

TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 25

TOTC

JOEL AND AMOS

For

PAUL (†1979), JOHN, LAURA and BOB
Brothers and sisters in
blood and Spirit

TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 25

GENERAL EDITOR: DONALD J. WISEMAN

JOEL AND AMOS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

DAVID A. HUBBARD



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GENERAL PREFACE

The aim of this series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, as it was in the companion volumes on the New Testament, is to provide the student of the Bible with a handy, up-to-date commentary on each book, with the primary emphasis on exegesis. Major critical questions are discussed in the introductions and additional notes, while undue technicalities have been avoided.

In this series individual authors are, of course, free to make their own distinct contributions and express their own point of view on all debated issues. Within the necessary limits of space they frequently draw attention to interpretations which they themselves do not hold but which represent the stated conclusions of sincere fellow Christians.

The messages of the so-called 'minor' prophets Joel and Amos should be as relevant for the reader today as for their original hearers. Dr Hubbard helpfully brings this out as he guides us through the text by which their words come down to us. Joel's call to repentance and salvation by faith through grace still registers, and his promise of the gift of God's Holy Spirit reminds us that God's presence and power are available today to every believer. Amos stresses that crimes against humanity will certainly bring the judgment of God and that we should be more concerned with present spiritual commitment than with past experience, influential though that may be.

In the Old Testament in particular no single English translation is adequate to reflect the original text. The version on which this commentary is based is the Revised Standard Version, but other

translations are frequently referred to as well, and on occasion the author supplies his own. Where necessary, words are transliterated in order to help the reader who is unfamiliar with Hebrew to identify the precise word under discussion. It is assumed throughout that the reader will have ready access to one, or more, reliable renderings of the Bible in English.

Interest in the meaning and message of the Old Testament continues undiminished and it is hoped that this series will thus further the systematic study of the revelation of God and his will and ways as seen in these records. It is the prayer of the editor and publisher, as of the authors, that these books will help many to understand, and to respond to, the Word of God today.

D. J. Wiseman

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Joel and Amos are books for our times. Nothing in the past 2,500 years has made their messages passé. Amos still calls moribund congregations to turn their liturgies into loving actions. He still beckons the wealthy and powerful of our lands to do right by the poor and disadvantaged. Joel still teaches peoples beleaguered by plague, drought, or other disasters to seek relief through repentance. His words still provide magnificent perspective on the work of God the Holy Spirit.

No-one who writes a commentary starts from scratch. Origen himself would doubtlessly agree with that. By my side have been the works of Hans Walter Wolff, James Mays, Hammerschaimb, Arthur Weiser, S. Amsler, Robert Martin-Achard, W. Rudolph, Leslie Allen, Arvid Kapelrud, G. W. Ahlstrom and W. S. Prinsloo. When my debt to them is especially deep or my difference from them is especially wide I have cited their names. But even where they are not mentioned their help may well be present.

This commentary has sought to make its own contribution by treating the books as unified compositions artfully shaped by their authors and/or editors. The final form of the work is the only one of whose structure and content we can be sure. Interpretations based on theories of stages in the production of a work must ever remain tenuous. The approach to unity adopted here means also that context is as crucial as content to the message of any part of a book. I have tried, therefore, to help the reader keep track of what leads into a given passage as well as what flows out of it. In addition I have kept

an eye on the literary forms that have been so skillfully combined in both of these books. They are clues to the nuances that the prophets wanted their hearers to grasp, as they addressed the emotions as well as the intellect of the people. The Revised Standard Version, whose readings are usually italicized in the text, served as the basis for my comments, while the other versions were consulted frequently.

Special thanks are due to Vera Wils, Elsie Evans and Shirley Coe, who saw to the production of the typescript while also carrying out their other duties in my office. Dr Dawn Waring and Dr John McKenna assisted immensely with the final editing. I am more than grateful to Professor Donald Wiseman, to the external readers and to the Reverend David Kingdon for their gracious patience, thoughtful suggestions and meticulous care in the preparation of the book.

The dedication is a small token of my gratitude to, and affection for, my brothers and sister whose Christian witness in word and life shaped the faith and calling of their youngest brother in more ways than he can express.

David Allan Hubbard

Note

Where reference is made to comments on Hosea (for example, on pages 47 and 62), this relates to the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary on *Hosea* by David Allan Hubbard.

