

# Joel

*August 11, 2024*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

Joel 1:13-20; 2:1-32

### **Session Outline**

1. Troubles and Repentance (Joel 1:13-20)
2. The Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1-17)
3. Restoration (Joel 2:18-32)

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### **Theological Theme**

God sent the prophet Joel to preach a message of repentance and warning to the people of Judah who were living sinful lives.

### **Call to Action**

Brentwood's Goal #3 DxD Strategy. Home groups/small groups are our opportunity to disciple others with the truth that behind the whole course of history is God. God's Spirit is at work among us, and we must recognize that.



## Leader Guide

# Joel

### Introduction

In the days of pioneering across America, the wagon trains would park in a circle at night for protection from any enemies, whether wildlife or human. Fires were built inside the circle and the people knew inside the circle was the safest place possible. Any traveler who was isolated from the group, outside of the circle, could be in danger.

We may not be traveling across the country in wagons, but people today still have similar tendencies. When things are in chaos, people often “circle up” and gather their loved ones together to seek protection from outside threats. How people respond to crisis tells a lot about who they are and what they believe. The people of Judah were in a major crisis of their own making. They were suffering the consequences of their sin, and God sent Joel with a message of repentance.

- ❓ How do you typically respond when the surrounding world seems chaotic?
- ❓ How have you experienced the reality of “safety in numbers”?

### Session Summary


The people of Judah faced a national crisis that affected every home in the land. The prophet Joel came with a message from the Lord about why they were being punished and a warning about further punishment to come for their sinful ways. He shared details from a vision of a mighty army that would come and defeat them completely.

Because of who God is, He warned them in advance to give them opportunity to repent and stay His hand of judgment. God wants His people to be in right relationship with Him and if they repented, then He would bring His power against the mighty army instead of handing the people over to their enemies. The book of Joel carries the message of the coming day of the Lord, judgment, and the hope available when we trust and obey the Lord.

## 1. Troubles and Repentance (Joel 1:13-20)


At the beginning of this book, Joel spent time describing the condition of the land. Instead of beginning by prophesying about what was to come, he pointed out what was occurring at the time. The land had suffered a plague of locusts, a devastating reality for an agricultural society.

The troubles facing Judah consumed them to the point that it would impact generations. This was not a passing moment but would change the course of their lives and be remembered throughout history. Addressing the religious leaders of the day, Joel challenged them to lead the way in repenting. They were to prepare for the work of repentance.

 What might cause God's people to recognize the need for repentance today? Why is it important that we respond rightly in these moments?


Not only did Joel call for repentance, but he also listed how they were to repent. God's grace is often seen in His clear direction to His people when they have sinned against Him. The people were not left to respond to God blindly, but according to His specific instruction.

One of the steps of repentance was fasting. The elders or leaders were to be initiators and set the pace for what needed to happen among the people. They were called to gather in the house of the Lord and cry out to Him, trusting that He would respond with mercy.

 What are specific ways we can act in repentance today?

A significant theme throughout the book of Joel is the day of the Lord. This refers to God's action to punish sin and judge those of the earth. Ultimately the day of the Lord will be finally fulfilled when Jesus comes in glory to judge the earth. Judah would experience a time of judgment as a partial fulfillment of God's coming final judgment.

Joel named several other specific natural events that contributed to the complete devastation of the land—drought, fires, suffering livestock, and the locusts. In the face of such devastation, there was nothing Judah could do but cry out to God. The Lord sent calamity to the degree that there was no place left for His people to turn but to Him. They were powerless to fix their problems apart from God.

 Application: What do you need to stop trying to fix on your own and cry out to God about?

### The Army


Commentators are divided over the identity of the invading northern army described in chapter 2. (1) Some see it as a figurative description of the locust invasion of chapter 1. (2) Some see literal enemy troops coming from the north, described as invading locusts. (3) Revelation 9:3–11 compares demonic forces to locusts. Whether this army was man or insect, it represented the judgment force of the Lord.

## 2. The Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1-17)

The first chapter of Joel described what had taken place in Judah. Chapter two warned about what will happen in the ultimate day of the Lord. Those who are right with the Lord look forward to His coming. They long for God to show His power and might, confident of their place with Him.

People who are not right with God will have a very different response to the day of the Lord. It is a day to dread because God will bring judgment on all who are not found in Him. The people of Judah that Joel spoke to were not in a good place with the Lord, so his words regarding the judgment of the Lord were received with doom and gloom.


Joel warned of a mighty army that would come against them and invade their land, describing the strength and efficiency of this army. This judgment was certain if they continued the current path, but they still had the opportunity to repent. Joel's words were intended to prompt change and repentance.

 Why is it important to recognize the opportunity for repentance and not let it pass by?

Joel reminded the people of God's power shown in His ability to defeat any army, regardless of how impressive or mighty it was. The real power in the land of Judah was found in the Lord, and Joel called the people to repentance in the face of coming judgment. He instructed them to turn back to God and trust Him. If their hearts were sincere, God would receive them. Despite the people's continued rebellion, God held out the opportunity for reconciliation. In His mercy, He delays judgment, desiring all to come to Him (2 Peter 3:9).


 How has God shown His mercy in your life? Why should this prompt us to tell others about His goodness?

Joel urged the people to seek the Lord in repentance based on God's grace and compassion. Knowing who the Lord is motivates us to return to Him when we have gone our own way. The people of Judah needed the reminder of who God is as the catalyst for turning back to Him.

 Application: Where do you need to be reminded of God's grace and compassion today?

### 3. Restoration (Joel 2:18-32)

After giving dire warnings and painting a bleak picture of what to expect if they refused to repent, Joel's message changed tone. The Lord wanted His people to know if they responded rightly, He would renew their land and restore His relationship with them. Imagine how encouraging those words would be for a weary, fearful people surrounded by thousands of dead locusts from the recent plague.

 When have you been reminded of the Lord's heart for you, even in a season where you needed to repent?

This passage describes what happens when God's people cry out to Him. The Lord promises to renew and restore. He also promised to pour out His Spirit on them. The Lord listens when His people pray, and He hears our cries. Sometimes the circumstances of life and our own sin can make us feel like God isn't listening. When that happens, we can always go back to His character and His promises. He made it clear that if the people would cry out to Him, He would respond.

Part of the renewal God promised was to restore their material wealth and defeat the mighty army from the north. When God's people are in right relationship with Him, they will find certain security. This may not always be physical security, but we are eternally secure with Him no matter what. These promises of the Lord were cause for praise and rejoicing. Joel encouraged the people to respond to this message in worship.

 What do you need God to renew and restore in your life? How do you need to cry out to Him about this?

Joel described the ultimate restoration that will occur for God's people. This future time will be marked by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will come on people fully and not just for certain occasions, as was the case in the Old Testament. While the Spirit of God was at work in the Old Testament, He was not with people continually as He would be following Jesus's resurrection and ascension.

Joel looked to the future when the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh. Peter would quote these words at the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. In response, three thousand people were saved and baptized! This great outpouring of the Spirit was accompanied by the promise that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This was a call to prayer and to return to the one true God, turning from any false worship. Our circumstances are quite different than those Joel originally prophesied to, but the call is not different: repent, worship, and be restored.




 Application: How do you need to apply this study to your life today?

## Conclusion

Joel prophesied to the people of Judah about the punishment they would face if they didn't heed his words and repent. These words followed a devastating locust plague that wiped out their vegetation and food supply. Amid this kind of destruction, the people were confronted with the warning of a mighty army that would sweep in and overtake them if they persisted in their sinful ways. This coming judgment, the day of the Lord, was intended to give them a glimpse into the future if they did not change their ways and turn back to God.

Also included in this message was a reminder of who God is. The people had lost sight of the Lord and needed to remember who He is and all He had done for them. The Lord is patient, kind, merciful, and gracious. He often warns of judgment with the goal of seeing His people repent and turn back to Him. The Lord wants His people to turn their hearts toward Him out of love. The warning of judgment can be a wake-up call and strong motivation to get back into right relationship with God. God is the perfect Father, who will go to any length to get His people back.

From the book of Joel, we get a picture of God's might and power, His judgment of sin and His grace and love for those who put their trust in Him. When we read passages like this one in Scripture, they should stir in us an increased desire to seek God's forgiveness for our sin, cause us to choose to obey and worship Him, and give us hope for the future: a day when God will right all the world's evils and unite us with Him for eternity.

