

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Joel**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

Over this series of lessons we have said the Bible is like a library. This means the books are arranged by topic. In addition, the beginning books are also in chronological order.

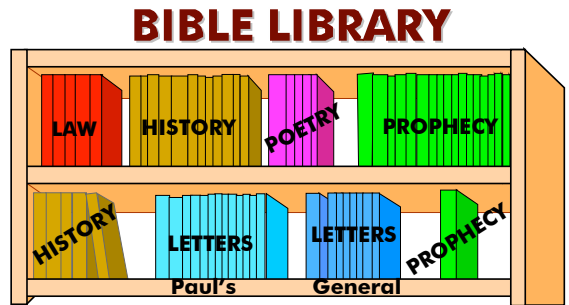
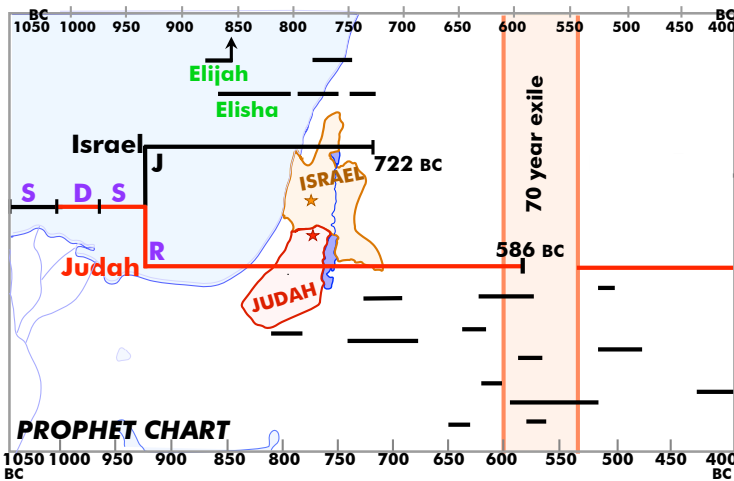
This is why we have taken *Genesis* thru *Samuel* in their normal order as we moved thru history.

*Kings* and *Chronicles* continued moving forward with the kingship of Solomon.

The rest of their chapters told about the civil war between **Israel** in the north and **Judah** in the south. They described the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, the first 2 prophets to the north.

After them, God sent other prophets, but they were never mentioned by name and no details were given about their ministries. All **that** information is in the books at the end of the Old Testament, the ones we call the books of the **PROPHETS**.

As you might guess, these books are not in chronological order. So in the rest of our lessons, we are going to take the books of the prophets, one by one and put them where they fit in history.



Besides **ELIJAH** and **ELISHA**, there will be **ten** more prophets that fit during the 344 years of the civil war.

There will be **three** prophets that start their ministry during the 70 years of exile in Babylonia.

**Three** others prophets will be in Judah after the exiles return.

## PROPHETS

**Their description** - we need to start with a definition and general background.

The word *prophet* means *someone who speaks for another*.

In the days of the Old Testament, all religious groups had men and women who spoke on behalf of their deity.

For example, the Bible refers to the *prophets of Baal*.

In the history of the Jews,

**Moses** and his sister **Miriam** were the first **PROPHETS**. They **represented God to the people**.

**Aaron**, their brother, was **PRIEST** - he **represented the people to God**.

These are the 2 most important roles in Jewish Old Testament society –

the *prophet* who represents God to the people and the *priest*, who represents the people to God.

From Scripture, it appears that originally God wanted both roles to come from the tribe of Levi.

They would not only help the people in worship, but also in obedience.

However the Levites as a group did not remain faithful to God.

So while the priesthood stayed in the tribe of Levi,

God opened the role of *prophet* to men and women from any of the tribes.

Early on, they began their ministry with no formal preparation - they were taught by God or another prophet. However, after Samuel, the majority were trained at the seminaries which were started by Samuel

The Bible uses 2 other titles to describe them.

Sometimes they are called **seers**. It can also be pronounced *see-ers*. It means they see things from God's perspective. They are not deceived by outward appearance because they can see inside the situation or person. In other words, they have spiritual **insight**.

