

# The Book of Joel

## I. The Writer of the Book

- Joel the son of Pethuel was a pre-exilic prophet of Judah.
- His name means “*Jehovah is God*” and was a common name in Biblical times.
- He lived during the reign of King Joash, around the year 820 BC and may have known the prophets Obadiah and Elisha.
- Jewish tradition assigns him to the tribe of Reuben.

## II. The Historical Background of the Book

### A. The Reign of King Joash

- He was the sole member of David’s family that survived the massacre by Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1-3).
- For six years the kingdom of Judah suffered under Athaliah’s idolatrous influence.
- Joash was raised secretly under the tutelage of the high priest, Jehoiada.
- Athaliah was overthrown and Joash proved to be a good king at first. (2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24)
- But when the high priest died, he came under the influence of idolatrous princes and turned away from the Lord:

*2 Chronicles 24:17-19 – “Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.”*

### B. The Word of God from the Prophet Joel

- Joel may have been among the prophets that were sent by God to king Joash.
- The wrath of God took the form of an invasion of locusts that devastated the whole land.
- This plague was one of the manifestations of the “*Day of the Lord.*”

- Joel calls the people to repent in order to avert a greater manifestation of the Day of the Lord (1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14).
- There are also wonderful blessings prophesied by Joel for wholehearted repentance (cf. Acts 2).

### III. The Outline of the Book

#### A. The Present Desolation (1)

##### 1. **Character of the Desolation (1:2-4)**

- One of the disasters most feared by farmers is a plague of locusts.
- It was one of the Ten Plagues that rained on Egypt.
- Moses prophesied that God would punish Israel with this plague if they rebelled against Him (Deuteronomy 28:38, 42).
- One interpretation is that the Four “Creatures” mentioned here are four different kinds of locusts.
- Another interpretation is that these were originally technical names for the different stages of the growth of the same locust:
  1. The “Palmerworm” (*gazam*): The locust when it has just emerged from its egg in the springtime.
  2. The “Locust” (*arbeh*): The same creature in late spring, when it puts forth little ones.
  3. The “Cankerworm” (*yeleg*): When it develops small wings which enable it to leap better but not to fly yet.
  4. The “Caterpillar” (*chasiyl*): refers to the fully mature locust with its full wings, about 7½ cm long.
- Drought made the situation worse (v.20).

##### 2. **The Ones Affected by the Desolation (1:5,8,9,11,18)**

- Drunkards have no more wine to indulge in, because all the grapevines have been destroyed in the plague.
- But God also allowed the priests to be affected by the desolation – they could not make any offerings to the Lord in the Temple.

##### 3. **The Required Response to the Desolation: National Repentance (1:14,15)**

- The priests are called to lead the nation in prayer and fasting because this event was only a warning of worse judgements to come!

## B. The Coming Desolation (2)

### **1. The Character of This Desolation (2:1-3)**

- Assyrian invaders that would soon come to Palestine in 740 BC, conquer the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, and then attempt to do the same to the Southern Kingdom.
- They are described as a great people and strong.

### **2. The One Who Will Bring This Desolation (2:11)**

- Slightly more than a century later, God brought the Assyrians under Sennacherib to chastise His people in Judah for their sins.

### **3. A Plea in View of the Coming Desolation (2:12,13)**

- The people are to return to the Lord, in sincere repentance, fasting and praying that He would change His plan and not bring the predicted desolation on them.
- At the time of this Assyrian invasion, King Hezekiah did lead the people to repent and seek the Lord.
- The Lord responded by destroying the whole army of 185,000 soldiers in one night!
- The results of their repentance :
- Rejoicing: v.21 – *“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”*
- Restoration v.23 – *“...for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.”*

## C. The Future Deliverance (3)

### **1. The Promise of the Holy Spirit (2:28,29)**

- Joel now looks another seven centuries ahead to another event.
- In OT times, only certain key people had the privilege of being filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Joel was pointing to a day when the Holy Spirit would one day be poured out on all believers.

- The apostle Peter cited these verses of Joel’s prophecy as being fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out visibly on the disciples at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:16,17).
2. **The Promise of Deliverance in the Last Days (2:30-32)**
    - Joel’s prophetic vision now jumps to the End Times.
    - God will perform signs in the sky just before the second coming of Christ (cf. Matt 24:29,30). This part of the prophecy will be fulfilled shortly before the battle of Armageddon.
  3. **The Promise of Judgment on Those Who Oppress God’s People (3:1-3)**
    - Throughout the course of human history many Gentile nations have been guilty of mistreating the Jews.
    - God will bring judgement on those nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat, which may be the Jezreel valley (“The valley of decision” in v.14)
  4. **The Promise of God’s Reign from Jerusalem (3:17-21)**
    - Jerusalem will be established as the center of the Lord’s reign here on earth.
    - Israel will then experience a time of blessing she had never known before.
    - A new temple will be built, and there will be a spring of water flowing out of it (v.18, cf. Ezekiel 47)

Conclusion:

- Events in Joel’s “prophescope” -
  - The locust invasion in Joel’s time
  - The Assyrian invasion and deliverance (100 years later)
  - The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (800 years later)
  - The Battle of Armageddon, and Israel’s deliverance.
- While God’s future judgments against sin are to be feared above all things, God’s future blessings for true, sincere repentance are to be sought above all things!