



# Reflections on Joel

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## Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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### ***A Brief Introduction to Joel***

The Prophet Joel has been called “the prophet of Pentecost”, “the prophet of hopefulness” and the “the prophet of the Spirit”, yet in spite of these nicknames, little is actually known about him as a man. In fact, there is a very great disagreement among scholars as to when his ministry took place, with estimates that range from around 900 BC to as late as 350 BC... and just about everywhere in between. I can only say that I think he belongs somewhere around 835 BC, and leave you to make your own call.

What is clear about Joel is his message, which as is true with most prophets was one of warning and hope. As you might suppose from his nicknames, his writings contain a very strong message of hope; more so than just about any other prophet, major or minor. I suppose that this would be a good place to mention the difference between “major” and “minor” prophets as a reminder... The only difference between the two is the length of their book; minor prophets wrote shorter books than the major prophets. This terminology has nothing whatsoever to do with the importance or relevance of what they wrote.

Joel’s book is divided into three parts: The Day of the Lord (Joel 1), The day of healing (Joel 2:1-27) and the day of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-3:21). If I were to try and sum up the book of Joel, I would say that he tells of the dire circumstances of the present, warning the people of the coming judgment of God, and that he went further to tell them of a new day when their sins would be forgiven and that they would have the opportunity to receive the greatest gift of God; eternal life.

Yes, the people of Joel’s day had some serious problems; they had gone far afield of God’s way of righteousness, and they needed to be concerned for their eternal future. Yes, they needed to stop fighting amongst themselves and deal with their dire situation. Yet in spite of this, there was a great hope if they would only follow God.

Come to think about it, I’d have to say that Joel’s message is just about as fresh today as it was then.

## ***The Day of the Lord***

### **Joel 1**

As Joel's account opens, there is disaster in the land in the form of an invasion of locusts. They have destroyed everything in their path that grows; crops in the fields, grain in the barns; everything. The situation is dire indeed.

God has given him a message to the people, a message in five parts. Each of these contains a summons to a different group of people to come at once to the temple for lamentations. He begins in 1:2-4 with a summons to the elders of the land. In those days during the minority of King Joash, these are the men who would have served as regents over the land until the King was old enough to serve on his own. No doubt you have noticed that Joel has not mentioned who the King was when he wrote the book as the prophets normally did, and that would be explained by the minority of Joash.

In the next section, 1:5-7, Joel summons the drunkards of the land, those who would drown their sorrows about the disaster with wine. Notice that Joel points out that the locusts have destroyed the vines; their precious alcohol is about to run out.

Next he delivers his wake up call to those who live in cities (1:8-10). Here, he likens the city dweller to a betrothed young maiden who has lost her beloved; her joy and anticipation has been replaced with sackcloth and ashes. His reference to the lack of offerings made at the temple refer to the fact that the entire rhythm of the city had been set by the morning and afternoon offerings, announced citywide with the blasting of trumpets; they had ceased, for there was nothing left to offer.

Next, his warning goes out to the farmers who have lost everything (1:11-12). Next he calls to the priests (1:13) who can no longer mediate between God and the people. Everyone is to mourn and lament for God's judgment is upon the land; they must come and cry out to God:

*Alas for that day!  
For the day of the LORD is near;  
it will come like destruction from the Almighty. (1:15)*

In verse 15 the Prophet alludes to something even more dire, for not only has God's judgment come upon the land in the form of an invasion of locusts with devastating results, there is the final judgment yet to come. The time has arrived for the people to repent and return to God's ways.

## ***The Day of the Lord is Great***

### **Joel 2:1-11**

In the first chapter Joel described the plague of locusts that had devastated the land that was supposed to flow with milk and honey; it was the present national crisis before the people of Joel's day. In this section, Joel is telling the people that they will face a much greater peril than the one that faces them now: The Final Judgment of God.

The first verse calls for the great trumpets to sound the warning, but we mustn't confuse this with his call for Lamentation in the previous chapter for keep in mind again, he is now talking about the Final Judgment. Since they were facing an actual and literal plague of locusts, the prophet uses locusts here as a metaphor for the judgment; I'm sure you will see this in the verses, for these are obviously not literal insects being described. One clue in the text that tells us this is not a literal passage is the use of the word "like" 9 times to tell us that these "locusts" look or act "like" something other than locusts. Notice also the use of apocalyptic elements that refer to judgment: "darkness, gloom, clouds, blackness, fire, flame" and "desert".

