



*The prophet Joel used a common imagery of a locust plague to drive his point home.*  
[READ EX. 10:12-15]  
We now jump forward about 1400 years to Joel's time.

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[READ JOEL 1:1-4]

**Who & When??**---This prophet's name was Joel, meaning "Yahweh is God," but little is known about him. We don't even know when he prophesized. Estimates vary between 850 B.C. and 200 B.C. Many theologians and scholars believe that he wrote this work in about 785 B.C., during King Uzziah's reign of Judah. This was a very wealthy period for both Israel and Judah, one in which worldliness would seem to take favor over worshipping Yahweh.

**BUT**

Most theologians and historians now believe Joel wrote his prophecy around 400 B.C. because of the following:

- Israel and Judah are now considered one nation (2:27)
- The monarchy has disappeared;  
the nation is now led by priests and elders (2:16-17)
- Many of the people are scattered in exile (3:2-3)
- A Greek (not Assyrian) slave trade is mentioned (3:6)
- The Temple is still standing and fully functional (1:13-14).

"All this points to the period after the Exile, when the worship of the restored Temple had become the lifeblood of the people, when **formalism in ritual** had taken the place of moral issues as the main concern of a prophet." (2:12-14)<sup>1</sup>

[READ JOEL 1:8-9]

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<sup>1</sup> *Interpreter's*, Vol. 2. "Joel, Book of," pg. 928. If Joel prophesized in today's society, what do you think he would consider "formalism in ritual" when it comes to worship??



**Joel's prophecies** can be divided into two sections:



Denver, 1875

[Chapters 1:1-2:27](#) reminds the people of how terrible and tragic a locust plague can be. The Day of the Lord will be equally as terrifying. Some commentators (e.g., Patterson) believe that Joel's scoldings and warnings are coming on the heels of an actual locust plague. Others, including the ancient church fathers, view the locust invasion as an allegory, with the locusts symbolizing the powers of darkness threatening the church.

The consensus today is that Joel is describing an actual gigantic locust swarm. It must have been a horrifying event for Judah and beyond.

**[READ 1:10-12]**

[Chapters 2:28-3:21](#) are almost totally eschatological. God has used a natural event to warn of what lies ahead if his people pursue their same path. It has a strong apocalyptic tint, similar to that found in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation.

**Why** was he prophesizing? Joel used a well-known tragic theme-- that of a recent locust invasion—to drive his point home. It's almost like Joel is saying, "If you think this locust plague is bad, wait until enemy warriors swarm our land." For emphasis Joel used a classical and logical form of writing to speak out against the people's complacency. He saw Judah's enemies—the Phoenicians, the Philistines, the Egyptians, and Edomites (Joel 3:4,19)---all set to invade, and yet, the population didn't seem to care. They were either content in their own pleasures or misguided to think that Yahweh would protect them, no matter what!

Any strong enemy nation that invaded Israel would cause death and destruction, crushing Israel's economy, just as a locust swarm would do. More importantly, the sacrificial offerings to God would be halted: this was the central feature of their faith!

Joel calls on his people to repent. **[READ 1:13-15]**

- "Day of the Lord" is often used by OT prophets like Joel. It refers to any time that the Lord openly intervenes in the affairs of humans. Joel graphically describes the locust invasion:

**[READ 2:4-9]**

- "Urgently the prophet summoned the people to a great fast, perhaps in connection with the festival of the New Year in the autumn, for repentance and lamentation."<sup>2</sup> **[READ 2:12-14]**

{Joel talking to God} "Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (2:17b)

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, pg. 488.

God takes pity on his land and people (2:18), and rids the land of the locusts (2:20). He promises that things will be as they were before, if not better. [READ 2:23-24]  
**“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

3:1-3---After he delivers his people from this calamity God will call all nations to be judged in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This valley’s name in Hebrew means “valley of decision.” The intent of this text is symbolic rather than geographical.<sup>3</sup>



### grasshopper ≠ locust

Locusts form swarms when they fly. Being able to fly allows them to invade distant regions. Some swarms can travel up to 1200 miles, eating almost all vegetation (alive or dead) in their path. Large swarms consume up to 200 tons per day.<sup>4</sup> These are known as desert locust, which originate in the Sudan region.



Even today, locust swarms continue to devastate large regions of the globe, mostly in Africa, but also in China and Australia. (North America has not had a locust plague in over a century.) “Desert locusts [the most destructive locust species] affect 20 percent of the world’s land surface.”<sup>5</sup> Though modern insecticides are somewhat

<sup>3</sup> *Interpreter’s*, “Jehoshaphat, Valley of,” pg. 816.

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, “How can we control locust swarms?” Nov. 11, 2015.  
<https://www.weforum.org>

<sup>5</sup> LiveScience.com, “Grasshoppers vs. Locusts: What Makes a Swarm?” by Robert Roy Britt, June 29, 2009. <https://www.livescience.com>

effective, the environmental risk is great. In Joel's time, there were only three ways to rid the country of locust plagues:

- Pray for very hot temperatures of at least 120°F;
- or for very low temperatures, lower than 41°F;
- or allow the land to be entirely stripped of vegetation, forcing the insects to move on.

## Works Cited

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