

1. The Book of Joel is both controversial and significant. On the one hand, its interpretation is hotly disputed.
2. Some hold that the major theme of the book is simply a locust plague that spread through Judah.
3. Others write that Joel recognized the locust plague as a sign, the beginning of a conquest by a human army, and further end time events.
4. The date of the book is also uncertain. Some even debate its unity. Some interpreters, in fact, consider it impossible that the author of chapter 1 also wrote chapter 3.
5. There is also wide disagreement about the date of Joel's prophecy. Some suggest that he prophesied during the last seven years of Zedekiah's reign - the last seven years of the kingdom of Judah.
6. If so - Joel would have been contemporary with Ezekiel and Jeremiah.
7. Others suggest that he prophesied during the reign of Uzziah or even as early as the days of Elisha.
8. The Hebrew Canon and the Septuagint group Joel with the earlier (pre-exilic) prophets.
9. The book of Joel mentions no king - but neither does Nahum, Micah, or Habakkuk.
10. Joel also does not mention idolatry - which both kingdoms were involved in. Joel spoke almost exclusively to Judah.
11. Joel draws in three chapters a very detailed picture of how the prophets presented and understood judgment, apocalyptic events, and the future of the people of God.
12. However - Joel is among the most important books of the prophets.
13. The book simply opens with; "word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel." Although we know little about him, it is apparent that he was a prophet of Jerusalem.
14. The Book of Joel has four chapters in the Hebrew text. The English translation (2:28-32) constitutes the Hebrew chapter 3, and the English chapter 3 constitutes the Hebrew chapter 4.
15. The English chapter divisions follow that of the Latin Vulgate.
16. In Joel it is a given that all of the covenant between God and Israel will be fulfilled. Beginning with the situation that Israel itself faces judgment for failing to keep the covenant. (Deut. 28:15)
17. The ultimate judgment would be military conquest at the hands of a foreign enemy, captivity and eventually exile. Judgment begins with God's own people.

18. But the covenant also implies both the compassion of God and the ultimate restoration of Israel. (Deuteronomy 32:36, 43)
19. God is merciful, and when His people call on Him, He is “compassionate and gracious” and “slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”
20. This was the basis for Joel’s hope that repentance will result in deliverance. (Joel 2:13)
21. In addition, Israel is the “apple of the eye” of God. (Deuteronomy 32:10)
22. Gentiles who mock or attack Israel will experience the same and worse; God will heap their atrocities back upon their own heads. (Joel 3:4–8; Obadiah 10–16; Nahum 1:15)
23. In the end God will show that He is Israel’s God by bringing the whole world into judgment and allowing for no place of safety except Zion. (Joel 3:19–21)
24. The day of the Lord dominates the Book of Joel. Every major event of Joel is treated as the day of the Lord.
25. The “day of the LORD” refers to a decisive action of God to bring His plans for Israel to completion.
26. This action may be an act of punishment or of salvation for Israel, but in either case it carries forward the purposes of God.
27. The prophet opened his message with an appeal to all who were living in the land, headed by the elders, to consider the disaster which had come on them. (Joel 1:1-3)
28. The elders were civil leaders who played a prominent part in the governmental and judicial systems.
29. The rhetorical question in Joel 1:2b anticipates a negative response.
30. Nothing in the experience of Joel’s generation or that of their ancestors was able to match the magnitude of this recent locust plague - and this unique event would be spoken of throughout coming generations.