

Joel

Joel uses a recent calamity in the nation of Judah to teach his hearers a prophetic lesson. A locust plague had invaded the land, destroying every green thing in its path. Grapevines were stripped clean, grain fields lay bare, and fruit trees stood leafless and unproductive. The devastation was so overwhelming that even grain offerings to God were impossible. Joel uses the locust invasion as the starting point of his sermon. As bad as the locust plague was, it would pale by comparison with what God was about to bring upon His people. An army from the north would come to attack the nation, leaving behind devastation even more complete than that of the locusts. The only hope for Joel's hearers: heartfelt repentance before that terrible day arrives.

INTRODUCTION

Disaster strikes the southern kingdom of Judah without warning. An ominous black cloud of locusts descends upon the land. In a matter of hours, every living green thing has been stripped bare. Joel, God's spokesman during the reign of Joash (835-796 b.c.), seizes this occasion to proclaim God's message. Although the locust plague has been a terrible judgment for sin, God's future judgments during the day of the Lord will make that plague seem insignificant by comparison. In that day, God will destroy His enemies, but bring unparalleled blessing to those who faithfully obey Him.

The Hebrew name *Yo'e/* means "Yahweh Is God." This name is appropriate to the theme of the book, which emphasizes God's sovereign work in history. The courses of nature and nations are in His hand.

AUTHOR

Although there are several other Joels in the Bible, the prophet Joel is known only from this book. In the introductory verse, Joel identifies himself as the son of Pethuel (1:1) meaning "persuaded of God." His frequent references to Zion and the house of the Lord (1:9, 13-14; 2:15-17, 23, 32; 3:1, 5-6, 16-17, 20-21) suggest that he probably lived not far from Jerusalem. Because of his statements about the priesthood (1:13-14; 2:17), some think Joel was a priest as well as a prophet. In any case, Joel was a clear, concise, and uncompromising preacher of repentance.

DATE & SETTING

Since this book includes no explicit time references, it cannot be dated with certainty.

Evidence points to a sharing of material between Joel and Amos (cf. Joel 3:16 and Amos 1:2; Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13). The context of the books suggests that Amos, an eighth-century prophet, borrowed from Joel. Also, Joel's style is more like that of Hosea and Amos than of the postexilic writers. The evidence seems to favor a date of about 835 b.c. for Joel. Since Joel does not mention idolatry, it may have been written after the purge of Baal worship and most other forms of idolatry in the early reign of Joash under Jehoiada the priest. As an early prophet of Judah, Joel would have been a contemporary of Elisha in Israel.