To ensure that we comprehend that he is referring to the Final Judgment, Joel adds these two verses at the end of our passage:

*Before them the earth shakes,  
the heavens tremble,  
the sun and moon are darkened,  
and the stars no longer shine.  
The LORD thunders  
at the head of his army;  
his forces are beyond number,  
and mighty is the army that obeys his command.  
The day of the LORD is great;  
it is dreadful.  
Who can endure it? (2:10-11)*

These are all apocalyptic elements that, when used in a prophetic context, always refer to the judgment of God, and when this is accompanied by the "day of the Lord" being "great", they refer to the Final judgment.

Consequently, this passage is a warning that the people must wake up now, for not only are they faced with temporal judgment for their wickedness in the here and now, they face their ultimate doom on Judgment Day. For the original recipients, this is a much more urgent call to repent that it normally would have been because of the simple fact that because of the current crisis, they are facing starvation in the short term and simply cannot put off for a single day responding to Joel's message. Thus, their present and literal plague served as both God's temporal judgment, but His warning of what would come.

## ***Time to Repent***

### **Joel 2: 12-17**

This text falls into three parts as we will see, but more than that, it is the challenge that faces every human being alive today, for as you recall this chapter is in a context of Final Judgment. Each person at one point or another faces a decision; repent and turn to God, or refuse and deal with the consequences.

The first part of this section is comprised of 2:12-13a:

*“Even now,” declares the LORD,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and mourning.”*

*Rend your heart  
and not your garments.*

Verse 12 is God’s invitation to repentance, and then 13a takes us beyond the Old Testament acts of contrition into something much more vital and real: “Rend your heart.” Of course grief and lamentation were demonstrated by the tearing of a person’s garments as an outward sign of their regret and sorrow; God doesn’t care about outward signs, He is calling for an inward change of heart— something real.

2:13b-14 is a sort of inducement to repent, reminding the people of God’s love for them, His mercy and graciousness. It even goes so far as to suggest that God may reward them with blessings in place of perils...

2:15-17 give the methodology of repentance for the people. Everyone should return to God; Joel lists several classes of people to illustrate this (2:16). They should earnestly pray to God asking for His forgiveness as they repent and turn back to Him.

Up to this point, it almost seems as though Joel were once again speaking of the assembly he called for in chapter 1, but let’s not be hasty; God’s reply is in the next section. As you will see next time, Joel suddenly begins to speak in the past tense, a sure sign that he is speaking in a transcendent sense. This transcendent tone is indicative that what is happening in the text is for all time.

## ***God's Response to Repentance***

### **Joel 2:18-27**

In the first part of this chapter, Joel has set up a picture, a picture in which the people have been in open and gross rebellion against God, and God has sent a serious plague upon them. Then the prophet calls upon the people to repent of their wickedness and to change their hearts, not to simply provide outward display; he has called them to get real and right with God. Now in these verses it is God's turn to respond, and what a response!

In verse 18 we see that God became "jealous" for His land and took pity on His people in their repentance. What we see in v. 18 is the depth of God's love for His people. Did you notice the change in tense? Joel is speaking in the past tense which clues us in to the fact that this is archetype; it is for all times and peoples.

God takes away the "locusts", takes away their suffering and once again provides for the needs of His people. Now that they have turned away from their rebellion (sin) He provides them with abundant blessings. Take careful notice: By the time we come to the end of the passage, the people have been restored so completely *it is as if they had never sinned*. Of course that should come as no surprise, for I told you in the beginning that Joel's is a messianic prophecy. God is once again dwelling with His people in a very special way, now that the people *have been delivered from judgment*.

### **Joel 2:28-32**

These verses enable us to nail down Joel's discussion as being without question messianic in nature, for they are quoted by Peter in his address to the crowds on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). Peter as you know, told the crowd that day after the Holy Spirit had come to the Apostles, the pouring out of the Spirit at that time, was exactly what Joel had foretold. Jesus Messiah had come to earth bringing the good news of reconciliation between God and Man, and had then willingly gone to the cross so that His blood could be shed to take away the sins of Mankind; this is what Joel was alluding to in the previous verses. *After that*, came Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit thereby giving a sign to all humanity that God had carried out His purpose.