Prophets are also called **men or women of God** meaning they are totally devoted to God. Because they know God and have companionship with Him, they can be trusted to speak God's words.

How they were chosen

Ministries in the tribe of Levi passed from father to son.

If the father was a priest, the son became a priest.

If the father was a temple musician, this is what the son would do.

But this was not true of the **prophets**. They did not inherit their ministry.

A prophet had to be individually, personally called by God.

### Their message

The prophets' message was only 5% about the future. Ninety-five percent was about the present.

Prophets taught about God Himself, explained His rules and told the people how to apply His rules to their lives.

They encouraged obedience and rebuked disobedience.

### Their assignment

The prophets were sent only to God's people.

There is one exception when a prophet spent 6 weeks of his life talking to pagans.

But the rest of his ministry was to God's people.

This describes Jewish prophets in general.

### SPECIAL PROPHETS – those who wrote books of our Bible

In addition, there was a special group of prophets who were chosen not just to speak about these things, but also to write them down. In the rest of the lessons, when we use the word **prophet**, we mean those who received direct and **new** revelation from God which then became part of Scripture.

This is important because today there are people who say they are **prophets**.

They say they are speaking or writing for God. But these prophets can only speak or confirm what God has already said. There is no **new** revelation that can be added to Scripture or made equal to Scripture. Everything prophets say today must agree with Scripture.

But in the days of the Old Testament, Scripture was being formed. The prophets we are studying wrote **17** books that became part of our Bible.

Joel is one of these prophets and writes the book named after him. Because he is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and no king is mentioned in his book, it is difficult to know when he lived.

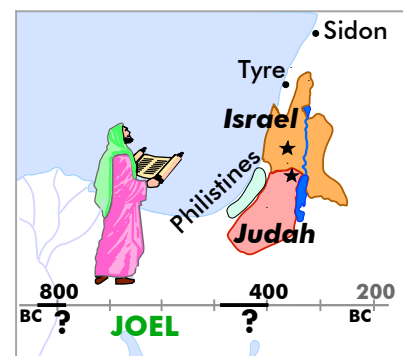
Some scholars date him in the 800's – others suggest the 400's BC.

Over the years I have found that when there is a question of dates, it helps to look for the enemies that are mentioned in the book. Then find out **when** they were enemies of the Jews and **when** in history they were destroyed or conquered.

Joel says that in his day, the Philistines as well as Tyre and Sidon are their enemies. From Scripture and history we know these were the enemies of the Jews during the **800's**. By the 400's, they had either been destroyed or conquered and the Persians had become the enemy of the Jews.

So based on history and the enemies mentioned, Joel lived during the 800's BC. This makes him a contemporary of Elisha. However they would not have known each other because Elisha was a prophet only to **Israel** in the north. Joel is a prophet only to **Judah** in the south.

Joel's ministry is from 814 - 789 BC - a period of some 25 years.



The **PURPOSE** of his book is to explain Judah's condition in the **present** and reveal God's judgments in the **future**.

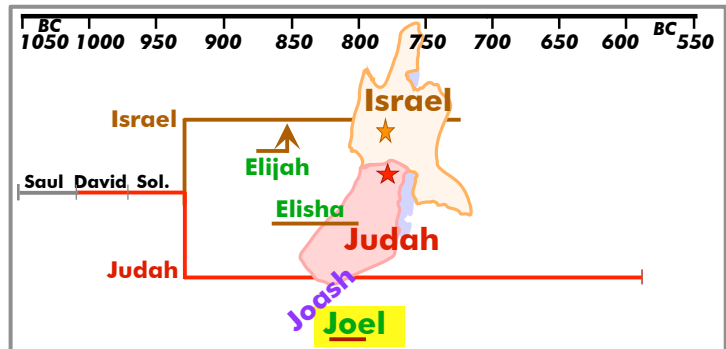
<b>OUTLINE</b>	Present conditions 1
	Divine answers 2-3

In the southern nation of Judah, king number 8 is a man named **JOASH**. (835-796 BC) He is made king when he is just 7 years old. Because he is not old enough to be a leader, his guardian uncle rules the nation for him. This uncle is also the high priest in the Temple in Jerusalem.

