

JOEL – SHORT VERSION

Historical Context. Since nothing is known about the author of the book of Joel, scholars have found it hard to nail down when it was written. Having said that, most scholars believe, based on internal evidence, that the book was written after Ezra and Nehemiah, and before the world conquest by the Greeks in the fourth century, most likely around 400BC.

Focus of the book. The central focus of the book is the “Day of the Lord” which carries a twofold message: for those who worship God, it will be a day of blessing and restoration, but for the enemies of God, it will be a day of destruction and desolation.

The story. A plague of locusts ravages Judah. Joel sees this as a symbol of the coming of the Lord. He summons the people to repent and turn to the Lord with fasting. They convene a solemn assembly of prayer for deliverance. The Lord answers their prayer and promises to drive away the locusts and blesses them with peace and prosperity.

In his book *Reading the Old Testament*, Fr. Lawrence Boadt says: “*The style of Joel is very similar to a modern penitential liturgy for the sacrament of penance. The penitents lament their evil state and all their sins; the priests call for repentance and fasting; both together beg God to show mercy and forgiveness to them; finally, the penitents receive reassurance of God’s forgiving love through the blessing of the priest*”(p. 464).

Division of chapters

- The plague and the call to fast (Chapters 1-2)
- The coming “Day of the Lord”: blessings for the faithful, punishment for the unfaithful (Chapters 3-4)