Now we can easily see why the crowd was so quickly impacted by Peter's address to them, for they had come to recognize that on that very day, God was doing His greatest work; redeeming humanity.

## Looking far into the future

We have already seen the connection between a present temporal event and the future it represents in the first two chapters of Joel. Recall the plague of locusts in chapter 1, real and present; a crisis that required immediate action. Contrast that with the future presented in chapter 2, a future in which all of the people would have to face God's final judgment. In both cases, repentance was called for: In the first case, repentance was needed because God had sent a warning and a judgment upon the land for wickedness in the here and now. In the second case, repentance is required to secure our eternal future. Thus, the literal and physical circumstances of chapter 1 are illustrative of the much greater truth of eternity. If you followed along in our recent study of Hebrews, this will sound familiar to you, for everything involved in the Old Covenant was an illustration of the greater reality that came in the Person of Christ.

Joel is making that same point.

Chapter 1 is a physical illustration of the ultimate reality of chapter 2 for God's people; chapter 3 continues farther into the future to reveal the ultimate reality of the final judgment, both for God's opponents, and for His redeemed.

*"In those days and at that time,  
when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,  
I will gather all nations  
and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.  
There I will put them on trial  
for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel,  
because they scattered my people among the nations  
and divided up my land.  
They cast lots for my people  
and traded boys for prostitutes;  
they sold girls for wine to drink.*

Joel 3:1-3

As we begin to look at these verses, it is very important that we keep them in context, for if we do not, we will soon be lost. Notice how the chapter begins: *"In those days and at that time..."*

In what days and at what time?

Don't be confused by the chapter break that was added centuries later, this continues directly from chapter 2; we are talking about the messianic age here, for nothing in the text has indicated any kind of a scene change. Note also that he says "in those *days*" which is plural; this is an age, the age in which you and I are living in now.

Those "nations" that live in opposition to God and His people have a serious problem, for in their opposition to the people of God (the redeemed) they have chosen opposition to God Himself. As we saw in our study of Revelation, this is the physical manifestation of the spiritual battle described in that prophecy as "this present evil age". Joel's point is made clearly in verse 4:

*“Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.”*

Once again, the kingdoms of Tyre, Sidon and Philistia are representative of all who oppose the people of God, represented in the text by “Judah and Jerusalem”. This is an important principle in Scripture:

To oppose the people of God is to oppose God Himself.

The next section, Joel 3:5-16 gives an account of God’s response to this opposition; see you next time!

## The Final Act

Joel 3:4-16

In these verses, God deals with those who have opposed Him and who have refused His offer of grace: This is His Final Judgment.

As you will recall from last time, 3:4 is the beginning of His indictment and conviction of the damned, for in their continual opposition and oppression of His people, they have opposed and oppressed God; their chance to repent and receive His grace and mercy has ended. This Judgment continues through v. 6 as God continues with His complaint against the Nations, and then in 3:7-8 sentence is pronounced:

*“See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away.” The LORD has spoken.*

A little bit of advice: Whenever you see the words “The Lord has spoken” in Scripture, it’s a good idea to take careful notice. In this case, time is up.

What follows is interesting indeed, for in 3:9-11 the host of heaven is called to assemble, and in 3:12-13 the Nations are gathered before God to be judged, and in v. 14 ff. His final judgment is executed using all of the imagery we saw in Revelation; they are destroyed and eliminated from the earth.

It’s all over for those who opposed God and His people.

For many who read this, you might be wondering something like “But wait— what about God’s love? A loving God would never do this!

May I suggest an alternate question?

*How could a loving God not do this?*

A very long time ago, when I was 19 or 20, I met a young lady who was just about the most amazing young lady I had ever met; I was smitten, slain of heart. I got to know her at my job, and on a few occasions we went out with groups of people and had the chance to become better acquainted. The more time I spent around her, the more I was taken with her; I was in love for the first time. On one of those outings, I got my courage together and asked her out on a date, and much to my surprise, she said “yes”.

