

## Commentary on Joel 1, by Chuck Smith 2.21.24

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February memory verse Galatians 6:7 (NKJV) Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

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### Includes John MacArthur : Bible Introductions - Joel

Joel is a prophet of which we have no light of his background except what he gives to us. He is the son of Pethuel, but who Pethuel is, we don't know. So it really doesn't help us that much. Joel was a prophet to Judah; that is, the Southern Kingdom. He probably was familiar with Elijah and no doubt was well acquainted with Elisha, because the time of his prophecy pretty much corresponds to the time that Elisha was prophesying to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. Joel was prophesying in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. And in those days they did have schools for the prophets where the prophets would gather together in these schools. Elisha conducted a school for the prophets, and so Joel was no doubt acquainted with Elisha. But of his background, nothing is really known.

Now in chapter 1 he speaks of a plague of locusts, and in the text we read, "the palmerworm, the locust, the cankerworm and the caterpillar." Actually, these words have been translated from the Hebrew words, and rather than being different insects, in the Hebrew they... all of them relate to the different aspects of the locust in its developing stages. When it is first born, eating the small little things, and then as it grows and develops, finally consuming everything that is in the land. So, they had probably had one of the terrible plagues of locusts that in history oftentimes afflicted that land. And after this terrible affliction of the locust, Joel speaks and he takes and likens it unto the coming judgment of God that will be coming upon the land.

So in chapter 1 there is an immediate reference to an experience of desolation of the land has just experienced as the result of this plague of locusts. There are spiritual analogies that are made to it, and then he uses that as the springboard to go in to tell of the desolation that is going to come to the land in the last days, as there will be armies that will be coming covering the earth like locusts cover the earth and just desolating the land. So this is,

The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? ([Joe 1:1-2](#))

Do you ever remember anything quite like this? Do you ever remember such a desolation?

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Tell to our children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation ([Joe 1:3](#)).

Now in those days, of course, most of the history was passed by word of mouth. And the fathers would relate to their children and then the grandfathers would relate to their grandchildren and then the grandchildren would say, "Well, my grandfather told me," you know. And thus the oral traditions and the oral history that was passed down. And much of the history was preserved through this oral tradition as they would pass from one generation to another the knowledge of the things that had transpired. Now, it was the purpose of God that there be the transmission of knowledge within the families. Oftentimes there were things that were established as memorials. The feasts that God had ordered, all of them were there for the purpose of remembering their history, to remember the work of God.

And so the Feast of Tabernacles, they were reminded of how their forefathers were preserved through the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. So they would build these little booths and move out of their houses into these little makeshift lean-tos next to their house. And as they were building them, of course, the children would participate. They would go out and gather the palm branches and come dragging the palm branches with their dad. "Daddy, what are we doing with this palm branch? Why are we making this little house here?" And, of course, the kids would always be excited about making a house to move into. You know how children are on things like that. But the father would say, "Well, there was a time when our forefathers first were coming to the land. As they came out of Egypt, they spent forty years out in the wilderness. But the whole time they were in the wilderness God fed them, God cared for them, God watched over them." And it gave the fathers a chance to talk to their children about how God had so moved in the history of those people.

The Passover, the same thing, and even at the Passover they developed the traditional question. The child would say, "Daddy, what makes this night different from all other nights?" And then the father rehearses the history of their deliverance out of Egypt. And the purpose was to transmit the faith and the trust in God from one generation to another generation. And God looked at the home as the place for the transmitting of this information down the line. And surely the home should be the place for the children to learn and to understand of the things of God. And you should be rehearsing and relating to your children that work of God that went in your own life, that work of God that you have seen.

One beautiful thing about my mother was she was a good storyteller. And she was always telling us the stories of how God answered prayer, how God had worked in her life and in the family history, the work of God. And she would rehearse it for us and it was imbedded in our hearts that learning to trust in God. If we were sick then she would tell us of how God had healed us in the time past. When I, you know, had a terrible fever and my brother had asthma, things of this nature, and she'd rehearse to us the work of God in the past. And thus, it is implanted in the heart and in the mind of the child

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and then, of course, they carry on. So I rehearse to my children many of the stories that my mother rehearsed to me of the work of God in our own family in times past.

When the children of Israel came through the Jordan River, God stopped the Jordan River at flood season and they were able to pass over the Jordan River without getting wet and without going into the water. For God stopped the flow of the Jordan River in the flood season. Now, as they came through, they had men from each of the tribes take stones from the bottom of the Jordan River and put a pile of stones on the bank of the river. When they came up out of the river they laid up this pile of stones. And the purpose was, in the future as you're coming with your children, you're walking along this way and they see the strange pile of stones and your children say, "Daddy, what is that pile of stones there?" Then the daddies had the opportunity to tell their children how God worked a miracle in bringing them into the land. For the Jordan River that they saw then flowing by was stopped and the people came through on dry land because God stopped the flow to bring them into the land. And they were able to rehearse for their children the things of God. And it is God's purpose that this transmitting of knowledge, the knowledge of Him, should be within the family from generation to generation.