When Joash becomes old enough, he takes over as king. He follows God as long as his uncle, the high priest, is living.

When his uncle dies, Joash and the people turn from God. 2 Chronicles 24 gives the background.

*After the death of Jehoiada - the high priest - the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king - Joash - and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their father and worshipped Asherah poles and idols. (This was both idolatry and immorality.) Because of their guilt, God's anger - God's response came upon Judah and Jerusalem. Altho the Lord sent **prophets** to the people to bring them back to Him and tho they testified against them, they - the people - would not listen. 24:17-19*



The verse says because God's people rebelled, He sent prophets. The prophets are not named, but based on the context, I believe that **Joel** is one of these prophets.

He started his ministry 4 years before the high priest's death, when the nation was still following God. (814 BC.)

After the priest's death, 810 BC, Joel would have encouraged the people to continue their obedience.

Then as he saw the people going down the road of disobedience, he would have started to warn them.

Because God is patient, Joel probably spent the next 5-8 years speaking out against their rebellion. But when the people refused to listen, God had to respond. He has to send consequences for their choice to rebel.

Chronicles does not say what He did. But according to Joel 1:4, God's response in Judah was to send a locust plague.

Most of us have never experienced a locust plague. So let's take a few moments to learn about locust and what a plague is like.

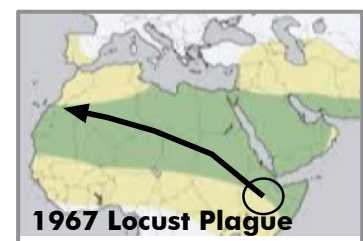
Locust are green grasshoppers. In dry years, when vegetation is scarce, they look for food by themselves, travel short distances, have limited breeding and only a few of their eggs hatch. However, if there are heavy rains, a very different cycle begins.

The rains cause all the eggs to hatch and there is a population explosion. This produces crowding. Both the adults and newly hatched become nervous and irritable, constantly touching each other. Within 2 hours, their metabolic rate increases and their color changes from green to yellow, black and red. Then within a few weeks they grow longer wings, broader shoulders and a larger head. Instead of wanting to live alone, they now band together like an army and travel in large, organized groups.



Because they cannot fly until their bodies reach 70° F. they stop for the night and wait until the next morning when the sun warms their bodies. Then with their double set of wings, they fly with the air currents at about 10 miles an hour, for as long as 12 hours. Within 8 months, locust can travel 2000 miles.

In 1967 a plague started in Ethiopia and 9 months later were in Morocco, 3000 miles away. In 2004, 3 swarms of red locust started in north Africa, moved north to Cyprus and then on to Lebanon.

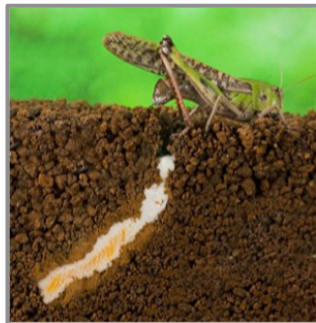


Locust flying together are called a swarm. It can be as small as 1-2 square miles or it can be big like in Somalia. In 1958, one swarm measured 400 square miles and contained 40 billion locust. A bad plague can last four days, bringing swarm upon swarm thru the same area. In 1978, Ethiopia experienced 33 swarms ranging in size from 5 to 40 square miles.



These swarms can be so thick they block out the light of the sun, moon or stars. The sound of a swarm flying can be heard 6 miles away.

Every day 1 swarm can travel 100 miles and eat 80,000 tons of vegetation. When this involves crops, one swarm eats in one day what a million people eat in one year.



