

## **Joel**

- I. Locust Plague ([1:1-2:27](#))
- II. Day of Yahweh ([2:28-3:21](#))

It is difficult to pin down the historical setting of the prophecies of **Joel**. Early readers must have thought him pre-exilic, hence his placement between Hosea and Amos. The book of Joel was placed before Amos perhaps because of the correspondence between [Joel 3:16](#) and [Amos 1:2](#), and [Joel 3:18](#) and [Amos 9:13](#). Also, Amos, like Joel, was alert to the coming Day of Yahweh.

The central theme of the book is this notion of the Day of Yahweh which gives the book as a whole its coherence. The book of Joel divides into two parts. The first part, [chapters 1:1-2:27](#), centers on an elaborate vision of a locust plague, which is a way to warn of the coming judgment of God, the Day of Yahweh. The second part, [chapters 2:28-3:21](#), describes the blessings on Judah and Jerusalem with the coming Day of Yahweh and the corresponding punishment of the surrounding nations.

Joel has sometimes been called a "cult prophet". That is, he was supportive of the priesthood and the temple, and perhaps was even a priest himself. He was concerned that offerings were not coming in as expected, in part because the land itself was not providing the produce, and in part because the people were not forthcoming. Consequently, the priests were unable to perform their duties.

Joel was a prophet of the judgment day. He called it the "Day of Yahweh" ([1:15](#)), as did Amos, but he broadened the concept into a comprehensive world-historical event. Presuming the postexilic dating of Joel, the book is a study in the appropriation of earlier prophetic tradition, especially that of Amos and the Day of Yahweh.

The occasion for Joel's core prophecy most likely was the devastating locust plague described in [1:4](#). The only way to avert disaster is through a communal fast. The coming destruction is described as a locust plague, which became a metaphor for the devastating army that would do the actual work of punishing Israel.

Joel also foresaw the coming of a new age, a time of salvation.

The pouring out of the spirit in Joel has associations with prophetic anointing. The spirit would inspire dreams and visions. The remarkable aspect of the outpouring is its democratic scope. Everyone, young and old, male and female, slave and free, would receive the prophetic gift in the latter days.

## **Zephaniah**

- I. Judgment Against Judah ([1:2-2:3](#))
- II. Oracles Against Foreign Nations ([2:4-15](#))
- III. Judgment Against Judah ([3:1-8](#))
- IV. Salvation for Judah ([3:9-20](#))

**Zephaniah** was a Judean prophet, possibly descended from the Davidic line, who was active during the reign of Josiah. His condemnation of the kinds of religious practices that were eliminated by the Josiah reformation in 622 B.C.E. suggests that he prophesied before that time, somewhere between 640 and 622.

Typical of most other Judean prophets, Zephaniah's words cover these three main topics: condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem for religious sins, condemnation of foreign nations (including Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria), and promises of salvation for God's people.

Zephaniah follows the lead of Amos (see [Amos 5:18-20](#)) and proclaims that the **Day of Yahweh** is coming. But it will be a sad day for God's people, and not a day on which they would see victory.

## **Zechariah**

- I. Zechariah (1-8)
  - A. Call to Repent (1:2-6)
  - B. Night Visions (1:7-6:8)
    1. Four Horses (1:7-17)
    2. Four Horns and Four Smiths (1:18-21)
    3. Man Measuring Jerusalem (2)
    4. Joshua and the Satan (3)
    5. Golden Lampstand and Two Olive Trees (4)
    6. Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
    7. Woman in a Basket (5:5-11)
    8. Four Chariots (6:1-8)
  - C. Crowning of the Messiah (6:9-15)
  - D. Fasting (7)
  - E. Yahweh Returns to Zion (8)
- II. Second Zechariah (9-14)
  - A. Oracle 1: Restoration of Israel (9-11)
  - B. Oracle 2: The Coming Day of Yahweh (12-14)

The prophet **Zechariah** was a contemporary of Haggai, and both were contemporaries of the leaders of the early Judean restoration, Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zechariah prophesied in Jerusalem from 520 to 518 B.C.E. Whereas the style of Haggai's prophecy was hortatory, Zechariah's prophecy took the shape of visions and dialogues with God.

The book of Zechariah divides into two main parts. The first unit, [chapters 1-8](#), is usually attributed to the prophet Zechariah of the sixth century. The second unit, [chapters 9-14](#), are referred to as **Second Zechariah**. It was written by an unnamed prophet (a situation much like that in the book of Isaiah) in the Greek period of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E.

Zechariah was concerned about the religious purity of the people and the morale of Jerusalem's leaders. To that end he attempted to inspire them. In eight visions Zechariah glimpsed the changes ahead.

Zechariah also shows his dependence on earlier prophecy by the way he adopts and adapts earlier prophetic images. Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of captivity ([Jeremiah 29](#)) was used in the first vision to designate the length of captivity. It also became the basis of Daniel's vision of seventy weeks of years ([Daniel 9](#)). And the flying scroll of the sixth vision seems to derive from Ezekiel's scroll ([Ezekiel 2-3](#)).

