

JOEL

The Man: Little is known about Joel, son of Pethuel. He shows great familiarity with the Jewish liturgy and appears devoted to the sanctuary, leading some to suggest he may have been a temple prophet or even a priest.

The Times: The Israelites are gathered around Jerusalem, worshipping at the restored Temple; Alexander the Great has not yet come upon the scene (336 B.C.). It is the first part of the 4th Century, c. 400-350 B.C. A terrible locust invasion has ravaged Judah. Joel sees it as a symbol of the coming day of the Lord.

The Message: The first two chapters focus on the locust plague, during which Joel calls upon the people to repent and pray to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord responds with a promise not only of ending the plague and bringing peace and prosperity, but also of an outpouring of the spirit on all people. The next two chapters expand on the experience of the plague to develop its eschatological significance, anticipating the defeat of the nations and the final salvation of Jerusalem at the hand of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will bring restoration to God's People, but utter destruction to their enemies.

Prophetic Themes in Joel

Authority: "The word of the Lord which came to Joel ..." [1:1] "...even now, says the Lord ..." [2:12] "The Lord answered and said to his people: ..." [2:19]

Judgment: The Lord will judge the nations that have oppressed the Israelites, inflicting on them punishments similar to those they had inflicted on Israel: "I will return your deed upon your own head." [4:4b,7b]

Call to Repentance: The priests and ministers must rouse the people to prayer: "Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the elders ... into the house of the Lord ..." [1:13-15]. Turn to the Lord with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning .. "rend your hearts not your garments ..." [2:12-17]

Remnant: "For on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant, ... and in Jerusalem survivors whom the Lord shall call." [3:5]

Day of the Lord = Salvation: The Lord took pity on his people and will bless them with great prosperity [2:19-27], after which he will pour out his spirit on all mankind, working great wonders and saving all who call upon His name [3:1-5]. Then the Lord will reign from Mount Zion, Jerusalem will be holy and the Lord's blessings will flow like water through the land. [4:15-21]

Readings at Mass

2:12-18 – Return to the Lord with your whole heart; proclaim a fast; gracious and merciful is he ... [Ash Wednesday; Mass for Forgiveness of Sins]

3:1-5 – The Lord will pour out his spirit on all mankind ... old men shall dream dreams and young men shall see visions ... everyone will be rescued who calls on the name of the Lord [Vigil of Pentecost]

1:13-15; 2:1-2 – The Day of the Lord is coming, a day of darkness and gloom. [Year I, Friday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time]

4:12-21 – The Day of the Lord renders judgment on the nations, but the Lord is a refuge to his people, reigning from Mount Zion. [Year I, Saturday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time]

2:21-24, 26-27 – The Lord provided his people with great abundance. [Mass After the Harvest, Votive Mass for Thanksgiving Day]

2:23a, 26-27; 3:1-3 – The Lord is in your midst; he will pour out his spirit upon all mankind, and work wonders in the heavens and on earth. [Mass for Confirmation]