Depending on food and temperature, the life span of locust is 4 to 12 months. During the last weeks of life, each of the females deposits eggs in 3 different places - about 70 eggs each time. The problem is that in each place, **all** the females lay their eggs in the same sandy moist area covering several acres. This means that during a plague, there can be 5000 eggs to the square foot. If the moisture is right the *next* season, every egg hatches. Several acres - 5000 eggs per square foot. That is a lot of locust!



After hatching, but before the locust can fly, they are called hoppers. Because of the crowding - 5000 to the square foot - these *newly born* are constantly touching each other. Within two hours they become the terrible locust instead of the harmless grasshoppers. Within a few days this *new* generation is ready to fly.

During their trip they will shed their skin five times before reaching adulthood. **They** will cover up to 2000 miles, with the females laying eggs in three **new** locations. The next season, if there are heavy rains, the plague will continue. If the season is dry, the plague will end and there will only be a few harmless grasshoppers. This is what happens in a locust plague.



Joel uses chapter 1 to review the locust plague **they** just been thru, so everyone remembers how bad it was. He also wants future generations to know what happened and be convinced that rebellion against God brings consequences.

In verse 4, the prophet uses 4 different Hebrew words to refer to the locust. If he is referring to 4 different swarms, the plague lasted about 4 days. But, if he means 4 stages in their development, the plague lasted from 2 – 6 months.

In verse 7 he says, *It, the locust, has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.*

This is literal. After eating all the vegetation, the locust, with their saw-like teeth, begin to work on the bark of trees. Bark that is left falls off, the trees die and eventually turn white.



Everybody and everything had been hurt by the plague.

The drunkards had no wine. 1:5

The farmers had no crops. 1:11

The priests had no food. 1:9

Their food came from the meat, grain, fruit and vegetables that people gave in their offerings. But with the locust, the people had no crops, so the priests had no food.

Even the animals were suffering

*How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture; **even** the flocks of sheep are suffering.* 1:18

Sheep can always find food in dry areas. So when sheep are suffering, it means the conditions are extreme.

The locust plague had been bad enough, but with it came other problems. Once the vegetation was destroyed, there was lack of moisture which brought a drought. Joel says in verse 19, *fire has devoured the open pastures*. This was not a literal fire, but a description of scorched fields devastated by the locust and drought.

With a disaster like this, people in Judah began to ask, *Why did God let this happen to us?* So in chapters 2 - 3, Joel gives them God's answers. He is speaking from Jerusalem, the capital of the southern nation.



He begins chapter 2 by describing a coming judgment, pictured as another locust plague. To make it more real, Joel describes it as tho it were already there. He describes how the locust sound as the swarm approaches. He tells about the effect it will have.

For example, in 2:10, he says,

*Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.*

This is not to be taken literally. Locust do not produce earthquakes. But when locust are flying all around you and everything is moving, you lose your balance and have the illusion the earth itself is moving beneath you.

The sun, moon and stars are not literally darkened. It means the locust swarm will be so thick it will block out the light of the sun, moon or stars. In the warm summer, locust are able to fly at night as well as during the day as long as their bodies remain over 70°.

We cannot be sure whether these verses are talking about another literal locust plague, or whether it is picture language to describe an army of people that will come. These verses can be read with either meaning. Often that means both are true. Joel is telling them, *Judgment in the future is going to be far worse than the locust plague we just experienced.*

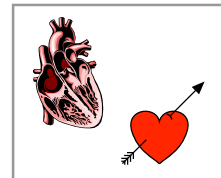
**But**, we do **not** have to go thru this future judgment. There is a way to escape it.

2:12 *Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with **all** your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments.*

In the Middle East, people did a variety of things to show they were feeling grief and deep emotion. They ripped their outer coat, put ashes on their head, fasted, wept or openly mourned. But sometimes it was only done to impress people. God thru Joel says, *Using **outward** signs to show your emotion is fine, but what I really want is an **inward** change. Rend your heart and not just your garments.*

In our culture, the word *heart* refers to

the literal muscle that pumps blood thruout the body  
or it is picture language for emotion and feeling.