-  Joel gave a detailed description of how the people were supposed to repent of their sins. What does repentance look like in our lives?
-  What does today's passage indicate about the way God will surely respond when His people repent, return, pray, fast, and seek Him?
-  What does the prophecy in the book of Joel teach you about God? About His character? About His actions?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for being loving, gracious, merciful, and patient with you. Confess and repent of anything that has kept you from right relationship with Him.*

## Memory Verse

*Even now—this is the Lord's declaration—turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. —Joel 2:13*

## Additional Resources

- *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, & Micah* by Trent Butler
- *Be Amazed* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Joel and Amos* by Tchavdar Hadjiev

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples





# Historical Context of Joel

## Purpose

The book of Joel shows us the Creator and Redeemer God of all the universe in complete control of nature. Joel made clear that the God of judgment also is a God of mercy who stands ready to redeem and restore when his people come before him in repentance. Joel points to a time when the Spirit of God would be present upon all people. On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that the new day of Spirit-filled discipleship, foretold by Joel, had arrived (Ac 2:17–21).

## Author

Joel (“Yahweh is God”) is identified as the son of Pethuel. He is not easily identified with the other Joels of Scripture (1Sm 8:2; 1Ch 4:35; 6:33; 11:38; 15:7; Ezr 10:43; Neh 11:9), leaving us only to know him by his book, his calling from God, and his work. The book itself gives no biographical information other than his father’s name.

## Setting

Dating the book of Joel has always been difficult and mainly conjectural, with suggestions ranging as widely as premonarchial Israel to the postexilic period, sometimes well into the Hellenistic period.

## Special Features

The book of Joel is one of the shortest in the Old Testament. The first part (1:1–2:17) describes a terrible locust plague concluding with a plea for confession of sins. The second part (2:18–3:21) proclaims hope for the repentant people coupled with judgment upon their enemies.

## Extended Commentary

### Joel 1–2

**Locust Plague (1:1–20)** Joel wrote after a devastating locust plague accompanied by drought and famine. Deprivation extended not only to food and enjoyment but even to temple worship. Israel was to consider this an early warning sign from the Lord and to gather together in fasting and prayer for the Lord's mercy.

**Invading Army (2:1–11)** Whereas chapter 1 considers past and present troubles, the rest of the book looks to the future. As ancient cities had watchmen, Joel was serving as spiritual watchman of Judah. He urgently warned of an approaching enemy, which is likened to an army of locusts. It would be a foreign army (v. 2) that would serve as God's judgment against His people (v. 11). The phrase "like a mighty army" in verse 5 does not mean it was not an army. The Hebrew word for "like" or "as" can express identity (see Joel 1:15; Neh. 7:2, which says literally that Hanani was "like a man of integrity"). The army's unparalleled destruction is described as the day of the Lord.

**Repentance and Renewal (2:12–19)** The destruction of the day of the Lord could be averted only by genuine national repentance and seeking the Lord's mercy with faith. (On the nature and importance of Joel's call for repentance, see the introduction to Joel.)

**Army Destroyed (2:20)** The invading army is identified as "the northern army" (literally, "the northerner"). This term would not be appropriate for a locust plague, which came from the south or southeast. The geography of Palestine is such that enemies had to attack either from the north or the south, but typically an enemy is described as coming from the north (Isa. 14:31; 41:25; Jer. 1:13–15; 4:6; 6:1; 10:22; 25:9; Ezek. 38:15; 39:2; Zeph. 2:13; Zech. 2:6–7). On the stench left by this divinely slain army compare Isaiah 34:2–3, which describes an eschatological destruction of God's enemies.

**Restoration of the Land (2:21–27)** These verses describe a reversal of the devastation brought by the locust plague of 1:2–20. Garrett notes that the command not to fear is characteristic of Isaiah's salvation messages (Isa. 40:9–11; 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2–3; 54:4; also Jer. 30:10; 46:27–28). In verse 23 the phrase "autumn rains in righteousness" also may be translated "teacher of/for righteousness" (see Job 36:22; Prov. 5:13; Isa. 30:20). It may be a reference or at least an allusion to the messianic seed of Abraham, the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:15, who would bring righteousness to the believing remnant (see Jer. 33:14–17).

**Spiritual Revival (2:28–32)** These verses in all their fullness describe events associated with Christ's return to remove evil and to rule in righteousness, when all believers will have the privileges and abilities of prophets (see Jer. 31:33–34). But the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 inaugurated Christ's rule in an incipient form. For at that time, God gave His Spirit to all believers as a down payment of more to come (Eph. 1:13–14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. E. Ray Clendenen, "The Minor Prophets," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 351.