So it is our obligation to transmit it to the next generation. And it then becomes their obligation to transmit it to the next generation, and on down the line, this oral tradition and the transmitting of knowledge within the families. Unfortunately, with the advent of radio, much of this transmission was lost. And in my days, the kids were listening to Lux Radio Theater and Gangbusters and all of these radio serials, Little Orphan Annie and Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy. And the tradition of conversation began to suffer with the advent of radio. And, of course, TV almost has devastated the tradition of oral transmission of knowledge. And now the children are entertained by the TV and there's very little just conversation within the family where you spend a whole evening just sitting and talking, sitting and telling stories. Sitting and that... and something vital, I feel, has been lost from the family unit by the invasion in our homes of radio and of television and of these other things that have taken away from the real honest relating heart-to-heart to people and that oral communication and all. And I think that a part of the breakdown of our society is surely traceable to the advent of entertainment in the home by way of radio and television.

But Joel encourages this oral transmission of knowledge. Now he begins to tell about this terrible plague.

That which the palmerworm hath left the locust has eaten; and that which the locust has left the cankerworm has eaten; and that which the cankerworm has left the caterpillar has eaten ([Joe 1:4](#)).

As I said, these Hebrew words are *devour* and *chewer* and all, and they are referring to the stages of the development of the locust.

So awake, ye drunkards, weep; and howl, all of you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth ([Joe 1:5](#)).

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So, the first people to be affected. Evidently the plague began in the fall. Now the last harvest gathered is the grape harvest in the land. It's the last crop to be harvested. So the plague began at the time of the grape harvest and devoured all of the grapes so that there was no new wine.

Drinking had become a very great problem in Israel. It is referred to by many of the prophets. The drunkenness of the people had become a severe problem. They were the first that were going to suffer as the result of this plague. The other crops had already been harvested but the grapes. But in the spring the new infestation. You see, all of the eggs were left and in the spring even a new and greater infestation that absolutely destroyed everything come springtime.

Now the Lord immediately likened this plague to:

A nation that is coming upon the land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are like the teeth of a lion, and the jaw teeth like a great lion. [And God cried out,] He hath laid my vine waste ([Joe 1:6-7](#)),

God oftentimes likened Israel unto a vine. Isaiah the sixth chapter, a whole chapter devoted to God's vineyard. The vine that He planted, hedged about, put a winepress in and all, and how it failed to bring forth fruit. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. Every branch in Me that bringeth forth fruit," and so this likeness of God's people to the vine. But there is also a likeness of Israel to the fig tree. And in the prophecy of Hosea, he likens them to the first ripe fruit of the fig tree in the ninth chapter, the tenth verse. In the book of Jeremiah, God likens Israel to a basket of figs so rotten that they're good for nothing; they have to be thrown out.

Here again God cries:

they have barked my fig tree ([Joe 1:7](#)):

I believe that when Jesus, in talking to His disciples about the end times and the signs of His return, when He said to them, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree," that He is making reference to the nation of Israel, which God has likened unto a fig tree. And thus, I believe that that parable that Jesus made of the fig tree has tremendous significance in this day in which we live, as He said that the sign of the budding of the fig tree would be one of the final signs of the nearness of His return, happening within the generation that sees it bud. So that the birth of the nation Israel is surely a remarkable sign that we need to be watching that signals the nearness of the Lord's return.

"They barked My fig tree." That is, they've eaten the bark.

they've made it clean bare; the branches thereof are made white ([Joe 1:7](#)).

All of the bark has been chewed off and, of course, just that white under branch is visible.

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Lament like a virgin that is girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth ([Joe 1:8](#)).

That is, the old maid who never got married, she is lamenting over her plight.

The meal offerings and the drink offerings are cut out from the house of the LORD; and the priests, and the LORD'S ministers, do mourn ([Joe 1:9](#)).

Now the meal offering was where you brought the fine flour, which of course came from the wheat. But the locusts have devoured the wheat fields so there's no flour to bring an offering unto the Lord. There's no wine to bring an offering to the Lord from the vine. So the priests are to mourn.

The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen [you farmers, actually]; howl, ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up, the fig tree languishes; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, the apple tree, even all of the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men. Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, and lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withheld from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD ([Joe 1:10-14](#)).

And so they are calling for a fast among the people. Crying out unto God for help from this great calamity that has befallen them.

