

# Joel

**Author:** Joel, the son of Pethuel. Nothing more is known of either of them.

**Date:** Scholars date it anywhere from 800 to 350 BC depending on how they place the events he mentions in the book. Most scholars think it was written somewhere near the beginning of the time Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians.

**Background:** The Babylonian Empire was one of the most ancient of the major human kingdoms. It was situated in The Tigris-Euphrates Valley, often referred to as "the cradle of the human race" for somewhat good reason - the Garden of Eden was located somewhere in it.

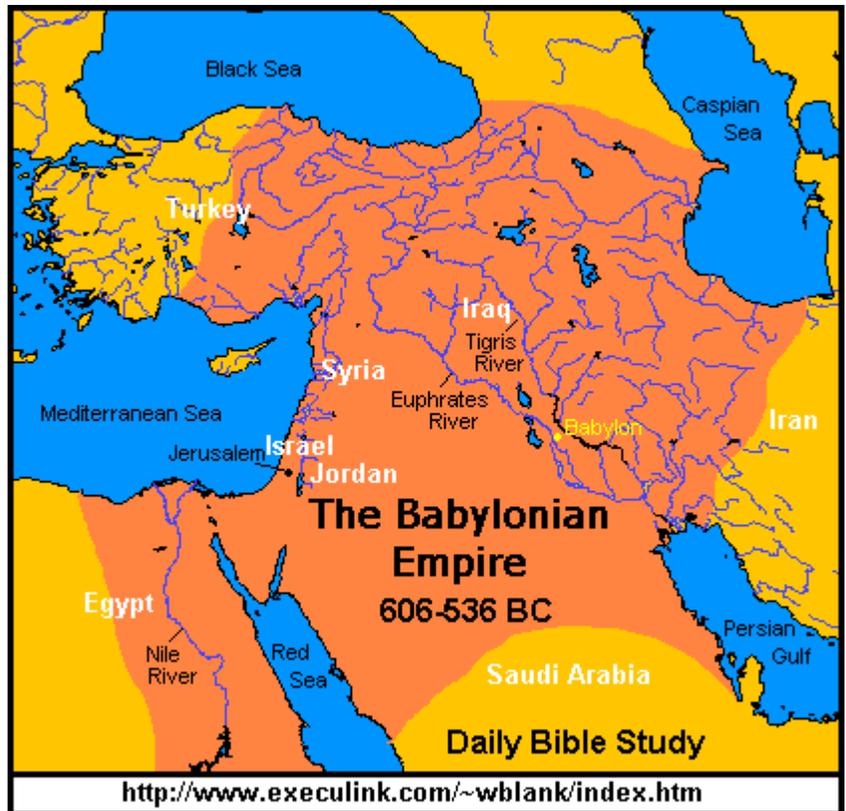
The Old Babylonian Kingdom was at its peak at about the time God called Abraham. However, after many centuries of conflict, the old empire eventually became subject to the Assyrians, from about 885 to 607 BC. It was during this period that the Assyrians conquered and took into captivity the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BC), from which the "Lost Ten Tribes" never returned. (2 Kings 17:1-23)

Babylonia was divided into Accad to the north, and Summer ("Shinar" of the Old Testament) to the south. Along with Ur and the city of Babylon itself, other major cities were Uruk, or Erech (Genesis 10:10), Larsa, or Ellasar (Genesis 14:1), Sepharvaim (2 Kings 17:24), Eridu, and Calneh (Genesis 10:10).

The New Babylonian Empire, which existed from 606 to 536 BC, fully conquered the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C. It was then that the Babylonians under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar completely devastated the city of Jerusalem, looted and burned the original Temple of God, built by Solomon, and carried the people of Judah, including the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, into captivity.

In 536 B.C., after 70 years of supremacy, the Babylonian empire, the "head of gold" in Daniel's Statue, came to an end when it fell to the Persians.