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible.
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton University Press, ² 1969).
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton University Press, ³ 1969).
ANVAO	Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akaderni i Oslo.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn).
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford University Press, 1906).
Bib	<i>Biblica.</i>
BZAW	<i>Beibefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.</i>
CAT	Commentaire de l'ancien testament.
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary.
CB.OT	Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup).
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly.</i>
CHALOT	W. L. Holladay, <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon</i> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).
DOTT	<i>Documents from Old Testament Times</i> edited by D. Winton Thomas (London: Nelson, 1958).

- E.T. English translation.
ETR *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses.*
EvTh *Evangelische Theologie.*
HAT Handbuch zum Alten Testament.
HTR *Harvard Theological Review.*
IB Interpreter's Bible.
IBD *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: IVP, 1980).
ICC International Critical Commentary.
IDB *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962).
IDB Supp. Supplementary volume to *IDB* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976).
Int Interpretation.
ISBE, rev. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, fully revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–88).
ITC International Theological Commentary.
JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature.*
JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.*
JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament.*
JTS *Journal of Theological Studies.*
KAT Kommentar zum Alten Testament.
KB L. Köhler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in veteris testamenti libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951–53).
NBC rev. *New Bible Commentary*, revised (Leicester: IVP, 1970).
NCB New Century Bible.
NICOT New International Commentary on the Old Testament.
OTL Old Testament Library.
OTS *Oudtestamentische Studien.*
TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76).
TDNT abr. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* abridged by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).
TbZ *Theologische Zeitschrift.*
TRE *Theologische Realenzyklopädie.*
TynB *Tyndale Bulletin.*
VT *Vetus Testamentum.*

<i>VT</i> Supp.	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Supplements.
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary.
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament.
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins.</i>

Texts and versions

AV	Authorized (KingJames) Version, 1611.
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , 1967/77.
JB	Jerusalem Bible, 1966.
LXX	The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).
Moffatt	J. Moffatt, <i>A New Translation of the Bible</i> , 1935.
MT	Massoretic Text.
NAB	New American Bible, 1970.
NASB	New American Standard Bible, 1960.
NIV	New International Version, 1978.
RSV	Revised Standard Version, 1952.
Syr.	Syriac.
Vulg.	The Vulgate (the late fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome).

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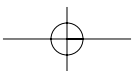
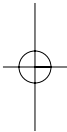
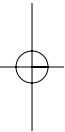
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JOEL

INTRODUCTION

i. The prophecy of Joel

The word of God came to Joel in the heat of an emergency. What prompted Joel to preach and then record his words was an *invasion of insects*, a devastating plague of locusts. So widespread and so death-dealing was their assault that every aspect of human life was put in jeopardy, especially the daily offerings in the Jerusalem temple, which were ordered to maintain communion between God and the people. Joel's understanding of the creation drove him to see the insects as agents of the Creator, carrying out the task of judgment on a disobedient nation. The severity of the judgment, described twice – first in literal, then in figurative terms – proved to Joel that he had begun to witness nothing less than the Day of the Lord. Amos and Zephaniah had spoken of that Day in terms of inescapable darkness and intolerable suffering. The clouds of locusts that obscured the sun and devoured the food supply were the heralds of that Day. Yahweh marched with them, the death of his incorrigible people on his mind.

But also on his mind was their rescue in response to their repentance. The very temple that had been stripped of its offerings could be the site of a return to him. The very priests who wrapped themselves in sackcloth to wail at the altar could be the leaders of that return. Yahweh was ready for change and now the prophet urged the people of God also to be ready.

Pity, not wrath, was his response to their penitence, and with that pity came full restoration of all the insect damage. Beyond that, the whole episode of judgment and deliverance brought with it a new understanding of Yahweh's uniqueness. It had a revelatory quality that marked it as the harbinger of the days to come, when all Israelites, not just prophets, would experience personal communion with God and fresh revelations of his power and glory. The era of Yahweh's spirit was on the way, an era so world-shaking that it signalled the final judgment, when the neighbour nations would pay for their savagery and Israel's covenant faith would be confirmed by God's abiding presence in their midst.

Amos had said that the Day was darkness *not* light (5:18, 20); Joel says that it is darkness *before* light. The Lord in covenant love had spared the people in the plague and preserved the honour of his name before the nations. Now he has a Day beyond the Day, when the vengeance that is his prerogative alone, and the grace that flows from his unique person, will be manifest to the whole world. On behalf of all God's people, Joel saw that Day and sang of it. From him we can learn the tune which we are to be ready to sing whenever the sovereign Lord is ready to give the cue.

