***Joel***

**Chapter 1**

**The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel.**

**1:1** *The word of the Lord… came to Joel.* Joel’s claim of prophetic authority is similar to that of several other prophets (see Jer 1:2; Eze 1:3; Hos 1:1; Jnh 1:1, 3; 3:1; Mic 1:1; Zep 1:1; Hag1:1; Zec 1:1; Mal 1:1). (CSB)

*Joel.* Means “The Lord is God”; cf. Elijah’s name, which means “(My)

God is the Lord.” (CSB)

*An Invasion of Locusts*

**2 Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. 4 What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten. 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. 6 A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. 7 It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white. 8 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth. 9 Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the LORD. those who minister before the LORD. 10 The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. 11 Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers; grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. 12 The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered; the pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree— all the trees of the field—are dried up. Surely the joy of mankind is withered away.**

**1:2** *elders.* Either the older men of the community or the recognized officials (see v. 14; 2:16, 28; see also note on Ex 3:16). (CSB)

Joel begins by directing a rhetorical question to the “old timers,” since they were best able to affirm the unprecedented nature of the agricultural disaster Joel predicted. (TLSB)

IN THE LAND – It is a spirited challenge to all the people of Judah to mark the lesson of the great calamity which has befallen them. (Kretzmann)

DAYS OF YOUR FOREFATHERS – He begins very abruptly; and before he proposes his subject, excites attention and alarm by intimating that he is about to announce disastrous events, such as the oldest man among them has never seen, nor any of them learnt from the histories of ancient times. (ACC)

A visitation of this kind, and grievous to this extent, had never yet been seen in Palestine. (Kretzmann)

**1:3**  NEXT GENERATION – They were to pass it on from father to son, all of them accepting this tradition with awe, fear, and trembling, as being an unparalleled manifestation of God's anger against men on account of their sins. (Kretzmann)

To heighten the effect, he still conceals the subject, and informs them that it is such as should be handed down from father to son through all generations. (ACC)

**1:4** See 2:25. (CSB)

An important feature of the book of Joel is a plague of locusts, insects which still periodically threaten the crops in large areas of Asia and Africa. The female desert locust lays eggs under the sand in “pods” of about 100. There may be as many as 100 of such egg pods per square foot. When the insects hatch, usually after rains, “they cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen” (Exodus 10:5). Hatching may continue for several days, with young hoppers numbering up to 1000 per square foot at any one time. The young insects, each about one-half inch long, immediately get on the move, looking for green plants to eat. (PBC)

All four names describe the devastation wrought by the great Oriental locust, which apparently came into the land in successive swarms at that time, gnawing off first the tender shoots of the orchards and vineyards, then the vegetables and field fruits, and finally the foliage of the trees and every spear of green that was in sight. The desolation wrought by the plague of the locusts is described in the most graphic manner, one feature after another being depicted in a way to arouse the people to a realization of the seriousness of the situation. (Kretzmann)

**1:5** *drunkards.* Although Joel calls for repentance, drunkenness is the only specific sin mentioned in the book. It suggests a self-indulgent life-style (cf. Isa 28:7–8; Am 4:1) pursued by those who value material things more than spiritual. (CSB)

*weep.* Various segments of the community (drunkards, here; general population, v. 8; farmers, v. 11; priests, v. 13) are called to mourn. The destruction of the vines by the locusts leaves the drunkards without a source of wine. (CSB)

The general destruction of vegetation by these devouring creatures has totally prevented both harvest and vintage; so that there shall not be wine even for necessary uses, much less for the purposes of debauchery. It is well known that the ruin among the vines by locusts prevents the vintage for several years after. (ACC)

NEW WINE – ESV has “sweet.” New wine that has not yet gone into storage. Once the sweet wine was exhausted, there would be no more stores of wine in Judah. (TLSB)

**1:6** The locusts are compared here to a nation; cf. the ants and coneys in Pr 30:25–26, where the Hebrew word for “creatures” means lit. “(a) people.” Elsewhere they are called the Lord’s “army” (2:11, 25). The reverse comparison—that of armies to locusts in regard to numbers—is as old as Ugaritic literature (15th century b.c.) and is common in the OT (see Jdg 6:5; 7:12; Jer 46:23; 51:14, 27; Na 3:15). (CSB)