Sadly for me, her roommate overheard this and took her aside very quickly and said, “hey, you can’t go out with him, *he’s a jock*, everyone will laugh at you, you’ll lose all your friends.”

She hesitated for a moment, and turning back to me she said, “I’m sorry but I can’t go out with you.” I was very troubled by this, grieved would the word to describe my reaction. I pondered what I should do, but in the end I decided that if I really loved someone, and that person didn’t

want my love, then I had to let them go, for to try to twist her arm or put pressure on her wasn't love at all, it was brutality and/or oppression, and how could I do that to someone I love?

In the end, although at the time I felt I had a great deal of love to offer her, she declined to have it, and as a result, as sad as I might have been, she never got it.

Mankind chose to rebel against God; He didn't force anyone to do this, yet we did it, for each and every single one of us has sinned against Him a multitude of times. Because God is a loving God, He sacrificed His Son that we might receive His grace... can you think of a greater sacrifice He could have or should have made to express His love for His children?

Grace has been offered freely to all who would receive it; those on the wrong side of the Final Judgment had an entire lifetime to receive it, but they declined to do so. Yet anyone who did receive it had their sins not only forgiven, but taken away completely, as though they had never sinned at all; that is where the love is in the prophecy, and we'll read all about it in the next and final section of Joel. See you next time!

## Glory Hallelujah!

Joel has just described the final judgment of God against those who, despite His offers of grace, have opposed and oppressed His people, and who have opposed God Himself. We pick up the action in verse 17:

*“Then you will know that I, the LORD your God,  
dwell in Zion, my holy hill.  
Jerusalem will be holy;  
never again will foreigners invade her.*

There are three apocalyptic elements here: “Zion”, “Jerusalem” and “foreigners”. Zion refers to the temple mount in the city of Jerusalem where the presence of God was said to dwell in the midst of His people. Jerusalem was the city where God dwelt in the midst of His people. In the Old Testament, these were pictures of the reality which was to come in the Person of Christ. In chapter 2 we saw that the Holy Spirit had come upon those who would follow Christ and be redeemed and thus, God dwells in the midst of His people in our age in the Body of Christ, the church. Foreigners refers to those who refused to receive the grace He offers and thus in this post Judgment verse, those who have refused God’s grace are no longer in the picture.

*“In that day the mountains will drip new wine,  
and the hills will flow with milk;  
all the ravines of Judah will run with water.  
A fountain will flow out of the LORD’s house  
and will water the valley of acacias. (3:18)*

New wine symbolizes Jesus Christ (Matt. 9:17), milk shows the Land has been redeemed and flows with abundance. Water symbolizes life; remember Jesus and “living eater”. The fountain shows that living water flows from God’s presence in the midst of His people (cf. Eze 47:1-12).

*But Egypt will be desolate,  
Edom a desert waste,  
because of violence done to the people of Judah,  
in whose land they shed innocent blood. (3:19)*

Egypt in prophecy usually represents this world, Edom the enemies of God’s people. Notice that both are empty, for that is the meaning of “desolate” and what you find in a “desert waste”: Nothing. This world has been judged and is no more.

*Judah will be inhabited forever  
and Jerusalem through all generations. (3:20)*

In contrast to this desolation (emptiness) God’s kingdom will be home to God’s people forever more.

*Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged?  
No, I will not.”*

*The LORD dwells in Zion! (3:21)*

There will be a final judgment; of this we can be certain. I do not know when it will come, but come it will. It could be at any time, or it could be in thousands of years; no one knows, *especially not the ones who say they do know*. In my view, Joel makes the sweep of redemptive history very clear, and we can easily see that we are in the midst of it right now, today, December 2, 2016.

We know that God does not desire that any should perish in the final judgment, for He desires that all humanity should have eternal life, but as we look around us at this world we live in, it is clear enough to anyone that many, most actually, are headed for destruction. We might feel a sense of despair: “God, why don’t you do something to save these poor people?” “God, why don’t you send someone to do something?” Let’s keep in mind that He did send someone to be here right now, today, to bring His grace to the world we live in...

He sent YOU; He sent me. What will we, you and I, do TODAY to bring God’s grace to those around us?