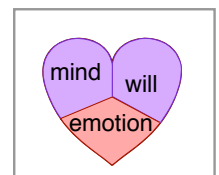


In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *heart* means

*you as a complete person –*

it includes the **emotions**, but the emphasis is on the **mind and will**.

So when God says, *Tear your heart and not just your garments*, He is talking about their mind and will. *Use your mind and will to tear out your stubbornness, rebellion and arrogance. Then I can forgive and bring blessing into your life.*



To help them take this action, Joel reminds them of what God is like.

*Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and He relents from sending calamity.* 2:13

The Hebrew phrase *slow to anger* is literally *long tempered*.

When they come back to God, He will not fly off the handle or jump on them for the things they have done.

*He abounds in steadfast love. He relents from sending calamity.*

Older Bible translations say, *He repents of evil*. There are two major errors in that translation.

First of all, God cannot repent of evil, because there is nothing evil in Him.

Secondly, because He is perfect, He cannot repent of anything He has done wrong.

That phrase should be crossed out, because it is a complete misunderstanding of the Jewish phrase.

*He relents from sending calamity* in simple English means, *He stops sending the punishment or consequences*.

But there is a condition. He can only stop when His people have **repented**.

If God's people shake their fist at God and say they want to do things their way,

God has to send consequences.

But if His people change their mind - they accept His boundaries and obey,

God is free to stop the punishment.

**He changes His actions towards people when they change their attitude towards Him.**

In Joel's day, if the people repent, then in place of judgment, they will have God's blessings.

Starting in 2:18, Joel uses the rest of the book to describe them.

**The first blessing:** *I will remove or drive the northern army from you.* 2:20.

This refers either to the locust or human army which would come from the north. Whether it was one or both, God promises to remove them if the people turn back to Him.

**The second blessing:** God promises to restore the vegetation and crops and will send rain. 2:22 - 24

**The third blessing:** the promise of the Holy Spirit. 2:28

The Jews in the Old Testament had the prophets and their sacred writings to help them obey God. The Holy Spirit did not live inside of them. He only came over them to help them in ministry and then left. If they disobeyed, the Holy Spirit left immediately.

God says that in the future He will bless them by sending His Spirit to live inside them so it will be easier to obey and understand what God wants. This part of the promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit came to permanently live inside everyone who puts their faith in Jesus.

- ✿ He is the One who teaches us, guides us and gives us comfort.
- ✿ He makes spiritual things come alive for us.
- ✿ He convicts us when we do wrong.
- ✿ He reminds us to obey and then gives us a desire to obey.
- ✿ He even goes a step further; He gives us the power to obey.

The New Testament tells us it is both God the Father and Jesus who have sent the Holy Spirit to us. What a special blessing to have the Holy Spirit in our lives. His ministry is absolutely crucial. Joel is the prophet who first describes this ministry.

In chapter 2 Joel has said if the people repent, God will bless them by...

... removing the coming locust or army.

... restoring their vegetation and crops.

... In the future, sending the Holy Spirit to live inside everyone who puts their faith in Jesus.

**The fourth blessing:** *God will judge the nations.* 3:12

If Judah responds, she will escape.

It will be her enemies, the nations around her that God will judge.

**The fifth blessing:** *God promises to dwell in Jerusalem and Judah will have peace* in that generation. 3:17 - 18

The ultimate peace will be the time of God's Kingdom in the future.

When Joel talks about God's **judgment**,

He begins with the judgment of the locust plague they just experienced

He then talks about a future judgment that would be like a locust plague. He called it the **Day of the Lord**.

This is the **THEME** of Joel's book – the **Day of the Lord**.

He describes it in chapters one and two

1:15 *What a dreadful day! For the **day of the Lord** is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.*

2:1 *Blow the trumpet in Zion - meaning Jerusalem - sound the alarm on My holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the **day of the Lord** is coming. It is close at hand. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and blackness.*

2:11 *The Lord thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command. The **day of the Lord** is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?*

2:31 *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood **before** the coming of the great and dreadful **day of the Lord**.*

The **DAY OF THE LORD** is **God's response to evil and injustice**.