That real locusts are intended there can be little doubt; but it is thought that this may be a double prophecy, and that the destruction by the Chaldeans may also be intended, and that the four kinds of locusts mentioned above may mean the four several attacks made on Judea by them. The first in the last year of Nabonassar, (father of Nebuchadnezzar), which was the third of Jehoiakim; the second when Jehoiakim was taken prisoner in the eleventh year of his reign; the third in the ninth year of Zedekiah and the fourth three years after, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Others say that they mean four powers which have been enemies of the Jews:

1. The palmerworm, the Assyrians and Chaldeans.

2. The locust, the Persians and Medes.

3. The cankerworm, the Greeks, and particularly Antiochus Epiphanes.

4. The caterpillar, the Romans.

Others make them four kings; Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar. But of such similitudes there is no end; and the best of them is arbitrary and precarious. (ACC)

*without number.* A phrase used to describe the locusts in the plague in Egypt (see Ps 105:34; see also Ex 10:4–6, 12–15). (CSB)

*teeth.* Joel’s comparison of the locusts’ teeth to lions’ teeth is reflected in Rev 9:8. (CSB)

Owing to their immense numbers, these locusts’ teeth are far more destructive than the fangs of a lion. (TLSB)

**1:7** *my.* The personal pronouns here and elsewhere in Joel (vv. 6, 13–14; 2:13–14, 17–18, 23, 26–27; 3:2–5, 17) offer a hint of hope, since they indicate that the people belong to the Lord (cf. Jos 22:19). (CSB)

THEIR BARK – This was by the complete removal of the bark. This being the condition in which the land was left after the visit of the locusts, the prophet now urges his countrymen to mourn. (Kretzmann)

**1:8** *virgin.* The community is addressed. In Israel, when a woman was pledged to be married to a man, he was called her husband and she his wife, though she was still a virgin (see Dt 22:23–24). This verse refers to such a husband who died before the marriage was consummated. (CSB)

*sackcloth.* See v. 13; Ge 37:34 and note. (CSB)

**1:9** *offerings.* The locusts have left nothing that can be offered as sacrifice. The grain offering (Lev 2:1–2) and the drink offering, which was a libation of wine (Lev 23:13), were part of the daily offering (Ex 29:40; Nu 28:5–8). (CSB)

These were regularly used in thanksgiving for God’s provision (Lv 2; 6:14-23), and with daily sacrifices (Ex 29:40-41), with the first fruit offering (Lv 23:13), and with other sacrifices (Nu 15:5-7, 10). The famine produced by the locust invasion would threaten to put an end to these sacrifices and the blessings they provided. (TLSB)

PRIESTS…MOURNING – These were the priests serving in God’s house would mourn the cessation of the grain and drink offerings because of the loss of their own substance and also because the people’s fellowship with the Lord would be broken. (TLSB)

**1:10** *dried up.* The destruction caused by the locusts was intensified by drought. (CSB)

As with Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen 3:17), and again in the days of Noah (Gen 6:13), so also here the earth is depicted as suffering the consequences of human wickedness (cf Rm 8:20-23). (TLSB)

*grain … new wine … oil.* An important OT triad, related to the agriculture of that day (see 2:19) (CSB)

According to the law, grain offerings in the form of fine flour mixed with oil and incese, or bread baked without yeast, or crushed and roasted heads of new grain were to be salted and offered on the altar. A grain offering and a quart or more of wine as a drink offering were to accompany all burnt offerings (Nu 15:1-12). (PBC)

**1:11** DESPAIR…FARMERS – As those responsible for the agricultural production of the land, framers will be especially grieved by the impending locust plague and resultant famine. (TLSB)

**1:12** ARE DRIED UP – There could be no rejoicing over a bountiful harvest, as usual. Cp. Ps. 4, 7; Is. 9, 3. The description of the swarming grasshoppers and the desolation following in their wake is one of the most powerful in all literature, and the picture is rightly regarded as one which ought to call all men to repentance. (Kretzmann)