**Where the book fits in Scripture:** Of the 39 books of the Old Testament 17 are classified as prophetic: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. But all of the other 22 books are also filled with prophecy. Elijah and Elisha were two of the most powerful prophets of that time although they never wrote anything. The chart on the next page shows how all the books fit together.



# Old Testament Books

Chronological Order

**The Poetical Books**

Reveals man's inner and outer struggles as he seeks to serve God by observing the Law.

(Job)  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
Song of Songs

**The Prophetical Books**

Challenges God's people to rectify themselves according to the Law before judgment comes.

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah

Ezekiel  
Daniel

Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

Before      During      After

**The Historical Books**

Details the spiritual growth or failure of God's people according to how they have responded to the Law.

Ruth  
1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Esther

JOSHUA  
JUDGES  
SAMUEL 1  
SAMUEL 2  
KINGS 1  
KINGS 2  
EZRA  
NEHEMIAH

Exile 70 years captivity

400 BC

|           |                          |                |             |
|-----------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Conquered | Saul<br>David<br>Solomon | Israel (north) | Assyria     |
|           | United Kingdom           | Judah (south)  | Babylon     |
| 360 years | 460 years                |                | Exiles Back |
|           |                          |                | 160 years   |

**THE LAW (Torah) (Pentateuch)**

The Law legally sets up the terms on which man can come before the LORD.

Job

GENESIS  
EXODUS  
LEVITICUS  
NUMBERS  
DEUTERONOMY

Joel is one of the twelve prophetic books written during the troubling times written about in the ending chapters of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

**Historical setting:** Nebuchadnezzar was the son and successor of Nabopolassar, who delivered Babylon from the Assyrians and laid Nineveh in ruins. He was the greatest and most powerful of all the Babylonian kings. He married the daughter of Cyaxares, and thus the Median and Babylonian dynasties were united.

Necho II, the king of Egypt, gained a victory over the Assyrians at Carchemish and took control of the western provinces of Syrian including Palestine. The remaining provinces of the Assyrian empire were divided between

Babylonia and Media. Nabopolassar wanted to take the western provinces of Syria, so he sent his son westward with a powerful army. (Dan. 1:1) The Egyptians met him at Carchemish, where a furious battle was fought, resulting in the complete rout of the Egyptians, who were driven back (Jer. 46:2-12), and Syria and Phoenicia brought under the control of Babylon. (606 BC) From that time "the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land." (2 Kings 24:7) Nebuchadnezzar also subdued the whole of Palestine, and took Jerusalem, carrying away captive a great multitude of the Jews, among whom were Daniel and his companions. (Dan. 1:1, 2; Jer. 27:19; 40:1)

Three years after this, Jehoiakim, who had reigned in Jerusalem as a Babylonian vassal, rebelled against the oppressor, trusting to help from Egypt. (2 Kings 24:1) This led Nebuchadnezzar to march an army again to the conquest of Jerusalem, which at once yielded to him. (598 BC) A third time he came against it, and deposed Jehoiachin, whom he carried into Babylon, with a large portion of the population of the city, and the sacred vessels of the temple, placing Zedekiah on the throne of Judah in his stead. Zedekiah didn't heed the warnings of the prophet, Jeremiah, entered into an alliance with Egypt, and rebelled against Babylon. This brought about the final siege of the city, which was finally taken and utterly destroyed. (586 BC) Zedekiah was taken captive, and had his eyes put out by order of the king of Babylon, who made him a prisoner for the remainder of his life.

## **Chapter 1**

Vs 1. This is God's word to the people of Judah.

Vs 2-12. Here God likens what is happening in the land to an invasion of locusts and asks the elders to recall if anything like this has happened during their lifetime or told as stories by their ancestors. Then he tells them to tell it to their children and grandchildren so it will be told for generations to come.