It has to do with judgment, dread and destruction.

In the New Testament it is called **Day of Wrath**.

Altho it is called **Day**, it does **not** mean a literal 24 hours.

Typical of Jewish prophecy, there is a limited meaning for the people in Joel's day and a full meaning for the distant future.

#### **LIMITED MEANING**

**Day of the Lord** in its limited meaning is any time period when God brought judgment on the Jews because of their disobedience and rebellion. It would apply to any serious defeat from their enemies in Joel's day.

This actually happened, which is why Joel could say it was near at hand. At first Joel's message caused some of the people to temporarily respond. But within 3 years the sin in Judah was so great, that the son of Jehoiada, the high priest, said God's judgment was coming. Instead of listening, king Joash had him killed on the Temple grounds. Within just a few months, God sent an army from Syria in the north who completely defeated them. King Joash was wounded and weeks later his own officials killed him. For the nation of Judah, the attack and defeat by the northern army was a partial fulfillment of the **Day of the Lord** in its **limited** sense.

Joel is saying to those of **his day**,

*As God's people, if you keep rejecting God, there will be a **Day of the Lord** judgment far worse than the locust plague you just went thru.*

#### **FUTURE MEANING**

From other parts of Scripture we know the **Day of the Lord** also has a *future* and *greater* meaning.

It is another name for **Satan's kingdom**, commonly known as the **Tribulation** that will last for 7 years.

Many of the Old and New Testament writers use this phrase to refer to the future.

Joel is saying that in the **distant future**, before God sets up **His** kingdom, He will send world-wide judgment called the **Day of the Lord**.

It will bring an end to injustice and evil.

Those who have refused Jesus will experience His judgment and be eternally separated from Him.

Those who have accepted Jesus' payment will have peace and forever live in His presence.

Chronologically, Joel is the first prophet to talk about the **Day of the Lord** and about God's Kingdom.

Joel is a small book but it covers a lot of time. It deals with both the **past** and the **future**.

It tells about judgment and blessing for the Jews in the 800's BC

It also tells about judgment and blessing at the end of this age.

But Joel also has a message for us in the **present**.

Some people never learned about God until later in life. Then they realize how many years they wasted.

Some of God's people made bad choices that ate away at their potential. They never found healing from abuse, injustice or great tragedy.

Some have lived a spiritual life full of duty rather than one of joy and enjoyment.

How often we as God's people have thought, *if only I could change the past.*

This is when God comes with one of the most beautiful promises in all of Scripture,

*I will restore to you the years the locust have eaten.* Joel 2:25

When God said that to the Jews, He was speaking of the physical, literal situation.

*Last year's crops cannot be recovered; the locust have eaten them. But if you turn to Me now, this year's crops will be doubled. It will be as tho you have both this year's and last year's harvest. I will make it up to you.*

On a spiritual level, God tells us, *You cannot change past decisions. You cannot undo what others did to you. But if you choose to obey Me now, I will give you double opportunities and experiences. I will give you double joy to make up for all the years of sorrow.*

God can take the negative and curses of the past and change them into blessing.

No matter our age, out of heartache can come a new beginning. There can be new opportunities for ...

...spiritual ministry;

...opportunities to reach our potential

...to enjoy companionship with God and

...to experience His life in us and thru us.

God is saying,

***I will restore to **you** the years the locust have eaten.***

#### **EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE**

**Day of God** in 2 Peter 3:12 is talking about a different time period. It is the time after the Millennium.

It is not the same as **Day of the Lord**.

#### Chronology BC

814 Joel begins his ministry 4 years before Jehoiada, the high priest, died (810)

805 – 800 Joel began warning about idolatry / immorality

800 the locust plague and Joel's message of Divine answers – temporary response

797 3 years later Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, who is also a priest, rebukes the people for their sin.

In response, Joash the king commands that he be killed on the Temple grounds.

God's response is to send an army from Syria in the north, who badly defeats them.

King Joash is wounded

Within weeks, his officials kill him for what he did to Jehoiada's son.