

JOEL – the prophet of the day of the LORD

Joel gives no clues as to when he lived. He warns of a great invasion of the land of Judah, probably by the Assyrians, so he may belong to the period of Isaiah.

The first chapter depicts a ferocious attack of locusts on the land, stripping the green crops to the stem and leaving the people and their herds without food. Locusts were a real threat in Old Testament times, when a typical cloud of these insects could number 150 million per square mile (60 million per sq km) and each eat their own weight in leaves every day. But Joel is using this assault as a simile for human invaders who would burn and destroy everything in their path. It was no good rushing to the Temple to pray for deliverance by a God they had neglected to serve. A day of judgement, “*the Day of the Lord*”, was on the way (Joel 1:15).

This theme returns again in chapter two, where the prophet promises that if the people genuinely repented of their bad ways (“*rend your hearts and not your garments*”, he says), there was still time for God to divert the invading army away and restore their lost crops. The passage assumes this would happen, and ends with an extraordinary prophecy:

“You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else ... And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to

blood, before the great and awesome Day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.” Joel 2:27-32

Here is a case where we must bring out our pairs of spectacles. In the first fulfilment, we know **Hezekiah’s** people *did* cry to God for help in a **Day of the Lord** when all seemed to be lost, and Jerusalem was miraculously saved from the invading army of Sennacherib. But there was no outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that occasion. For that to be fulfilled we need our first-century pair of glasses. At the **Feast of Pentecost**, when the Spirit had just been given dramatically to the believers in Jerusalem, the **Apostle Peter** told the excited crowds that Joel’s words had just been fulfilled in their hearing. And for those who were prepared to believe and be baptised, God was sending them deliverance, not at that moment from enemy soldiers, but from the power of sin and death (see Acts 2:1-21). This came “*before*” a second **Day of the Lord**, which lay 40 years into the future, when Jerusalem would be destroyed by Roman armies, and true believers who listened to Jesus’ warnings would escape with their lives. The **Apostle Paul** seized on the same prophecy in Joel and pointed out that it says *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. This means, he says, that Gentiles (non-Jews) are included in the promise of salvation. Paul had been sent, he said, to ‘call’ people to know the good news. Nor can we rule out a third fulfilment in ‘the last days’ when a humbled Israel,

invaded and broken, will turn to Jesus their Messiah and find salvation before the final Day of the Lord bursts upon this world.

That is what the third chapter of this amazing book homes in upon. In a third '**Day of the Lord**' (verse 14), the prophet sees God's people taken prisoner and desolate. But then the Lord gathers together the armies, not of Assyria but of all nations, for a great **Judgment** at Jerusalem, a harvest reaping, when He avenges the wrongs done to Israel with earthquake and fire.

From that time water flows from Jerusalem to transform the desert, just as we saw in Ezekiel's last chapters, and God dwells in Jerusalem, His holy city, forever.

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