

14. JOEL

Joel gives no definite clues to the dates of his ministry. His main theme is “the Day of the Lord” and the whole book is eschatological.

The Day of the Lord (Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 2:31, 3:14, 18)

The Day of the Lord is the dominant theme in Joel. There are many days of the Lord throughout Israel’s history when the Lord intervenes in judgment. However, the emphasis in Joel is on the great Day of the Lord (2:31) at the end of the present age, namely the battle of Armageddon, when the Lord calls forth the armies of the world to fight against Zion.

Ch. 1 describes a locust invasion of the land of Judah which destroys the crops and vegetation, but by the end of the chapter there is fire burning trees and pastures and all the streams are dried up. In ch. 2 the locust army has become a human army. There is a great and powerful people spreading over the hills and mountains. Fire devours before and after them, leaving behind a destroyed wilderness. They enter the cities and the houses, the earth quakes before them and the heavens tremble. There has never been such a large army before and never will be again. It is a judgment on God’s people for turning their back on him, but the Lord will take pity on his people. He will remove the armies from the North and destroy them. This sounds very much like the invasion of Israel by Gog that we looked at in Ezekiel 38-39.

God’s regathered people Israel will be saved and they will never be put to shame again, because God will pour out his Spirit on all of them (2:28), the conversion of Israel that Paul prophesied in Romans 11:26. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved in those days. The Church will be resurrected and translated into New Jerusalem in the sky, while Israel will be saved and will lead the nations in worship on Earth during the millennium.

Ch. 3 begins by stating that in the last days, the Lord will restore the fortunes of the people of Judah and Jerusalem who were dispersed by the Romans in 70 AD. Today, their fortunes have already been

restored as Joel prophesied. Israel became a nation again in 1948, and by 2020, despite their small population, Israel is among the ten most powerful nations in the world. Joel now returns to the fact that in the last days, God will gather all nations to fight against Israel and to bring judgment on them in the Valley of Jehoshaphat to the NE of Jerusalem. The apostle John says that it is Satan who assembles the nations to fight against Jerusalem (Rev 12:13, 16:14). The whole world lies under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19), and after he is expelled from heaven, he plans to prevent the Messiah from beginning his earthly reign. The prophets attribute the action to God, because he allows it to happen, and it is ultimately a part of his purpose. This is Armageddon, the final battle between God and rebellious mankind. God's judgment is pictured as a grape harvest (Joel 3:13). The vats will overflow with the blood of the nations because their evil is great. The nations are deceived by Satan to follow Antichrist and as a result, they will kill Christians and they will come to Jerusalem to kill Jews and capture the city that God chose for himself. This is a similar picture to the vision John saw, where the blood of the slain flows to the height of a horse's bridle, and the Lord, having struck down the nations, is said to be treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (Rev 14:17-20).

He describes the time of the Lord's return, the time of the great earthquake, and the time when the sun, moon, and stars are darkened. The Lord will roar from Zion and the heavens and the earth will quake, and the Lord will save his people, Israel.

A locust plague or a mighty army? (Joel 1:4-20)

Joel talks about locusts having eaten everything in the land, but in verse six he gives the meaning of his metaphor: It is not locusts that are the problem, a *nation has invaded his land*, powerful and without number. This nation is fierce, having the teeth of a lion, and the fangs of a lioness. He tells Israel to mourn because the fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, and the oil fails. So they are called to repentance. Compare the destruction on Earth when the first four seals are opened (Rev 6:18). There is a dictator, warfare, famine, pestilence, and death. The Day of the Lord is near (1:15).

Armageddon (Joel 2:1-11)

The Day of the Lord is coming! It is a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadow. Like the dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as has never been seen before, nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them, fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste, nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots, in our age, that would be tanks. They leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They are well disciplined and all march in line, not swerving from their course. They do not jostle each other; each one marches straight ahead. They plunge through the defenses without breaking ranks. They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves, they enter through the windows. Before them, the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine because of their weapons and resulting fires. The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The Day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

Think of a mighty modern army with modern artillery and you'll get the picture. The Lord thunders at the head of his army because he will turn Satan's plans and the misguided response of the unbelievers to his advantage. He says to Gog: I will turn you around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north and send you against the mountains of Israel (Ezek 39:2). The Day of the Lord is a day of judgment: a final act of judgment against Israel to punish them for their unfaithfulness and disobedience, and a final judgment on the unbelieving nations who dare to rebel against God and make war against his people Israel and his holy city Jerusalem.

Israel's Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32)

And afterward - sometime later when the battle is over, when the Antichrist and his false prophet have been cast into hell, and Satan has been apprehended by an angel and put out of commission for 1000 years, and the Messiah has been installed as king, God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh.

