their own temples (vs. 5)
    - 3. removed the Jews as far away from their homeland as they could so as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to return (vs. 6)
  - D. 3:7,8 – the recompense upon the enemies
  - E. 3:9-16 – invitation to the heathen to come and face God
    - 1. vss. 9-10 – let every man become a soldier
    - 2. vs. 11 – gather all together as one and, doing all this, you will still find yourselves inferior to Jehovah
    - 3. vs. 13 – the time of the destruction for their wickedness will have come
    - 4. vs. 16 – God will come out victorious and will rescue His people
  - F. 2:28-32 contain prophecy of the beginning of the church, the Christian dispensation. 3:1-16 seems to contain prophecy of the return of the Jews from captivity long before Jesus came to earth, long before the former prophecy was fulfilled. How do we explain Joel’s jumping forth to one scene and then going back to a much earlier one? In 3:1-16 God is promising that the captivity would end but in 2:28-32 He is telling the people of an even greater blessing, a time of release from spiritual captivity to Satan. Thus, He starts with the greater blessing.
- V. Third Section – The Glorious Future of Judah and Jerusalem (3:17-21)
  - A. Prophecy of their return from captivity (fulfilled – see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah)

- B. Some have taken this to mean that the Jews are to be reinstated as God's people during the Christian age. This is a premillennial view but it is not correct for this passage does not teach it.
1. vss. 17 and 21 speak of God dwelling in Zion
    - a. Jerusalem was the center of worship under the old covenant
    - b. John 4:21 – Jesus said, “the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain (Gerazim – mrg) nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.”
    - c. in the Christian age, Jerusalem is not the center of worship, thus these words of Joel do not have reference to something in this age
  2. vs. 20 used in support of the premillennial argument
    - a. I Kings 9 – similar promise when temple dedicated BUT this promise was conditioned upon their obedience (perhaps this statement in verse 20 was also along the lines of a conditional promise)
    - b. the word “forever” means “age lasting”
      - i. Judah would dwell intact throughout that particular age, the Mosaic age
      - ii. but when the Christian age began, they would no longer be God's people nor would Jerusalem be the center of worship