Alas for the day! the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come ([Joe 1:15](#)).

So he takes that plague and now he moves prophetically to another day in which the land is to be devastated through the judgment of God, the great day of the Lord and the day of God's judgment. "Alas for the day! The day of the Lord is at hand, and as for the destruction from the Almighty it shall come."

There is coming God's judgment upon the earth known in the scripture as the time of the indignation of God in the Old Testament or in the New Testament is called the time of Great Tribulation. When God is going to judge the earth, when God is going to send plagues upon the earth, when again God is going to devastate the crops, the food supplies and the famine will persist throughout the entire earth. The book of Revelation describes the black horse of the famine, the scales and a measure of wheat; that is, about of a quart of wheat, for a day's wage. A man will work all day and his pay will be half a pound of flour for a whole day's wage. So the terrible devastation that is coming from the Lord.

Now, that is something that you need to note, this Great Tribulation as destruction from the Almighty. There are people who have confused the whole prophetic issue as they

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have made the church Israel. And thus, they place the church on the earth during the Great Tribulation. And they use such scriptures as Jesus warning His disciples that they would have tribulation. But there is a vast difference between the tribulation that we experience as God's people and the Great Tribulation that is coming upon the earth. The basic difference is the origin. The tribulation that you experience as a child of God has its origin in your enemy, Satan. He is the one that brings tribulation upon you in your endeavor to serve the Lord. The Great Tribulation that is coming comes direct from God.

Now, that I am attacked by the enemy I can well understand; I can accept. But I thank God that even in those attacks from the enemy, I have the power and the strength of the Holy Spirit within me so that I can overcome through the power of the Spirit within me. However, I cannot accept that God would attack me. Inasmuch as He is my Father, He loves me, I love Him, and "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus" ([Romans 8:1](#)). So, the fact that the Great Tribulation emanates from God precludes the church being a part of the Great Tribulation period. It comes as destruction from the Almighty.

Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed has rotted under the clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all of the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness ([Joe 1:16-20](#)).

And so we see a land in a very desolate condition. No pasture for the cattle, no crops; they've been destroyed.

## John MacArthur :: Bible Introductions - Joel

### Title

The Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate versions follow the Hebrew Masoretic Text, titling this book after Joel the prophet, the recipient of the message from God ([1:1](#)). The name means "the LORD is God" and refers to at least a dozen men in the OT. Joel is referred to only once in the NT ([Acts 2:16-21](#)).

### Author and Date

The author identified himself only as "Joel the son of Pethuel" ([1:1](#)). The prophecy provides little else about the man. Even the name of his father is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT. Although he displayed a profound zeal for the temple sacrifices ([1:9](#); [2:13-16](#)), his familiarity with pastoral and agricultural life and his separation from the priests ([1:13](#), [14](#); [2:17](#)) suggest he was not a Levite. Extrabiblical tradition records

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that he was from the tribe of Reuben, from the town of Bethom or Bethharam, located NE of the Dead Sea on the border of Reuben and Gad. The context of the prophecy, however, hints that he was a Judean from the Jerusalem vicinity, since the tone of a stranger is absent.

Dating the book relies solely on canonical position, historical allusions, and linguistic elements. Because of: 1) the lack of any mention of later world powers (Assyria, Babylon, or Persia); 2) the fact that Joel's style is like that of Hosea and Amos rather than of the post-Exilic prophets; and 3) the verbal parallels with other early prophets ([Joel 3:16/Amos 1:2](#); [Joel 3:18/Amos 9:13](#)), a late ninth century B.C. date, during the reign of Joash (ca. 835–796 B.C.), seems most convincing. Nevertheless, while the date of the book cannot be known with certainty, the impact on its interpretation is minimal. The message of Joel is timeless, forming doctrine which could be repeated and applied in any age.

### Background and Setting

Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia had made frequent military incursions into Israel ([3:2ff.](#)). An extended drought and massive invasion of locusts had stripped every green thing from the Land and brought severe economic devastation ([1:7–20](#)), leaving the southern kingdom weak. This physical disaster gives Joel the illustration for God's judgment. As the locusts were a judgment on sin, God's future judgments during the Day of the Lord will far exceed them. In that day, God will judge His enemies and bless the faithful. No mention is made of specific sins, nor is Judah rebuked for idolatry. Yet, possibly due to a calloused indifference, the prophet calls them to a bona fide repentance, admonishing them to "rend your heart, and not your garments" ([2:13](#)).

