

Restored

A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF JOEL

TIFFANY DICKERSON

Introduction to Joel

READ JOEL 1-3

There are a handful of books in the Bible that receive heavy foot traffic. Readers are often drawn to the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels, or Paul's letters. Each one is wonderful and worth every minute of study, but what about some of those smaller, lesser-known books? You know, those books that require a quick look at the table of contents to remember exactly where to find them — those tiny books like Joel.

The book of Joel is just three short chapters, nestled in the midst of the Old Testament. Found shortly after the Major Prophets and at the beginning of the Minor Prophets, it can be easily skimmed and quickly forgotten in a Bible reading plan. It is not typically a book that comes to mind when choosing the next group Bible study or a passage to walk through in a quiet time. But, though it may be small, Joel has many lessons for the believer both now and for the future.

The message shared in this book is worth taking some time to ponder and study. However, before diving into the book of Joel, it is important to understand four things: the overall message of this book, what we know about Joel as a person and a prophet, the time period in which Joel was written, and the structure and themes of the book. These elements will inform your study as you learn about Joel in the next three weeks.

As for the overall message of Joel, Joel is filled with hard topics and hopeful events. Both are important for the study of this book.

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Before we relegate Joel to a dusty shelf with other Minor Prophets that might be difficult to understand, we should study Joel for the future hope it provides believers. God's message spoken through the prophet Joel provides a solemn reminder that we are all sinful and must seek repentance, but it also reminds sinners that their loving and gracious God restores them when they return to Him.

Not much is known about Joel the prophet. The book's opening line states he is the son of Pethuel, and scholars define his name as, "Yahweh is God." No other personal information is given in his prophecy. The other traits known about him are gleaned from the context of his message. He knew the geography and history of Judah and Jerusalem well, implying he was a native. He also understood the inner workings of the temple. While the reader might like to know more about the author, it is important to remember that the true author is God. God gave His words to Joel to share an urgent and important message with the southern kingdom, known as Judah. Joel's message can be trusted because God can be trusted.

Scholars have debated the date Joel was written for many years. As a nation, Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon's reign. Some believe Joel was written before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC, while some believe it was shortly before Judah, the southern kingdom, fell to Babylon sometime between 587 and 586 BC. Still, others think it was written after some of the Israelites returned from exile. Dating books of the Bible is important for context because it allows us, as readers, to understand the original audience and the cultural activities of the time. What makes Joel unique is that the events of the book can be placed in these different eras and still have the same urgency and application. Therefore, instead of focusing on the time period of the writing, the reader is forced to focus on the message and intent, which will be discussed throughout this study.

Joel is broken into three time periods. In chapter 1, a plague of locusts destroys everything during a prosperous time. In chapter 2, Joel uses the locusts metaphorically to warn the people of a coming army that will destroy them unless they repent. Finally, in chapter 3, Joel shares an eschatological prophecy, which simply means a prophecy concerning the end times.

Though limited in length, Joel covers some significant themes in these chapters. Through the course of this study, themes like the Day of Lord, repentance, mercy, and God's presence will weave together to remind the original audience, Judah, and the present-day audience, us, of God's sovereignty. Whether it was written in the eighth century or the fifth century, Joel's message stands the test of time for readers to learn from the past and prepare for the future.

No matter how difficult it may seem to understand the text, this reminder from 2 Timothy 3:16–17 should spur us on in our study: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The study of Joel will help turn our hearts toward our sovereign God, who will complete and equip us in our mission to be more like Jesus. Grab your Bible, and open that table of contents to hunt for Joel one last time. In three weeks, it will hopefully be a place that feels like home and reminds you of the beautiful restoration God provides for His children.

Respond



What questions do you have after reading through Joel? Write several of them down. What excites you about studying this book? What intimidates you?

Respond



What repeating words and themes do you find as you read Joel?

As you begin your study of Joel, write out a prayer asking the Lord to give you clarity in the hard places, conviction of your sin, and the perseverance you need to finish well.

Notes



Lined writing area with 20 horizontal lines.