The oracles found in Second Zechariah echo familiar prophetic themes: the destruction of the foreign nations, the restoration of Israel, and the coming Day of Yahweh. Second Zechariah gives special attention to messianic leadership. It describes the triumphant king who comes on a donkey ([chapter 9](#)). The evil shepherds would be removed from office ([chapters 11](#) and [13](#)). The evil nations would be finally destroyed, and Jerusalem would become a holy place where Yahweh the king would dwell forever.

## **Malachi**

- I. Superscription ([1:1](#))
- II. Yahweh Loves Jacob and Hates Esau ([1:2-5](#))
- III. Yahweh Exposes Unfaithful Priests ([1:6-2:9](#))
- IV. Yahweh Hates Divorce ([2:10-16](#))
- V. Yahweh Will Send a Messenger to Prepare for the Day of Yahweh ([2:17-3:5](#))
- VI. Call to Repentance ([3:6-12](#))
- VII. Israel Will Be Restored ([3:13-4:3](#))
- VIII. Keep Torah; Elijah is Coming ([4:4-5](#))

### **Disputations in Malachi**

1	<a href="#">1:2-5</a>	"I have loved you," says YHWH. But you say, "How have you loved us?"
2	<a href="#">1:6-2:9</a>	"If I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is your fear of me?" says YHWH. But you say, "How have we despised your name?"
3	<a href="#">2:10-16</a>	"How are we faithless?" ... "You have been faithless to your wife, your companion."
4	<a href="#">2:17-3:5</a>	"You have tired YHWH with your words." Yet you say, "How have we tired him?"
5	<a href="#">3:6-12</a>	You say, "How are we robbing you?" "In your tithes and offerings."
6	<a href="#">3:13-4:3</a>	You say, "How have we spoken against you?" You have said, "It is useless to serve God."

Nothing is known about the prophet **Malachi**. Based on an analysis of the themes of the book, it is supposed that he lived in the period 500-450 B.C.E. He complained about abuses in the Second Temple, which was completed in 515. Concern about foreign marriages ([2:10-12](#)) was a major issue in Ezra's day (around 450).

The book of Malachi makes extensive use of the disputation literary form. That is, it frames its prophecies in a question-and-answer dialogic style.

<sup>4</sup> Remember the Torah of Moses my servant, that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel, the laws and rules. <sup>5</sup> Now, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible Day of YHWH comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the heart of fathers to sons and the heart of sons to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with utter destruction. (4:4-6)

The expectation of the return of Elijah before the judgment day is here stated clearly. This has given rise to traditions of Elijah's return within both Judaism and Christianity. Elijah has a place within the traditional Jewish celebration of the Passover yet today. And New Testament writers viewed the career of John the Baptist as the realization of this expected return of Elijah.

## **Daniel**

1. Tales of heroism (1-6)
  - A. Daniel and his friends at the Babylonian court of Nebuchadnezzar (1)
  - B. Daniel interprets the statue dream of Nebuchadnezzar (2)
  - C. The three friends are placed in the furnace (3)
  - D. Daniel interprets the tree dream of Nebuchadnezzar (4)
  - E. Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall of Belshazzar (5)
  - F. Daniel is placed in the lion's pit of Darius (6)
2. Apocalypses (7-12)
  - A. The four beasts and the Son of Man (7)
  - B. The ram and the goat (8)
  - C. Gabriel interprets Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy weeks (9)
  - D. Vision of future history (10-12)

The book of Daniel can be divided more or less cleanly into two main parts based on content. The first part, chapters 1-6, contains six tales of Jewish heroism set in the late seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. They are told in the third-person and concern **Daniel** and his three friends, or Daniel alone, or the three friends alone. The second part, chapters 7-12, contains four apocalypses which Daniel narrates in the first-person. An **apocalypse** is a dream vision of the future (see Part 3).

The book of Daniel does not claim to have been written by Daniel. The first six chapters are a narrative about Daniel (and his friends), and while the final chapters contain Daniel's first-person dream accounts, they are introduced using third-person editorial frameworks. Still, Daniel is the dominant figure of the book, absent only in chapter 3.

## **First Six Chapters**

The first six chapters of Daniel contain some of the most popular stories in the Hebrew Bible. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Daniel in the lion's den. The handwriting on the wall. In addition to their popular appeal, the tales had moral and spiritual lessons with special application to Jews living in the diaspora.

The hero tales of Daniel send two fundamental messages. First, no matter what political and religious pressures urge you to conform to the dominant culture, do not give

up your faith in Yahweh. If you are faithful God will surely deliver and prosper you. Fidelity to Mosaic torah brings divine reward. Second, ultimately the evil kingdoms of this world will crumble before the kingdom of God, for Yahweh orders history. The hero tales will be treated under these two points.

### **Apocalypses (7-12)**

To understand the setting of the final portion of the book of Daniel it is necessary to summarize the history of the Maccabean period. The Maccabean conflict is the historical setting for the apocalypses, as well as for the final compilation of the book as a whole.

Alexander the Great began his conquest of the eastern Mediterranean world beginning in 333 B.C.E. By his death in 323 B.C.E. Greek control extended as far east as the Indus Valley. After his death, control of the empire was divided among four generals, of whom only two are important for our purposes. Most of Mesopotamia went to Seleucus and became the Seleucid Empire. Syria, Palestine and Egypt went to Ptolemy and became the Ptolemaic Empire. Palestine was roughly the dividing line between these two empires and for that reason became a matter of contention.

Palestine was under the control of the Ptolemaic Empire until around 200 B.C.E. The Greek way of life, with its attractive cultural institutions such as gymnasiums and theaters, Greek language and literature, refined manners and colorful religion, was a serious temptation to the Jewish population, and found not a few cultural converts. But during this time Judaism was still an acceptable and even thriving enterprise.

This changed when the Seleucid empire extended its area of control to include Palestine. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV, nicknamed Epiphanes, ruled his empire 175 to 164. He faced growing opposition to his rule throughout the Seleucid empire. He interpreted the movements toward independence as being in part inspired by local religious and cultural practices. He decided to eradicate everything that smacked of provincialism and impose, by force if necessary, a uniform system of Greek cultural expression, a process called Hellenization. He outlawed such traditional Jewish practices as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observance, and he made ownership of a Torah scroll a capital offense.

Antiochus took visible and outrageous actions to demonstrate royal disfavor of Judaism. He forced Jews to eat pork in violation of kosher regulations, and even sacrificed a pig on the altar of burnt offering in the Jerusalem temple complex. Then he set up a statue of Zeus in the most holy place of the temple. Many Jews accommodated Hellenism, the culture of the Greek world, and assimilated. Others opposed any sort of compromise. They were called Hasids, "faithful ones." The struggle between the Seleucids and the Hasids is told in 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Armed Jewish resistance broke out in 167, led by a provincial Jew named Mattathias and his sons. The most famous son is Judas Maccabee, "the hammer." They successfully waged a guerrilla campaign against the Seleucids, eventually resulting in the retaking of Jerusalem. They cleansed and restored the temple and resumed ritual activity as prescribed in the Torah. The temple was rededicated in 164 B.C.E. in a celebration called Hanukkah that lasted eight days. In apocalyptic literature's typically cryptic and veiled way, the apocalypses of Daniel 7-12 relate to the history of this period.

<u>7</u>	Four beasts and son of man	Kingdom of the persecuted Jews
<u>8</u>	Ram and he-goat	Greek to Persian rule
<u>9</u>	Seventy weeks of years	History from exile to Maccabean war
<u>10:1-12:4</u>	Kings of South and North	Ptolemies and Seleucids

A human-like figure, "one like a **son of man**," appeared in the vision and was given total power over the kingdoms of this world. This mysterious and intriguing figure is separate from the supreme deity yet comes from heaven. It may be the angel Michael, who appears by name in the fourth apocalypse.

**Son of Man.** The identification of the "one like a son of man" figure in 7:13 is problematic. The phrase "son of man" is used in the book of Ezekiel when Yahweh addresses the prophet (2:1; 3:1; etc.), and seems only to mean human being. In Daniel the phrase "a human-like figure" refers to an angel (8:15 and 9:21; but a different figure is being referred to in these references than the one in 7:13). The "son of man" figure is suggestive yet open-ended. It develops into a messianic notion in post-biblical literature. According to the first book of Enoch (37-71), the Enoch of Genesis 5:24 will return to earth as "son of man" at the end of time and establish the rule of God. "Son of man" is a component of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament Gospels. Jesus prefers the title "son of man" over all others, perhaps just because it both affirms and veils his claim of divinity. See Borsch (1967).

**Four Ages.** Clearly the writer of the Daniel 7 apocalypse knew the tale of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and updated it to his time. The four metals of Nebuchadnezzar's dream correspond to the four beasts; the stone which becomes a mountain is the "one like a son of man," later the "holy ones." The four age scheme of world history can be found in other ancient literature. The dynastic prophecy published by Grayson (1975: 24-37) describes the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia, the fall of Babylonia and the rise of Persia, then the fall of Persia and the rise of the Hellenistic monarchies. Also, the *Works and Days* of Hesiod divides history into four ages: gold, silver, bronze and iron.

### Four Ages of Daniel

Age	Kingdom	Daniel 2	Daniel 7
1	Babylonia	Head of gold	Lion with eagle's wings
2	Media	Chest and arms of silver	Bear
3	Persia	Midsection and thighs of bronze	Four-headed winged leopard
4	Greece	Legs of iron	Terrible beast
4a	Ptolemies and Seleucids	Feet of iron and clay	Ten horns and little horn
Final	Kingdom of God	Stone	One like a son of man / Holy Ones of the Most High