### Historical and Theological Themes

The theme of Joel is the Day of the Lord. It permeates all parts of Joel's message, making it the most sustained treatment in the entire OT ([1:15](#); [2:1](#); [2:11](#); [2:31](#); [3:14](#)). The phrase is employed 19 times by 8 different OT authors ([Is. 2:12](#); [13:6](#), [9](#); [Ezek. 13:5](#); [30:3](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1](#), [11](#), [31](#); [3:14](#); [Amos 5:18](#) [2x], [20](#); [Obad. 15](#); [Zeph. 1:7](#), [14](#) [2x]; [Zech. 14:1](#); [Mal. 4:5](#)). The phrase does not have reference to a chronological time period, but to a general period of wrath and judgment uniquely belonging to the Lord. It is exclusively the day which unveils His character—mighty, powerful, and holy, thus terrifying His enemies. The Day of the Lord does not always refer to an eschatological event; on occasion it has a near historical fulfillment, as seen in [Ezek. 13:5](#), where it speaks of the Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. As is common in prophecy, the near fulfillment is an historic event upon which to comprehend the more distant, (far term) eschatological fulfillment.

The Day of the Lord is frequently associated with seismic disturbances (e.g., [2:1–11](#); [2:31](#); [3:16](#)), violent weather ([Ezek. 13:5ff.](#)), clouds and thick darkness (e.g., [2:2](#); [Zeph. 1:7ff.](#)), cosmic upheaval ([2:3](#), [30](#)), and as a "great and very terrible" ([2:11](#)) day that would "come as destruction from the Almighty" ([1:15](#)). The latter half of Joel depicts time

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subsequent to the Day of the Lord in terms of promise and hope. There will be a pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, accompanied by prophetic utterances, dreams, visions ([2:28, 29](#)), as well as the coming of Elijah, an epiphany bringing restoration and hope ([Mal. 4:5, 6](#)). As a result of the Day of the Lord there will be physical blessings, fruitfulness, and prosperity ([2:21ff.](#); [3:16–21](#)). It is a day when judgment is poured out on sinners that subsequently leads to blessings on the penitent, and reaffirmation of God's covenant with His people. See note on [1 Thess. 5:2](#).

### Interpretive Challenges

It is preferable to view [chap. 1](#) as describing an actual invasion of locusts that devastated the Land. In [chap. 2](#), a new level of description meets the interpreter. Here the prophet is projecting something beyond the locust plague of [chap. 1](#), elevating the level of description to new heights, with increased intensity that is focused on the plague and the immediate necessity for true repentance. The prophet's choice of similes, such as "like the appearance of horses" ([2:4](#)) and "like mighty men" ([2:7](#)), suggests that he is still using the actual locusts to illustrate an invasion which can only be the massive overtaking of the final Day of the Lord.

A second issue confronting the interpreter is Peter's quotation from [Joel 2:28–32](#) in [Acts 2:16–21](#). Some have viewed the phenomena of [Acts 2](#) and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as the fulfillment of the Joel passage, while others have reserved its fulfillment to the final Day of the Lord only—but clearly Joel is referring to the final terrible Day of the Lord. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not a fulfillment, but a preview and sample of the Spirit's power and work to be released fully and finally in the Messiah's kingdom after the Day of the Lord. See note on [Acts 2:16–21](#).

### Outline

Following [1:1](#), the contents of the book are arranged under 3 basic categories. In the first section ([1:2–20](#)) the prophet describes the contemporary Day of the Lord. The land is suffering massive devastation caused by a locust plague and drought. The details of the calamity ([1:2–12](#)) are followed by a summons to communal penitence and reformation ([1:13–20](#)).

The second section ([2:1–17](#)) provides a transition from the historical plague of locusts described in [chap. 1](#) to the eschatological Day of the Lord in [2:18–3:21](#). Employing the contemporary infestation of locusts as a backdrop, the prophet, with an increased level of intensity, paints a vivid and forceful picture of the impending visitation of the Lord ([2:1–11](#)) and, with powerful and explicit terminology, he renews the appeal for repentance ([2:12–17](#)).

In the third section ([2:18–3:21](#)), the Lord speaks directly, assuring His people of His presence among them ([2:27](#); [3:17, 21](#)). This portion of the book assumes that the repentance ([2:12–17](#)) had occurred and describes the Lord's zealous response ([2:18](#),



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[19a](#)) to their prayer. [Joel 2:18–21](#) forms the transition in the message from lamentation and woe to divine assurances of God's presence and the reversal of the calamities, with [2:19b](#), [20](#) introducing the essence and nature of that reversal. The Lord then gives 3 promises to assure the penitents of His presence: material restoration through the divine healing of their land ([2:21–27](#)), spiritual restoration through the divine outpouring of His Spirit ([2:28–32](#)), and national restoration through the divine judgment on the unrighteous ([3:1–21](#)).