A succession of locusts have devastated the land. The Assyrians, then the Egyptians, then the Babylonians took control of parts of the land. Then the Babylonians took control of all of Judah and took the brightest young people captive to Babylon. A second time they came into the land because of Jehoiakim's revolt which was quickly put down. A third time they came into the land because of Jehoiachin's revolt and this time took large portions of the population captive and took the sacred vessels of the temple. Finally, a fourth time they came into the land to put down a revolt and this time decimated the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple completely. This was just like a succession of locust invasions. Consequently, God calls the people to wake up and weep because this invading nation has stripped the good from the land. He calls them to mourn because the offerings have been cut off from the temple. He calls the farmers to despair because their vineyards, crops and the produce of their trees have been destroyed. The joy of the Promised Land has been removed.

Vs 13-20. Here God calls the people to repent because of what has happened and declare a holy fast and sacred assembly. These were things to call the people to understand that their disobedience of God had brought all this upon them and thus to change their ways and return to obeying God. The day of the Lord is a time of judgment for their disobedience and is a dreadful day. The current destruction of the land causes it and everything in it to groan and moan.

## **Chapter 2**

Vs 1-11. Here God tells them to announce on his holy hill in the city of Jerusalem that the day of the Lord is coming. He doesn't give them a date, but promises that he will come at the head of an army like they have never seen before and bring judgment. Everyone should tremble at the prospect of God's judgment. The army

that he leads is mighty and like no other army that has even been or will be. It has such power and might that nations will be in anguish and people's faces will turn pale with fear. There will be no place to hide from this army, and its size will be beyond number.

Vs 12-17. Again God pleads with the people to return to him. He is slow to anger and abounding in love and doesn't want calamity to come upon people. So, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly, and consecrate the people. Let everyone seek the Lord and ask him to spare his people.

Vs 18-27. If they will do this, God says he will take pity on his people and send them enough grain, new wine, and oil to satisfy them and never again make them an object of scorn among the nations. He says he will drive the northern army far from them into a parched and barren land with their front columns going into the eastern sea (Dead Sea) and the rear columns going into the western sea (Mediterranean Sea). He says that then the land will bring forth its produce, the animals should not be afraid, the people should rejoice because he will repay them for the years that the locusts have eaten and give them plenty to eat. Then the people will praise God's name for the wonders he has done and never again will his people be shamed.

Vs 28-32. God says he will pour out his Spirit on people and they will prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions. Peter quotes this in Acts 2:16 as beginning at that time. God says he will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. (That has not happened yet.) But he promises that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This is what Paul says in Romans 10:13.

### **Chapter 3**

Vs 1-16. Here God says that he will bring all nations into the Valley of Jehoshaphat and bring judgment against them for what they have done against his people Israel. He mentions that they have scattered his people among the nations, divided up his land, cast lots for the people, traded boys for prostitutes and sold girls for wine to drink. He asks the cities of Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of the Philistines if they think by what they have done that they are paying God back for something he has done to them. He reminds them that they took his silver and gold and sold his people of Judah and Jerusalem so they might be sent far from their homeland. And God says he will rouse his people from the lands where they were taken and bring them back to the land and he will give the sons and daughters of those people to his own people to be sold to nations far away – bringing what they have done to his people upon them. Then God says to proclaim to the nations that they should prepare for war with him and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and he will judge them there. He says the sun and moon will be darkened and the stars no longer shine. He, the Lord, will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem and the earth and sky will tremble. But he promises that he will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Vs 17-21. Then, he says, you will know that God dwells in Zion, that Jerusalem will be holy and never again will foreigners invade her. In that day, the land will be blessed and produce good things, but Egypt will be desolate and Edom a desert waste because of their violence against Israel. He announces that he will pardon Israel for their previous disobedience for which he has not yet pardoned them and they will dwell with him in Zion.

This entire book would be a warning to the people of Joel's day to repent and return to the Lord so that judgment would not come upon them. But it was also a promise to bring judgment on those who bring evil things against the Lord's people and that they will be returned to him at the end.