

Joel – his times and his prophecy

• *A Terrible times locust plague – ‘like the end of the world’*

• *God’s hand is behind what is happening*

• *A foretaste of the Day of the Lord*

• *A wake-up call to repentance for negligence of the things of God*

There are times in life when something happens to us which for us is like the end of the world. There came a time in Israel’s history when there was a plague of locusts so terrible that it seemed to be the end of the world for Israel. It went on for several years. It ruined the agriculture of Israel. Food supplies sank to zero.

At this time God raised up a preacher called ‘Joel’, who was led by God to make this plague of locusts the theme of his preaching. We do not know exactly when he did this preaching. Some think that it was in the reign of Joash at about 835 BC. We do not know for sure. What is more important for us is to note the circumstances in which Joel was preaching.

Like all of the prophets, Joel was a preacher, and this book of the Bible is a record of his preaching. The nation of Israel was in a terrible situation. Joel sees the hand of God in what is happening and calls the nation to repentance. He sees this locust plague as a foretaste of the end of the world. He is led by God to see that there is a special reason why God has let this plague of locusts come upon them. It is God’s warning to them. An intervention into the normal course of life could come at any time. The Day of the Lord – God’s judgement day – is always near. Joel urges the people to seek the Lord in a way they have never done before. Then Joel is led by the Spirit to widen his theme, and to talk of the Day of the Lord in a fuller way.

No particular sin is mentioned in Joel’s prophecy. There is no mention of idolatry or social sins. He mentions drunkenness passingly in Joel 1:5 but it was not the aim of Joel to denounce any one particular misdeed. Evidently Joel was concerned more about general negligence of the people in the things of God. This plague of locusts gave the nation an opportunity to wake up to spiritual reality.

**1:1–20
Joel’s first summons to the nation**

First there is the **title**.

Joel **addresses every section of the community**. He calls upon

The elders

The drunkards

Jerusalem

The farmers

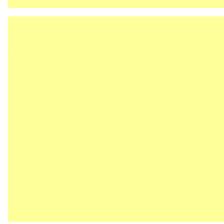
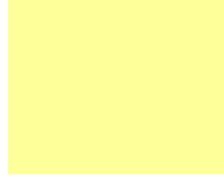
The priests

He calls the whole nation a section at a time. He tells them what to say. He puts a cry of repentance in their mouths.

Then there comes a **second summons to the nation**.

**2:1–17
Joel’s second summons – the locust plague pictures the day of the Lord**

The locust plague is being used as a picture of the Day of the Lord. Joel is describing the final great day of the Lord as though it was a very great plague of locusts. The picture of a locust plague is taken up by the prophet and used as a way of picturing judgement day. Joel now refers to ‘the nations’¹ and ‘the earth... sky... sun ... moon... stars’². In Joel chapter 1 he had mentioned only the local scene.



1:1

1:2–14

2–4

5–7

8–10

11–12

13–14

15–20

2:1–17

1 6
2 8

2:18–3:21
Mercy and judgement in the Day of the Lord

Joel deals **with mercy and judgement in the Day of the Lord**. Joel widens his message. He applies what he has said to the whole world, as well as the situation in Israel. God will remove the judgement of the locusts and bless Israel.

They will be restored materially.

Then ‘afterwards’ the Spirit will be poured out.

God will provide for the world spiritually as well as materially. Salvation will come to Jerusalem.

In Joel chapter 3 he speaks of the judgement which comes upon **all of the nations**.

18–27

28–32

3:1–21

1. We are dealing with the Word of God

1. In the book of Joel we must remember that **we are dealing with the Word of God**. It begins:

*‘The word of the Lord that came to Joel,
the son of Pethuel’ (1:1).*

There is no mention of any king. Joel could have been written in the reign of a young king like Joash or it could have been written at the time when there were no kings (after the exile). Personally I think the book is early rather than late.

The important thing is that this title makes the claim that Joel’s book is the word of God. ‘The word of the Lord came...’ The prophets make this claim. Their message is for their own day, but by the Holy Spirit they are given something wider. It is not just Joel’s thinking that we have in this book. It is the ‘Word of the Lord’. God revealed something to him.

• **God breathed**

This is the claim of the Bible. Joel’s words are God’s Word. The whole Bible is like this. Paul said of the Old Testament, ‘*All Scripture is God-breathed*’¹. He was referring to the Old Testament but the same thing is true of the whole Bible.

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16

• **Double authorship**

The Bible has a double authorship. Joel wrote his book, but God was behind it as well. The Spirit illumined Joel’s mind. There are predictions, glimpses of the future¹. Joel is saying something on behalf of God.

¹ for example in 2:28

2. Sudden interruptions in life’s routine are often a call from God

2. Sudden interruptions in life’s routine are often a call from God. Joel starts his central message:

*‘Hear this, you elders,
and listen, all inhabitants of the land.
Has anything like this happened in your days
or in the days of your forefathers? (1:2)
Tell it to your children,
and let your children tell it to their children,
and their children to the next generation.’ (1:3)*

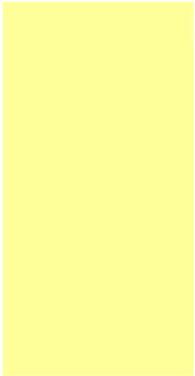
• **Take notice**

When God steps into your life with something unusual you should always take notice. The plague was unusual (‘Has anything ever happened like this. . . ?’) It was very serious. The nation had run out of grain. When God intervenes in a striking way into one’s life one should take notice.

• *Pass on what we have learned*

• *A Crisis – time to seek the Lord*

We tend to think that life will go on as it has always been. But life is not like that. There come interruptions, things that move you out of the run of normal routine. A crisis wakes us up, and should lead us to turn to God. We should learn the lesson and pass on what we have learned. We tend to get careless but then something happens and shakes us out of our complacency. That is a time to seek the Lord. We should try to learn the lessons of events that are unusual ('Tell it to your children...'). Learn the lesson and pass it on. Let the next generation learn something because you learned something from the Lord in a time of crisis. Are you shaken out of your normal routine? Then it is time to seek the Lord.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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