
JOEL 1: 1 The LORD's word that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.

Joel, the son of Pethuel, the second of the twelve minor prophets, was, as is said, of the tribe of Reuben, and city of Bethoran; or rather Betharan, for Bethoran was on this side Jordan, in the tribe of Ephraim, and Betharan was on the other side of the river, in the tribe of Reuben. Joel prophesied in the kingdom of Judah; and it is the opinion of some critics that he did not appear there till after the removal of the ten tribes and the destruction of the kingdom of Israel. We do not know distinctly the year wherein he began to prophesy, nor that in which he died. He speaks of a great famine, and an inundation of locusts, which ravaged Judea; but as these are evils not uncommon in that country, and all sorts of events have not been registered in history, we can infer nothing from thence towards fixing the particular period of Joel's prophecy.

St. Jerome, followed by many others, both ancients and moderns, believed Joel to have been contemporary with Hosea, according to this rule laid down by him, that when there is no certain proof of the time wherein any prophet lived, we are to be directed in our conjectures by the time of the preceding prophet, whose epoch is better known. But this rule is not always certain, and should not hinder us from following another system, if we have good reason for doing so. The Hebrews maintain that Joel prophesied under Manasseh; and as collateral circumstances seem to preponderate in favor of this hypothesis, it has been accordingly followed in the margin. Under the idea of an enemy's army, the prophet represents a cloud of locusts, which in his time fell upon Judea, and caused great desolation. This, together with the caterpillars, and the drought, brought a terrible famine upon the land. God, being moved with the calamities and prayers of his people, scattered the locusts, and the wind blew them into the sea. These misfortunes were succeeded by plenty and fertility. After this, the prophet foretold the day of the Lord, and the vengeance he was to exercise in the valley of Jezreel. He speaks of the teacher of righteousness, whom God was to send; and of the Holy Spirit, which was to descend upon all flesh. He says that Jerusalem will be inhabited for ever; that salvation will come out from thence; and that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. All this relates to the new covenant, and the time of the Messiah. See Calmet.

Bishop Lowth observes that "the style of Joel differs much from that of Hosea; but, though of a different kind, is equally poetical. It is elegant, perspicuous, clear, diffusive, and flowing; and, at the same time, very sublime, nervous, and animated. He displays the whole power of poetic description in the first and second chapters; and, at the same time, his fondness for metaphors, comparisons, and allegories; nor is the connection of his subjects less remarkable than the graces of his diction. It is not to be denied that in some places he is very obscure; which every attentive reader will perceive, especially in the end of this prophecy." Prael. xxi.; and see Dodd. The two first chapters are inimitably beautiful; and the language, in force, and often in sound, well adapted to the subject. See the note on Joe 1:1 (note).

This and the beginning of the next chapter contain a double prophecy, applicable in its primary sense to a plague of locusts which was to devour the land, and to be accompanied with a severe drought and famine; and in its secondary sense it denotes the Chaldean invasion. Both senses must be admitted: for some of the expressions will apply only to the dearth by insects; others to the desolation by war. The contexture of both is beautiful and well conducted. In this chapter the distress of every order of people is strongly painted; and not only does the face of nature languish

when the God of nature is displeased, vv. 1-19; but the very beasts of the field, by a bold figure, are represented as supplicating God in their distress, and reproaching the stupidity of man, Joe 1:20.

Verse 1

The word of the Lord that came to Joel - See the introduction for some account of this prophet, whose history is very obscure. Bishop Newcome thinks that he prophesied while the kingdom of Judah subsisted, and refers to Joe 2:1, Joe 2:15, (see also Joe 1:14 (note), and the note there), but not long before its subversion as his words, Joe 3:1, seem to imply that its captivity was approaching. See 2Kgs 21:10-15. He therefore favors the conjecture of Drusius, that this prophet lived under Manasseh, and before his conversion, 2Chr 33:13; that is, some time from before Christ 697 to (suppose) 660.

JOEL 1: 2 Hear this, you elders, And listen, all you inhabitants of the land. Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?

Verse 2

Ye old men - Instead of הזקנים hazzekenim old men, a few MSS. have הכהנים hacchohanim, ye priests, but improperly.

Hath this been in your days - 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.

JOEL 1: 3 Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children, another generation.

Verse 3

Tell ye your children of it - 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.

JOEL 1: 4 What the swarming locust has left, the great locust has eaten. What the great locust has left, the grasshopper has eaten. What the grasshopper has left, the caterpillar has eaten.

Verse 4

That which the palmerworm hath left - Here he begins to open his message, and the words he chooses show that he is going to announce a devastation of the land by locusts, and a famine consequent on their depredations. What the different insects may be which he specifies is not easy to determine. I shall give the words of the original, with their etymology.

The palmerworm, גזם gazam, from the same root, to cut short; probably the caterpillar, or some such blight, from its cutting the leaves of the trees into pieces for its nourishment.

The locust, ארבה arbeh, from רבה rabah, to multiply, from the immense increase and multitude of this insect.

Cankerworm, ילק yelek, from לק lak, to lick or lap with the tongue; the reference is uncertain.