This is a dual-fulfillment prophecy. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter cites this passage (Acts 2:17-21), saying that the pouring out of the Spirit on that day was what the prophet Joel was talking about. This was a monumental occasion when the Spirit of God was poured out on the Church, which at that time consisted mainly of Jewish believers. As a result of this baptism in the Spirit, they spoke in tongues, the languages of many Jews and proselytes who had come from surrounding countries to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. Peter added that the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit was for his hearers, their children, and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to himself.

That Pentecost was not a complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy is shown by the fact that it does not fit the context of Joel's prophecy. Joel's whole book is about the Day of the Lord at the end of the age, and his prophecy is about Israel, not the Church. For Joel "all flesh" meant everyone, not just the leaders who usually received God's Spirit. Israel's sons and daughters, old men and young men, even male and female servants would receive God's Spirit.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

God immediately adds:

I will do wonders in the sky and on the Earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned black and the moon will turn red like blood before the arrival of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord. Everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved, for there will be deliverance on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem as the Lord has said. Among the survivors are those whom the Lord calls.

The sun being turned black and the moon red like blood are events that occur before the Messiah arrives at the end of the tribulation period. It is only after the Messiah descends from heaven to Jerusalem that all Israel will be saved and this prophecy will receive its complete fulfillment. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" is both a promise and a requirement. It is especially applicable to Israel when the whole nation is saved after seeing the Messiah return, the one whom their ancestors pierced (Zech 12:10). When they see him, the Jewish survivors of the battle of Armageddon will mourn

in repentance and call on the name of Jesus, whose blood is the only means of salvation. Jeremiah's prophecy about God making a new covenant with Israel (Jer 31:31) will be fulfilled as all Israel is saved. Jesus applied that prophecy to the Church when he spoke about the new covenant in his blood, but its Christian fulfillment does not cancel the original promise, which is for the nation of Israel.

God will gather all nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:1-16)

In these last days, the Lord has already restored Israel to her land and Jerusalem. The time will soon arrive when he will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. He will judge them there on behalf of his people Israel who are his chosen nation. The Jews have been scattered among the nations and have been mistreated by them. God said, the nations have divided up his land.

The surrounding nations are told to prepare for war and rouse their warriors! All the fighting men should beat their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears, and draw near and attack. They should come quickly from every direction, and assemble in Israel.

Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

Come, trample the grapes in the winepress, for it is full.

The vats overflow; so great is their wickedness!

There will be multitudes in the valley of decision! The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will no longer shine due to the smoke rising from the battle. The Messiah will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. The earth and the sky will tremble, but the Lord will be a refuge and stronghold for his people Israel.

Revelation 14 builds on this terminology of the grape harvest. There we see the victorious Messiah seated on a cloud with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. The grape harvest that he reaps depicts the resurrection and rapture of the righteous. It is followed by another angel who swings his sickle, reaps the grapes, and throws them into the winepress of God's wrath. They are trampled in the winepress outside the city (Jerusalem) and their blood flows as high as a horse's bridle for 300 km. This is the slaughter of Armageddon.

The river of life (*Joel 3:17-21*)

Joel says that after the Messiah's victory at Armageddon, Israel will know that the Lord their God has returned to dwell in Zion, his holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy and will never again be invaded by foreigners. The Lord will pardon Israel and they will live in their land forever.

In the days of the messianic reign, the mountains will drip new wine, the hills will flow with milk, and 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 the Acacias, just north of the Dead Sea. In other words, there will be abundant rainfall with productive vineyards and plenty of pasture for the farmers. This fountain is also prophesied by Ezekiel and Zechariah. The Kidron Valley already has a stream that descends 4000 feet over a 32 km course from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea.

Ezekiel takes twelve verses (47:1-12) to describe water issuing from the threshold of the Messianic temple (Ezek 43:7) and flowing towards the East. Zechariah says that in those days when the Lord is king over all the Earth, living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea (Dead Sea) and half to the western sea (Mediterranean) in both summer and winter (Zech 14:8-9).

These three prophecies are Messianic. Because of the place names mentioned and the details given, they must be interpreted literally. There will be geographical changes as a result of the great earthquake, but Jerusalem will remain aloft on its site (Zech 14:10-11).

The millennium is an era of restoration for the world when nature is set free from its bondage to corruption. The river that flows from God's temple through the wilderness of Judah and into the Dead Sea symbolizes the transformation that will take place in the whole world as it is ruled by the Messiah and God's children (Rom 8:19) and relieved of its curse. The river of the water of life has its source in God and brings about the abundant, happy, fully-satisfied life that is associated with paradise.