

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14E_Prophecy in the Prophets_Joel_Part 2_Intro)

Introduction

In our previous lesson, we briefly examined the phrase “the day of the Lord” as it is used in the Bible – the prophetic writings of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation in particular. Obviously, there are many passages we did not examine that contain that phrase and a more exhaustive study of that phrase throughout the Bible could be conducted. Nevertheless, that brief introduction should have established some frame of reference for that concept.

In this lesson, we shall introduce the prophet Joel and his book. In our next lesson, we will examine some of the more important prophetic passages in the book.

Author

Little is known of the author apart from his name and that he was the son of Pethuel (1:1). Joel’s name means “The Lord is God” or “Yahweh is God.”¹ Several observations can be made about Joel from the contents of the book.²

- ❑ His name suggests that he was reared in a home that honored God.
- ❑ The references to Zion, Judah, and Jerusalem (2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:1, 6, 8, 17-19, 20, 21) indicate that Joel probably lived and prophesied in Judah and Jerusalem.
- ❑ He was very knowledgeable of the Temple and the work of the priests (1:9, 13, 14; 2:17) which has caused some to speculate that he may have been a member of the Levitical priesthood.
- ❑ He was very acquainted with the geography and history of the land (1:2; 3:2-8, 12).

Date

There is a great divergence of opinion, even among conservative scholars, regarding the date that the book of Joel was written. Most of the debate centers around the names of the other nations and peoples mentioned in Joel’s book. The dating of the book ranges from the 9th Century B.C. to the period of the Maccabees around the 2nd Century B.C.

Two general categories of dating capture the majority of the views – *pre-exilic* and *post-exilic*.³

- ❑ Those of an *earlier pre-exilic* view note Joel’s failure to mention a king and the prominence he gives to the priesthood and elders. These facts seem to point to that period in Judah’s history where the king was the boy-king Joash (835-796 B.C.) who ruled through the regency of the high-priest Jehoiada. The mention of the shedding of innocent blood indicates a closeness to the revolt of Edom in the days of Jehoram, Joash’s grandfather (2 Ki 8:20).
- ❑ Those who adopt a *mid pre-exilic* view (ca. 8th Century B.C.) note Joel’s lack of mention of the great mid-east powers (Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia) which may point to a

¹ Frank E. Gabelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, electronic version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1989-1998).

² Ibid. See also Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1464.

³ Ibid. See also Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985).

- period corresponding to Assyria's severe decline; Joel's positioning among other dated minor prophets (Hosea, Amos, Jonah); and the contextual juxtaposition of several nations prominent during the 8th Century in Joel 3.
- ❑ Those who adopt a *late pre-exilic* view (ca. 7th Century B.C.) note an influence of Jeremiah and conclude that Joel was a younger contemporary to Jeremiah.
 - ❑ Those who adopt a *post-exilic* view find the information in Joel's prophecy most consistent with a time when both kingdoms had fallen and Assyria and Babylonia had passed off of the scene.

Setting

A locust plague without parallel had descended on Judah, ruining all the crops. This disrupted the economic and social fabric of the country. Obviously, God was executing the cycles of discipline (Lev 26) upon Judah in advance of the 5th cycle – expulsion from the land. The agricultural losses associated with this swarm of locusts threatened Judah's ability to perform Temple rites in accordance with the Mosaic Law. In their spiritual decline, the Jews had resorted to ritualistic performance of the Mosaic Law without the desired spiritual reality. God took away some of their ability to perform sacrificial rites in order to cause them to focus upon the need to repent and possess a spiritual heart that was in tune with God's intention through the sacrifices. As Joel pondered the judgment Judah was to experience, God revealed His intentions associated with eschatological times.

Purpose

Joel's prophecy had two major purposes that is common to many of the prophetic books: 1) to call the nation to repentance (2:12); and 2) to provide comfort with promises of future salvation and blessing upon the nation (2:28-32; 3:18-21). God would remain true to His word and His essence in spite of what might happen to this generation of Jews.