

Bible Synthesis IV
(Bible Survey)

**INTRODUCTION TO
JOEL**

1. INTRODUCTION

“Made up of only three chapters *Joel* is a literary gem — *multum in parvo*, much in little ... The key to the understanding and interpretation of the book is the repeated phrase, ‘The day of the Lord,’ which will commence when the church has been raptured, and will be characterized by divine judgment, and of God’s interference once more directly in the course of world politics. Joel himself, of whom so little is known (1:1), is referred to as ‘The Prophet of Religious Revival,’ and thus in some ways his book is one on *Repentance*. Joel knew, and all must know who deal with souls, that genuine repentance is the basis of real revival.”

— *All the Books and Chapters of the Bible* — Herbert Lockyer, Zondervan

“A plague of locusts gave Joel ... the illustration he needed to appeal to the conscience of his country. His book is not dated, and opinions vary widely as to when Joel lived and ministered, although it would seem that he was a prophet of Judah rather than to Israel.

“The enemies he does mention — the Phoenicians, Philistines, Egyptians, and Edomites — belong to the days of Jehoash (II Chronicles 21:16–17). Scofield says, ‘In his youth he may have known Elijah, and he certainly was a contemporary of Elisha.’ What a flood of light that statement casts on the days of Joel!”

— *Exploring the Scriptures* — John Phillips, Moody Monthly, 1965

Joel was the first of the writing prophets. At the time when he wrote there was a great need in Israel for repentance. Joel has been called “the prophet of religious revival.” Revival must be preceded by repentance. From the perspective of Joel, looking ahead through the centuries, he saw events beginning with the Day of the LORD and onward to the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28–29) at the time of Israel’s restoration. This event, to which Peter refers in his sermon on Pentecost Sunday (Acts. 2:16–17), however, Peter does not say that Pentecost was the *fulfillment* of Joel’s prediction, he said, “this is that.” It is *the same thing*. The fulfillment of Joel’s prediction is still future.

Locusts had been mentioned as one of the instruments of divine chastisement upon that nation (Deut. 28:38–39; I Kings 8:37). Israel had not yet recognized this plague of locusts as such in Joel’s day. His mission is to point out the sad condition of their national spiritual life as the reason why the locust plague was sent and to exhort them to national repentance.

There is also a *prophetic* reason for Joel’s prophecy. He also pointed out that the invasion of these insects was a picture of a far greater invasion to take place in the future. While Israel did suffer invasions, the fulfillment of the picture given to us in Joel is still future, for the last days.

From the standpoint of style, *this small book of Joel is a literary gem*. Someone has written that its “style is preeminently pure, and is characterized by smoothness and fluency, strength and tenderness.” It contains the most graphic description to be found in all of Scripture of a great devastation. It gives the first mention of a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon *ALL* flesh (2:28–29) which will follow the repentance and restoration of Israel.

2. AUTHOR

- (1) Joel—His name means “Jehovah is God.” He was the son of Pethuel, “enlarged of God.”
- (2) He differs from Hosea in that he writes but a single verse about himself (1:1). Nothing is known of him beyond this short introduction.
- (3) The only other reference to be found in Scripture which refers to Joel as a prophet is found in Acts 2:16–17.

3. RECIPIENTS

- (1) All the inhabitants of the land (1:2)
- (2) Evidently directed to Judah because of the following references: Joel 1:9; 2:15–17, 23, 32; 3:1, 17.
- (3) Special mention is made to “old men” (1:2), to “drunkards” (1:5), to “husbandmen” and “vinedressers” (1:11), and to “priests” (1:13).

4. DATE OF WRITING

- (1) No kings or other historical characters are mentioned in Joel’s writing to enable us to date it positively.
- (2) Joel is not mentioned in any books of the Historical section of the Bible.
- (3) Tyre, Sidon, the Philistines, Egypt, and Edom are pictured as Israel’s chief enemies (3:4, 19). See II Chronicles 21:16–17 —Jehoram, king of Judah (848–841).
- (4) The date most commonly accepted by conservative scholarship is during the early years of the reign of Joash (see II Kings 11 – 12; II Chron. 22:10 – 24:27). Scofield says, “In his youth he may have known Elijah, and he certainly was a contemporary of Elisha.” This would be about 835 B.C.
- (5) All of the dates suggested by the scholars range from 850 B.C. to 350 B.C. depending upon the theological position represented. Conservative scholars favor the earlier date, while critical (liberal) scholars hold to a date after the Babylonian exile.

5. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

- (1) A terrible locust invasion and a drought had taken place in the land (Joel 1). On the basis of this calamity, Joel calls the people to repentance, for it is a judgment of God.
- (2) This locust invasion foreshadows an invasion in the future by human armies as another judgment of God. This will be the “day of the LORD.”
- (3) Even greater blessings are promised for the future. The coming “day of the LORD” will be a day of salvation for Israel and a day of judgment upon her enemies.
- (4) Following Israel’s repentance and restoration, the Spirit of God will be poured out upon *ALL* flesh (2:28–29).

6. THEME

The “Day of the LORD”

The present is in a sense man’s day. But the LORD will soon have His day — not just a 24-hour day, but a period of time.

7. KEY PASSAGES

Joel 2:28–32

8. KEY TERM

“Day of the LORD” — 5 times

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OUTLINE OF
JOEL

- 1. A Call to Repentance** **— Joel 1:1 — 2:32**
- (1) The Judgment of God — The locust plague — 1:1–20
- (2) The Day of the LORD — 2:1–32
- 2. A Call to Judgment** **— Joel 3:1–21**
- (1) Judgment of the Nations — 3:1–16a
- (2) Kingdom Blessing — 3:16b–21

Outline 2 (J. Vernon McGee)

- 1. LITERAL and Local PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS** **— 1:1–14**
- 2. Looking to the DAY OF THE LORD (Prelude)** **— 1:15 – 2:32**
- 3. Looking at the DAY OF THE LORD (Postlude)** **— Joel 3**
- (1) The Great Tribulation — 3:1–15
- (2) The Millennial Kingdom — 3:16–21

Outline 3 (John Phillips in *Exploring the Scriptures*)

- 1. THE PRESENT FAMINE** **— 1:10 – 20**
- 2. THE PREDICTED FOES** **— 2:1–11**
- 3. THE PROMISED FORGIVENESS** **— 2:12–27**
- 4. THE PROPHETIC FOCUS** **— 2:28 – 3:21**

Outline 3 (G. Coleman Luck in *The Bible Book by Book*—adapted)

- 1. THE FUTURE “DAY OF THE LORD” PREFIGURED** **— Joel 1**
- Prefigured by the locust plague
- (1) The plague of locusts is described — 1:1–12
- (2) The people are called to repentance — 1:13–14
- (3) The Day of the LORD foreshadowed by the insect plague — 1:15–20
- 2. EVENTS OF THE FUTURE “DAY OF THE LORD”** **— Joel 2**
- (1) Israel in terror because of the approach of a northern army — 2:1–10
- (2) The LORD’s army ready for the invader — 2:11
- (3) Repentance of the people in that day — 2:12–17
- (4) The LORD delivers and blesses His people — 2:18–27

- (5) The promise of the Spirit —2:28–32
—”Partly fulfilled at Pentecost and during the present age,
but awaiting complete fulfillment at the time of the
second advent.” —Dr. Luck
— *See introduction and comments in overview for the views
of this editor.*

3. ORDER OF EVENTS IN THE “DAY OF THE LORD” —Joel 3

- (1) Regathering of Israel —3:1
(2) Judgment of nations in Valley of Jehoshaphat —3:2–15
(3) Kingdom blessing for Israel —3:16–21