

Who was Joel in the Bible?

Joel was an Old Testament prophet. His name means “The Lord is God” and is still in common use today. Joel is considered a minor prophet alongside Hosea, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Jonah, Micah, Malachi, and some others. These prophets are seen as minor not because they are less important but because their books are shorter. In the Hebrew Bible, they are grouped together in a book called The Twelve.

Joel the prophet is not the only biblical character bearing this name. Other Joels include one of Samuel’s sons (1 Samuel 8:2), a descendant of Reuben (1 Chronicles 5:4,8), a Levite of the Gershon family (1 Chronicles 15:7, 11), and a mighty warrior under David’s rule (1 Chronicles 11:38). However, Bible readers usually associate the name with the prophet.

Joel wrote the book of Joel probably between 835 and 800 BC. Little is known about the prophet himself, except that he was the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1). He might have lived during the days of Uzziah the king, alongside Amos and Isaiah.

The book of Joel has only three chapters. The style is poetic, complete with metaphors and other poetic tools. However, it is intended to be a prophetic document. Peter quoted one of its famous passages on the day of Pentecost: “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2:16-18).

Other notable words of Joel include the following:

Joel 1:4: “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.”

Joel 2:25: “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you.”

Joel wrote his book during a tragic period in Judah’s history. Locusts had attacked the land, leaving destruction in their wake. This is evident in Joel 1:2: “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 ancestors?”

The book of Joel can be divided into two parts. The first part encompasses chapters 1 and 2a. Using the locust attack as a metaphor, Joel writes of an impending human attack and emphasizes the need for repentance. In the second part of Joel’s book, the focus shifts to a promise of restoration and the outpouring of the Spirit.

The book of Joel explores themes like God’s wrath and judgment—tagged the Day of the Lord—repentance, and restoration. These themes enrich our understanding of God’s nature and point to Christ’s work of salvation. Through Christ, God intends to restore all things (Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:5). Joel’s prophecy also serves as a reminder of the ultimate day of the Lord when God will judge all mankind (2 Peter 3:10).