

## General Comments on Joel

The book of Joel is difficult to place chronologically because the opening statement does not identify contemporaries or kings at the time of writing as other prophetic books usually do. The LDS Edition KJV Bible Dictionary suggest Joel is a prophet of Judah circa 850 B.C.E., and this seems reasonable. It might be placed earlier, closer to the sack of Israel by Assyria in 721 B.C.E.

Joel's focus on Zion and Jerusalem in ch. 2 suggests he was a prophet of Judah. However, this may not be the case. One could easily build the case that the book's primary intent is to address a latter-days, or eschatological, setting akin to that described in Micah 4-5. Assuming this is the case, Joel may be taking his cues from the sack of Israel by Assyria and forecasting it into a latter-day time setting for a subsequent sack of Judah at Jerusalem. If this was his intent, then the omission of chronological indicators could be deliberate.

Overall, the book is well structured. Chapters 1 and 3 are complimentary and frame chapter 2. Chapter 1 tells us foreign invaders and famine are brought to make the people of Jerusalem repent. To compliment this, chapter 3 says the foreign invaders are brought to Jerusalem to be judged and punished for their sins, while righteous Judah will be blessed. Chapter 2 focuses on the Judgement of the wicked and the redemption of the righteous upon the Day of the Lord, the focal point of what is more generally discussed in chapters 1 and 3.

This short book represents the backbone and core of prophetic material concerning the Day of the Lord, what Christians would see as the Second Advent depicted in John's Revelation. John's Revelation draws heavily on imagery and rhetoric from Joel. As such, this book is fertile when it comes to eschatological interpretations.

One could go so far to say the Temple referenced in ch. 1 is the same as Ezekiel's Messianic Temple of Ezek. 40-42, and its closure is associated with the invasion of Gog recounted in Ezek. 38. Then one would say that Ezek. 39 parallels Joel 3 in that Gog is smashed and Israel redeemed. Clear parallels can easily be made to John's Revelation as well.

Aside from the Christian reading of the text, the book of Joel is a retelling of the covenant curses from the Law of Moses. Joel warns Israel and Judah that wickedness results in curses and to escape the punishment they must repent. The Jewish reader would see this book as a warning that ancient covenant theology still applies today. Modernity does not change the Abrahamic Covenant. So much so that it warns future generations there are

yet to come covenant curses so terrible they eclipse anything that has ever previously occurred.

### Comments on Joel 1

This chapter interweaves the imagery of foreign invasion and famine. The two go hand in hand and are equated in the Scriptures on a number of occasions, cf. Deut. 28:33-42, Judges 6:4-5, Judges 7:12, Alma 3:2, Alma 4:2, Alma 53:7, Alma 62:35. The invasion is intended to humiliate Judah and get them to repent.

The text of the chapter can be arranged based upon subject as follows:

- Introduction (v. 1)
- Summons (v. 2-3) All generations are warned
- A - (v. 4-7) Invasion/famine
  - B - (v. 8-9) Temple priests lament in sackcloth
  - C - (v. 10) Drought
    - D - (v. 11a-d) Shamed farmers & vinedressers
  - C - (v. 11e-12g) Drought
    - D - (v. 12h) No joy for sons of men
  - B - (v. 13-14) Temple Priests lament in sackcloth
- A - (v. 15-20) Famine/invasion

The intent is to summon and warn all of the people about the events preceding the Day of the Lord, but most especially the Temple priests as they are Israel's spiritual leaders.

### **1 THE word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.**

v1 Introduction of the author, but no chronological clues are given.

**2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell ye your children of it, and [let] your children [tell] their children, and their children another generation.**

v2-3 Joel rhetorically asks the reader if anything like what is about to be predicted has happened before? The answer is both "Yes" and "No". The apostasy cycle of rebellion then curse then repentance then blessing appears repeatedly throughout the OT. However, what Joel is speaking of here is an event that transcends all previous events, the Day of the Lord. The apostasy cycle predicted herein culminates in a great and terrible scene where the wicked are destroyed, righteous Israel

is redeemed, and Zion is founded.

Note Joel has the reader ask their parents about the history in v. 2, but also warn the children about the predictions in v. 3. Thus, the warnings clearly had future applications as far as Joel was concerned. Such a warning to future generations forwards an eschatological reading.

**4 That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. 5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. 6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth [are] the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. 7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast [it] away; the branches thereof are made white.**

v4-7 A foreign nation (v. 6) will come upon Jerusalem like a plague of locusts (v. 4), inexorably devouring everything in their path (v. 7). Joel calls out to the complacent people of Judah telling them to repent (v. 5).

Verses 4-7 compliments v. 15-20 in that it emphasizes the invasion over the famine, where the latter has the emphasis reversed.

v4, 7 The imagery equating the invading army with a plague of locusts is derived from Judges 6:4-5, cp. similar uses in Amos 7:2, Nahum 3:15-17, Jer. 46:23, Jer. 51:27.

v5 On the imagery of drunkenness, Isaiah uses it to represent both literal physical drunkenness and spiritual stupor, cf. Isa. 5:11-12, Isa. 19:14, Isa. 28:7-8, Isa. 29:9-10.

v6 The invading nation is compared to a powerful lion with sharp teeth, indicative of its military might, cp. Num. 23:24, Deut. 33:20, Isa. 5:29, Hosea 5:14. A man killing a lion is presented as a miraculous act, cf. Judges 14:5-6, 1 Sam. 17:34-36.

**8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. 9 The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn.**

**10 The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. 11 Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. 12 The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, [even]**

all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.

13 Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. 14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders [and] all the inhabitants of the land [into] the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

v8-14 An emphatic lament where spiritual famine is paralleled to the physical famine. First, priests lament over the end of the Temple offerings (v. 8-10). Second, farmers and men in general lament over the destroyed harvest (v. 11-12). Priests are then told to formalize the mourning process over the Temple closure by donning the robes of lamentation (v. 13), and organizing a national day of fasting and supplication at the Temple (v. 14).

The lament indicates the curse isn't simply the physical deprivation of food, but also a spiritual one as the Temple is shut down. The closing of the Temple would symbolize the people being cut off from the sacrifices, and therefore the figurative spiritual food as they were cut off from partaking of the sacrificial meals. Thus emphasizing the close connection between things physical and things spiritual.

v8 The "virgin" here is better translated to "young woman". The imagery is that of a woman mourning the death of her beloved husband. It is made doubly lamentable because she is no longer in her youth, so the possibility of remarriage isn't good. She is lamenting her husband, and her own bleak future of widowhood.

v13-14 The Temple is used here and in v. 9 as a place of mourning as well as of attempted reconciliation between man and God, cp. 1 Kings 8:27-53.

15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD [is] at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. 16 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, [yea], joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. 18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. 19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. 20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

v15-20 Again (cp. v. 4-7), themes of invasion and famine are combined, this time emphasizing the resulting famine and drought

(v. 16-18, 20) over the invasion (v. 19).

v15 The Day of the Lord is the ultimate day of judgement where the Lord vindicates the righteous and punishes the wicked. The Christian would equate this with the Second Advent. See the LDS Edition KJV Topical Guide entry under "Day of the Lord" for numerous citations.

The foreign invasions, famine, and drought all precede the Day of the Lord and are here held up as signs it is imminent, much like the tribulations documented in John's Revelation.

v19 While the references to "fire", "flame" and "burning" have reference to the severity of the literal drought, they also figuratively make reference to the foreign invaders (cf. 2:2-5) and the wrath of the Lord (cf. Num. 11:1, Deut. 32:22, Ps. 78:21, Isa. 30:27-30, 2 Ne. 26:4-6).

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