*A Call to Repentance*

**13 Put on sackcloth, O priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. 14 Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. 15 Alas for that day! For the day of the LORD is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 16 Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes—** joy **and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins, the granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. 18 How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep are suffering. 19 To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field. 20 Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the open pastures.**

**1:13** *your God.* See note on v. 7. The phrase occurs eight times in Joel (here; v. 14; 2:13; 2:14; 2:23; 2:26; 2:27; 3:17). (CSB)

**1:14** *fast … assembly.* See 2:15. Fasting, required on the Day of Atonement (see note and NIV text note on Lev 16:29) and also practiced in times of calamity (see Jdg 20:26; 2Sa 12:16; Jer 14:12; Jnh 3:4–5; Zec 7:3), was a sign of penitence and humility. The Bible speaks against outward signs that do not reflect a corresponding inward belief or attitude (see Mt 6:1–8; 23:1–36). (CSB)

The priests are to assemble the people and lead them in making a public confession of sin. Fasting was part of penitential observance. All the people suspended their activities for the national observance. Sincerely begging for forgiveness was the central part of such national days of repentance and prayer. (TLSB)

**1:15** *day of the Lord.* This phrase occurs five times in Joel and is the dominant theme (here; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14). Six other prophets also use it: Isaiah (13:6, 9), Ezekiel (13:5; 30:3), Amos (5:18, 20), Obadiah (15), Zephaniah (1:7, 14) and Malachi (4:5); and an equivalent expression occurs in Zec 14:1. Sometimes abbreviated as “that day,” the term often refers to the decisive intervention of God in history, such as through the invasion of locusts in Joel or at the battle of Carchemish, 605 b.c. (see Jer 46:2, 10). It can also refer to Christ’s coming to consummate history (see Mal 4:5; Mt 11:24; 1Co 5:5; 2Co 1:14; 1Th 5:2; 2Pe 3:10). When the term is not used for divine judgments in the midst of history, it refers to the final day of the Lord, which generally has two aspects: (1) God’s triumph over and punishment of his enemies and (2) his granting of rest (security) and blessing to his people. (CSB)

*destruction … Almighty.* The Hebrew for each of these two words is a pun on the other (as in Isa 13:6). (CSB)

**1:17** SEEDS ARE SHRIVELED – With no moisture, planted seeds dry up instead of germinating. (TLSB)

STOREHOUSES…GRANARIES – These were useless in a famine. Grain reserves for lean times and for planting will run out, guaranteeing long term starvation. (TLSB)

**1:18** Cf. the description of a drought in Jer 14:5–6. (CSB)

*moan.* The Hebrew for this word is used for the groaning of Israel in Egypt (Ex 2:23) and of others in distress (Pr 29:2; Isa 24:7; La 1:4, 8, 11, 21; Eze 9:4; 21:12). (CSB)

Lowing and bleating for their owners to feed them. Sheep feed closer to the ground and can scrounge grass too short to be grazed by cattle. Because the locusts will leave virtually no grass, however, the sheep will suffer along with cattle. (TLSB)

*mill about.* The Hebrew for this verb is used to describe Israel’s confused movements in the desert (Ex 14:3). (CSB)

They are looking everywhere, and wandering about to find some grass, and know not which way to run. (ACC)

*even … sheep.* Sheep are the last to suffer, because they can even grub the grass roots out of the soil. (CSB)

**1:19–20** *fire.* Although the destruction caused by the locusts is elsewhere compared to that of a fire (see 2:3), here the prophet likely is describing the effects of a drought. In both cases he evokes the fire of God’s judgment (see, e.g., Jer 4:4; 15:14; 17:27; Eze 5:4; 15:6–7; 20:47; 21:32; Hos 8:14; Am 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5). (CSB)

This may either refer to a drought, or to the effects of the locusts; as the ground, after they have passed over it, everywhere appears as if a sheet of flame had not only scorched, but consumed every thing. (ACC)

**1:20** WILD ANIMALS – This depicts the depth of the coming misery. Even hardy will animals desperately search for any sign of water. (TLSB)

PANT FOR YOU – The animals’ desperation mimics the prayers of the people. (TLSB)