Caterpillar, חסיל chasil, from חסל chasal, to consume, to eat up, the consumer. Bishop Newcome translates the first grasshopper; the second, locust; the third, devouring locust; and the fourth, consuming locust. After all that has been said by interpreters concerning these four animals, I am fully of opinion that the arbeh, or locust himself, is the gazam, the yelek, and the chasil and that these different names are used here by the prophet to point out the locust in its different states, or progress from embryo to full growth. See the note on Joe 2:2 (note).

JOEL 1: 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

Verse 5

Awake, ye drunkards - 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.

JOEL 1: 6 For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number. His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a lioness.

Verse 6

A nation is come up upon my land - 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.

JOEL 1: 7 He has laid my vine waste, and stripped my fig tree. He has stripped its bark, and thrown it away. Its branches are made white.

Verse 7

He hath laid my vine waste - The locusts have eaten off both leaves and bark. חָשַׁף חָשַׁפָּה chasoph chasaphah, he hath made it clean bare; שָׁדַד שָׁדַד שָׁדָה suddad sadeh, the field is laid waste, Joe 1:10; and מִשְׁדֵי כֶסֶד מִשְׁדֵי kesod mishshaddai, a destruction from the Almighty, Joe 1:15; are all paronomasias in which this prophet seems to delight.

JOEL 1: 8 Mourn like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth!

Verse 8

Lament like a virgin - for the husband of her youth - Virgin is a very improper version here. The original is בְּתוּלָה bethulah, which signifies a young woman or bride not a virgin, the proper Hebrew for which is אַלְמָה almah. See the notes on Isa 7:14 (note), and Mat 1:23 (note).

JOEL 1: 9 The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from the LORD's house. The priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn.

Verse 9

The meat-offering and the drink-offering is cut off - The crops and the vines being destroyed by the locusts, the total devastation in plants, trees, corn, etc., is referred to and described with a striking variety of expression in this and the following verses.

JOEL 1: 10 The field is laid waste. The land mourns, for the grain is destroyed, The new wine has dried up, and the oil languishes.

JOEL 1: 11 Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers; for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field has perished.

JOEL 1: 12 The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all of the trees of the field are withered; for joy has withered away from the sons of men.

Verse 12

The vine is dried up - Dr. Shaw observes that in Barbary, in the month of June, the locusts collect themselves into compact bodies a furlong or more square, and march on, eating up every thing that is green or juicy, and letting nothing escape them, whether vegetables or trees.

They destroy the pomegranate, the palm, the apple, (תפוח tappuach, the citron tree), the vine, the fig, and every tree of the field. See the note on Joe 2:2 (note).

JOEL 1: 13 Put on sackcloth and mourn, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the meal offering and the drink offering are withheld from your God's house.

JOEL 1: 14 Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land, to the house of the LORD, your God, and cry to the LORD.

Verse 14

Call a solemn assembly - עצרה atsarrah signifies a time of restraint, as the margin has it. The clause should be translated - consecrate a fast, proclaim a time of restraint; that is, of total abstinence from food, and from all secular employment. All the elders of the land and the representatives of the people were to be collected at the temple to cry unto the Lord, to confess their sins, and pray for mercy. The temple was not yet destroyed. This prophecy was delivered before the captivity of Judah.

JOEL 1: 15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Verse 15

Alas for the day! - The Syriac repeats this, the Vulgate, Septuagint, and Arabic, thrice: "Alas, alas, alas, for the day!"

As a destruction from the Almighty - The destruction that is now coming is no ordinary calamity; it is as a signal judgment immediately inflicted by the Almighty.

JOEL 1: 16 Isn't the food cut off before our eyes; joy and gladness from the house of our God?

JOEL 1: 17 The seeds rot under their clods. The granaries are laid desolate. The barns are broken down, for the grain has withered.

Verse 17

The seed is rotten under their clods - When the sprout was cut off as low as possible by the locusts, there was no farther germination. The seed rotted away.

JOEL 1: 18 How the animals groan! The herds of livestock are perplexed, because they have no pasture. Yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

Verse 18

How do the beasts groan! - I really think that the neighing of horses, or braying of asses, is wonderfully expressed by the sound of the original: מה נאנחה בהמה mah Neenchah behemah, how do the horses neigh! how do the asses bray! בהמה behemah is a collective name for all domestic cattle, and those used in husbandry.

Cattle are perplexed - They are looking everywhere, and wandering about to find some grass, and know not which way to run.

JOEL 1: 19 The LORD, I cry to you, For the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field.

Verse 19

O Lord, to thee will I cry - Let this calamity come as it may, we have sinned, and should humble ourselves before God; and it is such a calamity as God alone can remove, therefore unto him must we cry.

The fire hath devoured the pastures - 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.

JOEL 1: 20 Yes, the animals of the field pant to you, for the water brooks have dried up, And the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Verse 20

The beasts of the field cry also unto thee - Even the cattle, wild and tame, are represented as supplicating God to have mercy upon them, and send them provender! There is a similar affecting description of the effects of a drought in Jeremiah, Jer 14:6.

The rivers of waters are dried up - There must have been a drought as well as a host of locusts; as some of these expressions seem to apply to the effects of intense heat.

For המדבר hammidbar, "the wilderness," one of my oldest MSS. reads מדבר midbar, "wilderness" simply, as in Jer 14:19. Eight or ten of Dr. Kennicott's have the same reading.