

and Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 6, 8, 16-20), and it is most likely that he was from the Southern Kingdom. Joel has an innate knowledge of the Temple and its services, which has led some to conclude that he was somehow involved with the priesthood.² The Book of Joel can be a confusing text, even though it includes standard prophetic elements of the need for repentance, the judgment of God, and promised restoration.

There is difficulty with dating the Book of Joel because no contemporary events are mentioned,³ and it is likely to remain the most controversial issue regarding its composition.⁴ While Joel is placed second among the Twelve Prophets in the Jewish order of the Tanach, the Septuagint places it fourth after Micah, indicating some uncertainty as to when Joel prophesied.⁵

Among conservatives, a broad dating of the Seventh-Fifth Centuries B.C.E. is often assumed. Some place Joel's prophetic ministry during the reign of King Uzziah,⁶ with some even placing him earlier in the Ninth Century. Proposals across the spectrum for Joel's composition often range over a 500 year period.⁷

Those leaning toward an earlier date for Joel note the mention of Ancient Israel's more ancient enemies of the Philistines and the Phoenicians (3:4), and Egypt and Edom (3:19), when compared to the later enemies of Assyria and Babylon. Likewise, it is believed that Amos may have been acquainted with Joel's prophecies (3:16; cf. Amos 1:1; 3:18). Conservatives often favor an earlier dating for Joel,⁸ noting "there is no single element of the thought of Joel that is incompatible with a pre-exilic date for the prophecy" (Harrison).⁹ Regardless of where Joel specifically falls within this paradigm, it should not affect our overall understanding of the text.

Liberals examining the Book of Joel feel that he is interpreting contemporary events of his time, using unique symbology,¹⁰ perhaps borrowing from other prophets. Many Jewish and Christian interpreters over the centuries have followed a similar style.¹¹ Liberals tend to favor a post-exilic, Fifth Century or later composition for Joel, dating Joel at the earliest to the time of the Persians.¹² They make note of the reference to the Greeks (3:6), and assume that Ancient Israel did not have contact with them prior to the Fifth-Fourth Centuries B.C.E.¹³ In the past, liberals have doubted the authenticity of any of Joel's prophecies.¹⁴ Surprisingly,

² H.G.M. Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1076; Theodore Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:878.

³ Ehud ben Zvi, "Joel," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1166.

⁴ Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1077; Patterson, in *EXP*, 7:231-233; Dillard and Longman, pp 365-367.

⁵ Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:879; Gelston, in *ECB*, 686.

⁶ Patterson, in *EXP*, 7:229-230.

⁷ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 876-877; Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1078; John G. Graybill, "Joel, Book of," in *NIDB*, 530; Ronald A. Simkins, "Joel, Book of," in *EDB*, 720.

⁸ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 877.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 878.

¹⁰ W. Neil, "Joel, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:927; Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1077; Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:878-879; James L. Crenshaw, "Joel," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1271.

¹¹ Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1079.

¹² Neil, "Joel, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:928; ben Zvi, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1166.

¹³ Neil, "Joel, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:926.

¹⁴ Patterson, in *EXP*, 7:230.

though, a fair number today do hold to some kind of unified authorship/composition for Joel, and do not advocate that multiple sources were used for the text,¹⁵ although some still do feel that a few of Joel's visions were added later.¹⁶

Some similarities in language are present with the other Prophets, which causes some to believe that Joel is a later text and borrowed from Prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, or Malachi.¹⁷ However, the argument could equally be made that these Prophets borrowed from Joel. The Hebrew MT of Joel is in relatively good condition, with textual witnesses present among the DSS at Qumran.¹⁸ The major difference between the MT and LXX textual witnesses is the latter's division of Joel into three, rather than four chapters.¹⁹ Christian Bibles today divide Joel into three chapters, whereas Jewish Bibles divide it into four.

The Prophet Joel emphasizes a series of physical plagues that will herald "the day of the LORD" (2:31). The first part of this judgment is seen in a series of natural catastrophes (1:1-2:27), with the second part seen with God's judgment upon foreign peoples (2:28-3:21). Joel calls on Judah to turn to God in repentance. An invading army will come (2:1-10) culminating in a final battle (ch. 3). God's Spirit will be poured out (2:28). After this judgment is concluded, a period of restoration will ensue.²⁰

The only specific reference to the Prophet Joel outside of the Book of Joel is in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:16-17). Luke interprets the events of *Shavuot*/Pentecost as involving some kind of fulfillment of Joel's prophecies.²¹ Joel's message of God's salvation helped fuel the expanse of the gospel message during the First Century.²²

The Book of Joel also has some important liturgical properties.²³ In some Jewish traditions (Ashkenazi, Conservative) the Book of Joel is considered on *Shabbat Shuvah*, or the Sabbath between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* during the Ten Days of Awe.²⁴

As things currently stand, there is not a great deal of Messianic engagement with the Book of Joel, aside from a few isolated verses here or there.

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¹⁵ Neil, "Joel, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:927; Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1079; Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:873-874.

¹⁶ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 875; Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:879.

¹⁷ Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:879.

¹⁸ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 881; Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:879.

¹⁹ Patterson, in *EXP*, 7:235.

²⁰ Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1076-1077; Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:876-878; Ronald A. Simkins, "Joel, Book of," in *EDB*, 720.

²¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 881; Graybill, "Joel, Book of," in *NIDB*, 531.

²² Williamson, "Joel," in *ISBE*, 2:1080; Dillard and Longman, pp 370-371.

²³ Dillard and Longman, 368.

²⁴ ben Zvi, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1167.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON JOEL:

- 1. How significant do you think it is for Joel to first describe swarms used to judge God's people (1:6), only later to use the same symbology to describe His own army (2:11)?**
- 2. How do Yeshua (2:10; cf. Matthew 24:29) and Peter (2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:17-21) both appropriate and apply themes of the Day of the LORD as detailed by Joel?**
- 3. What is the overarching promise delivered by God to Judah seen in the Book of Joel?**
- 4. Do you believe today's Messianic community takes the message and themes of Joel seriously?**

REFLECTION ON JOEL'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Joel: