

B. Content of the book

1. The question of approach to the 1st two chapters.

See Freeman's discussion of the various approaches to the book, centering around the interpretation of the 1st two chapters (p. 150ff; cf., Bibliography, p. 14).

- a. The view that Freeman adopts, and that seems to fit the book better than other suggested views, is what he calls an apocalyptic interpretation. Such an approach takes chapter 1 as a description of an actual locust plague that had recently devastated Palestine. Joel then uses this occurrence for the "apocalyptic" imagery of chapter 2 in which he describes a future invasion of Judah by her enemies in the latter days.
- b. This view is contrasted with an allegorical view that takes both chapters figuratively and sees in them descriptions of a series of enemy attacks on Israel in her future history. In the 4 kinds of locusts mentioned in chapter 1 (vs. 4), E. B. Pusey and E. W. Hengstenberg find 4 invasions of Israel: Assyria, Babylonia, Greece and Rome. Chapter 2 then describes the end time and the establishment of the millennial kingdom.
- c. This view is also to be contrasted with a completely literal view that interprets both chapter 1 and chapter 2 as descriptive of severe locust plagues, the one in chapter 2 more severe than that of chapter 1, and one that will usher in the day of the LORD in a yet future time.

There are some variations of this last category. J. Ridderbos sees both chapters as literal. Chapter 1, is the devastation of the country side, and chapter 2 the entrance of the plague into the city. But in chapter 2 he feels that there is a fusion of the locust plague and the Day of the LORD so that some of the references point beyond the present disaster to a great future judgment. This view is sort of mid-way between the "apocalyptic" view of Freeman and the completely literal view.

C. H. Bullock categorizes methods of interpreting Joel a bit differently (See pp. 330-331). He gives three answers to the question of whether the locusts in 1:1-2:17 are to be viewed as real and historical.

- 1) Historical literal - Joel describes a locust plague that occurred during his lifetime.
- 2) Allegorical - the locusts are an allegory of invading armies representing the four great powers at whose hands Israel successively suffered: the Assyro-Babylonian, The Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman.
- 3) Apocalyptic - eschatological - represents not a natural pestilence but extraterrestrial invaders who usher in the Day of the Lord. [!] Not widely held. Cites no one who advocates the view (p. 331).

2. The question of chronological sequence.

What are the temporal relationships of the events referred to in the various sections of the book? Obscurity on this point is one of the factors that complicates understanding the structure of the book, and in turn may affect ones interpretation of it.

Many interpreters, including Bullock (p. 326), divide the book at 2:17 producing two major sections, i.e., 1:1-2:17 and 2:18-3:21. The first part of the book is seen as a lamentation over a locust plague sent as a divine judgment. The second part of the book is seen as descriptive of a change of fortune to future blessing that has resulted from repentance.

In my view, framing the structure of the book in this way obscures the relationship between three distinct units in the book.

In is my view that in analyzing the structure of the book it is important to notice that 2:10, 11; 2:31 and 3:15 give a similar sign for the "day of the Lord" that is referred to in 2:1 as coming .

This suggests that the day of the Lord referred to in these three places is to be understood as the same day historically. If this is true, then, there are 3 parallel accounts of this day in 3 different sections of the book. These three accounts of the coming Day of the Lord may be viewed as complimentary to each other, emphasizing different aspects of the same subject.

3. Outline of the book.

On this basis the book of Joel may be outlined as follows:

- I. 1:1-20 DESCRIPTION OF A CONTEMPORARY LOCUST PLAGUE
- II. 2:1-3:21 THREE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD
 - A. 2:1-27 THE DAY OF THE LORD DESCRIBED IN THE IMAGERY OF THE PRESENT LOCUST PLAGUE AND DROUGHT
 - B. 2:28-32 (MT - 3) THE PROMISE OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH WILL PRECEDE THE DAY OF THE LORD
 - C. 3:1-21 (MT - 4) THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS AND THE SALVATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

4. Some comments on the content.

a. Joel 1:1-20.

A description of a locust plague combined with drought (vss, 12, 20) and fire (vss. 19, 20).

It seems to me that here Joel is describing a real locust plague, contrary to some who see merely symbolism and allegory. He interprets this, however, as a judgment of God and, as such, a call to repentance. In this perspective it is a manifestation of the day of the Lord (vs. 15). It is this perspective that also enables Joel to move from the present historical situation to the eschatological message that in principle is the same. God will come in judgment on all who do not repent and call upon the name of the LORD.

Verse 4.

Four different Hebrew words are used for locust here. Some think that the various stages in the locust's growth are referred to. This may be, although in 2:25 the same terms are used, but in a different order. There are 9 possible words for locust in Hebrew. The terms here could simply be chosen for variety as a way of describing swarm after swarm of locusts coming in to devour the land.

Hebrew has a rich vocabulary to describe the locust. There is no equivalent in English - thus the terms crawling, swarming,

hopping, stripping (NASB, Berkely). There is no basis for the allegorical view of seeing here Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome.

Verses 5, 9, 13.

The plague was so destructive that there was not sufficient vegetation left for carrying on the meal and drink offerings at the temple. There was to be no new wine. The land had been left desolate. The Dec. 1915 issue of The National Geographic describes such a plague in Palestine.

"One evening it was heard that the locusts had already reached the German colony and the railroad station and as we went out the next day to see them, scarcely had our carriage swung around from the Jaffa Gate than we found the white road was already black with them. Ever in the same direction they pushed up the 'Western Hill' still commonly called Zion, even entering the houses about the 'Tomb of David'. The roads now became so slippery from the masses of the little, greasy bodies crushed beneath the horses hoofs that the horses could scarcely keep a footing and had consequently to be driven slowly and with great care. Afterward it was heard that likewise trains throughout the country had been stopped for hours at a time, notably on the Damascus-Haiffa line near the Lake of Galilee.

Below the Lower Pool of Gihon old olive trees, yesterday green, were now nothing but bare trunks and twigs, and further up the valley a couple of beautiful mulberry trees had just been attacked, the leaves falling like rain, and already the ground was deeply strewn with them, and long before evening they, too, were leafless. This, however, proved to be but a sample of coming things.

The locusts, when advanced into the second or pupa stage, walk like ordinary insects, leaping only when frightened into a quicker pace, which they readily accomplish by the use of their two long and powerful posterior legs. However, while still in the first or larva stage, they seemed to hop much like fleas, so that when anything neared their thickened masses it seemed as if the entire surface of the ground moved, producing a most curious effect upon one's vision and causing dizziness, which in some was so severe as to produce a sensation not unlike seasickness. The same was also true when watching them undisturbed on tree or field.

One of our most interesting experiences, while noting the locusts methodical but stubborn moves, occurred when they first reached Jerusalem. Countless numbers of the young locusts poured into the broad, walled road leading into the city from the

west, past the United States Consulate to the Jaffa Gate. For three or four days an incessant and unending stream filled the road from side to side, like numberless troops marching on parade, and in spite of the traffic at this junction, which to this city is like lower Broadway to New York, their ranks, although thinned, entered the ancient gateway and the New Breach, 'Though in among the weapons they fall they shall not stop' (Joel 2:8)."

See Laetsch (p. 114ff.) for additional quotations from the National Geographic article.

Verses 13,14.

Joel then summons the people to repent and cry unto God. He calls for prayer and fasting and a return to the Lord. He understands that this disaster is an act of God. God acts in Israel's history not only in blessing but also in judgment (cf. vs. 3: this act was to be recited to the children just as the acts of the Exodus were). Here was the actualization of the covenant curse of Deut 28:38, 42ff.

Verse 15.

In this plague Joel sees the day of the Lord as near. It seems that Joel sees the day of the Lord as consisting in a contemporary locust plague or perhaps a harbinger of its coming (see Payne, Theology of the Older Testament, p. 464 ff). Viewed in this way it is a provisional divine judgment that is intended to point forward to the great day of judgment that is to come.

b. Joel 2:1-3:21

Three descriptions of the coming Day of the Lord.

1) Joel 2:1-27

The Day of the Lord described in the imagery of the present locust plague and drought.

Verses 1-10.

In chapter 1 the locust plague and its results are described as something that has already occurred. In chapter 2 the description is of something in process. The perfect tenses of the verbs in chapter 1 are replaced for the most part (esp. 2:3-9) by imperfects in chapter 2. Chapter 2 thus speaks of either something that will happen or is happening.

In chapter 2 the locusts seem to have become eschatological symbols, representing human invaders. Freeman puts the expression "the invader from the north" of verse 20 in connection with this (p. 153).

Freeman:

"The 'north' is a technical term in the Old Testament which often appears in passages of an apocalyptic nature and in such contexts is always symbolic of the enemies of Israel. In this connection it is also used to indicate the direction from which calamity and misfortune came upon Palestine. Assyria and Babylon came out of the north against the Hebrew nation and appear in Scripture not only as contemporary enemies of Israel, but also as typical of her end-time foe who was to come out of the north, that is, the eschatological 'northerner.' (Cf. Zech. 6:8; Jer. 1:14-15; 16:1,22; Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2; Isa. 14:31; Zeph. 2:13)."

See also, Allen, 88,89. (CC. 39A)

Verse 11.

Should verse 11 be taken as the response of the Lord to the invader from the north? Cf. vs. 20.

Compare: Zech 14:1-5; Matt. 24:29,30; Rev. 19:11-16.

Joel 2:11 וַיְהִי הָיָה נִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ

The Lord will give his voice

Joel 3:16 וַיְהִי הָיָה מִצִּיּוֹן יִשְׁאַג
וּמִירושָׁלַם יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ

The Lord roars from Zion
and from Jerusalem he gives his voice.

Jeremiah 25:30

וַיְהִי הָיָה מִמְּרוֹם יִשְׁאַג
וּבַמְּעוֹן קֹדְשׁוֹ יִתֵּן קוֹלוֹ

The Lord shall roar from on high
and utter his voice from his holy habitation

Verses 12-17.

A call to repentance.

Return with all your heart. Rend your hearts, not your garments. God is great in mercy.

Verses 18-27.

The response of the Lord.

There is a translation issue in verse 18.

KJV - Then the LORD will be jealous . . .

New Schofield - Then the Lord was jealous. . .

NIV - Then the Lord will be jealous. . .

NASB - Then the LORD will be jealous . .

NRSV - Then the LORD became jealous . . .

Many think that this is not a prophecy, but an account of what happened. The verbs are then translated in the sense of a completed action. In such cases a pause is assumed between vss. 17-18 in which one supposes that the day of repentance that Joel called for was held. Then here we have a description of the change in the Lord's relation to his people as a result of the already manifested repentance.

This, then, becomes the major dividing point in the entire book (as interpreted, for example, by Bullock).

The problem with this, in my view, is that there is no mention of the presumably held day of repentance and much of what is contained in the remainder of the passage is difficult to interpret as having already occurred (even if the chapter refers only to a contemporary locust plague).

See: vs. 19 I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.
vs. 20 I will remove the invader from the north
vss. 25ff. I will repay for the years which the locust devoured
vss. 26b, 27b My people shall never again be put to shame

The verbs in vs. 18 are w consecutive with the Imperfect.

וַיִּקְנָא יְהוָה לְאַרְצוֹ

And the LORD was jealous for his land

וַיִּחַמֵּל עַל-עַמּוֹ:

and pitied his people.

Ridderbos, and others, argue that the form does not exclude the possibility of translating the verbs as future.

- a) Joüon (A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew) §112^h in his discussion of the "prophetic perfect" says that "this notion is extended by Ibn Ezra even to cases of *wayyiqtol* as in JI 2.18 וַיִּקְנֶא see his commentary ad loc."
- b) Cf. Ges 111^w. Imperfect with waw consecutive used to represent future actions. Similar to prophetic perfect.
- c) Can vocalize the verbs differently as jussive with copulative. Not jussive as a wish, but as the apodosis of a conditional clause. Then would be translated as an imperfect. See Ges 109^h. "Undoubtedly this use of the Jussive (in conditional sentences) is based on its original voluntative meaning: let something be so and so, then this or that must happen as a consequence . . . in not a few cases the Jussive is used . . . for the ordinary imperfect form.

Verse 23b.

כִּי־נָתַן לָכֶם אֶת־הַמּוֹרָה לְצַדִּיקָה
 וַיֹּרֶד לָכֶם גֶּשֶׁם
 מוֹרָה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ בְּרֵאשׁוֹן:

NIV (a) for he has given you a teacher for righteousness

NIV (b) for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness

KJV for he hath given you the former rain moderately

NASB for he has given you the early rain for your vindication

Keil for he giveth you the teacher for righteousness

LXX βρώματα εἰς δικαιοσύνην
 (food fully, i.e. to exactness or correctness)
 מְזוֹן - food - appears 2x in M.T.

The crucial phrase is : אֶת־הַמּוֹרֶה לְצַדִּיקָה

That מוֹרֶה is taken by some as "teacher" and by others as "former" or "early rain" is due to a certain contextual problem.

Most of the Rabbi's and early commentators took it in the sense of teacher. Others including Calvin and many modern commentators take it as early rain.

מוֹרֶה - teacher (m.n.). (The verb hry means throw (rain), shoot, instruct. The verb occurs 15 times in sense of instruct. Doubtful if it ever means moisten.)

יֹרֶה early rain (m.n). It falls in Palestine from the last of October to the first of December at sowing time. It promoted germination and growth of seed.

גֶּשֶׁם rain shower

מִלְקוֹשׁ latter rain, spring shower

What is striking is that מוֹרֶה is unquestionably used in the last clause of the verse in the sense of early rain. In every other instance in the OT this is יֹרֶה (except Ps 84:6(7) where there is a textual problem).

It seems likely that the מוֹרֶה in the last phrase of the verse is an example of the copyist's error called dittography. The scribe wrote a מ instead of a ך because of the occurrence of מוֹרֶה earlier in the verse.

The following word לְצַדִּיקָה cannot mean "in just measure," "at proper time," etc. because it is only used in the ethical sense of righteousness, not in a physical sense.

The understanding "teacher" is an old Jewish interpretation found in the Targums (2nd cent. BC), Vulgate, Rashi, etc.

If "teacher for righteousness" is accepted then we have here what is probably best taken as a messianic prophecy (although some see it as a reference to Joel [cf. Payne p.

408, n.11], all prophets idealized in Christ, [Keil] or, as in Qumran, some particular leader.)

Payne's view presupposes that he speaks of that which is already come. The sons of Zion are to rejoice because God has given them Joel as a teacher who instructs them in righteousness with the result that God has now sent the rain. But it does not seem too likely that Joel would call himself a teacher of righteousness and his coming as a cause for rejoicing.

In addition Payne's view can only pertain if one accepts Payne's general approach to the interpretation of Joel 2. He divides the chapter as follows (EBP, 407,408):

- 2:1-11 fulfillment - an impending contemporaneous locust plague (ca. 735 BC).
- 2:19-26a fulfillment - contemporary deliverance from invading locusts.
- 2:23 (EBP 408, n.11) "he giveth you the teacher for righteousness" - not the Messiah or the leader of the sect at Qumran, . . . but seemingly the prophet Joel, referring to himself and his own preaching. . . "
- 2:26b-27 fulfillment - future Messianic kingdom.

See also Allen, p. 92ff for advocacy of "rain" interpretation.

One additional consideration is that the inhabitants of Qumran evidently interpreted the phrase as "teacher" because their leader was known as the "Teacher of Righteousness." Where did this title come from if not Joel 2:23? The only other similar statement in the OT is Hosea 10:12

עַד־יָבוֹא יִרְהַ צְדָק לְכֶם:

Till he come and rains (teaches) righteousness upon (to) you.