2. The place in the Canon

With the Jews through the centuries, we need to look at the Minor Prophets not only individually but as one book, The Book of the Twelve. Hosea was placed first, not only because of the early date (mid-eighth century), but because of the length of his message and comprehensive treatment of the great prophetic themes of judgment and hope. Why was Joel placed second in the Hebrew list that has carried over to our English versions (the LXX has it in fourth place after Hosea, Amos and Micah)? The best answer will not be chronology alone since the Twelve are arranged in only rough

chronological order, and Jonah, Obadiah and Joel are hard to fit into any historic framework. Joel seems to use Amos' view of the Day of Yahweh as a foil, both to reinforce his interpretation of the plague and to move beyond it to a radiant understanding of the ultimate victories of the Day, which amplifies Amos' brief note on future prosperity. As much as any single component, it is the common emphasis on the Day that probably accounts for Joel's position before Amos in the collection.¹ The thematic similarity is reinforced by verbal correspondences, especially Joel's use of Amos 1:2 in 3:16 and of Amos 9:13 in 3:18, and by the parallels between Joel's announcements of doom to Tyre, Philistia and Edom (3:4, 19) and Amos' threats to the same nations (Amos 1:8–12).

Even more important in determining Joel's place in the Canon of Scripture was the movement in his work from doom to hope, from judgment to salvation. In a sense, Joel, replete with ideas and terms drawn from many prophets, encapsulated the basic movement not only of individual prophetic books (e.g. Hosea, Isaiah) but of the prophetic corpus as a whole: 'for manifest in Joel is a comprehensive view of prophecy ...' that prompted the arrangers of the Twelve to invite us to 'read Amos and the following prophets in the light of Joel's proclamation' (Wolff, p. 4).

3. The date of the book

Dates proposed for Joel's ministry and the composition of his book range from the early ninth century BC to the Maccabean era, some seven hundred years later. The broad diversity of scholarly opinion is evidence of the book's scarcity of information to help us pinpoint the date. The fact that the book's centrepiece, the locust invasion, has left no other tracks in biblical history compounds our problem. Happily, most of what Joel has to teach we can grasp without the precise knowledge of his times, though we could read between his lines more keenly if we knew when he lived.

The most common theory of an *early date* would place Joel in the period of Joash's youth (c. 835–825 BC). That regency period (see

1. See G. T. Sheppard, 'Canonization', *Int*, 36, 1982, p. 24.

2 Kgs 12:1–21 for the role of Jehoiada the priest in guiding young Joash) would help to account for the absence of mention of a monarch in the book. The most common arguments for this early date are these: (1) the place in the Canon between two eighth-century prophets (but see above); (2) Joel's possible role in Judah's on-going struggle against the incursion of Baal worship (cf. Bič, pp. 106–108). The pivotal argument for the early date has usually been Joel's position in the Canon. If other sound ways of accounting for that position can be brought forward, then the case for a ninth-century date is greatly weakened. (3) The table of enemies, condemned for their ill-treatment of Judah: Tyre (dealing slaves to Edom, Amos 1:9), Sidon (the home of Jezebel, Ahab's pagan wife, 1 Kgs 16:31), Philistia (a constant thorn in Judah's western side, Amos 1:6; 2 Chr. 21:16–17), Ionians (Greeks who lived on both sides of the Aegean Sea and were renowned as slave-traders; the Assyrians, Sargon II and Sennacherib had dealings with them in the late eighth century), Egypt (whose raid against Jerusalem in Rehoboam's day was well remembered, 1 Kgs 14:25–28), Edom (in constant tug-of-war with Judah for control of the southern regions, 2 Kgs 8:20–22; Amos 1:6, 9, 11); not a word is heard of Assyria, Babylonia and Persia, the dominant powers from the eighth through to the fifth centuries BC.

Those who advocate a *late post-exilic date* (c. 400–180 BC) have based their claims on a number of lines of evidence: (1) a two-stage composition of the book (see on Unity below) which assigns a late date to the apocalyptic outlook of 2:28 – 3:21, with its supernatural heavenly portents and its seemingly simplistic view of Judah's vindication and the subjugation of the neighbour nations; (2) the heavy use of what appear to be quotations from other books:

Joel passages:

Joel 1:15, cf. Isa. 13:6; Ezek. 30:2–3; Zeph. 1:7;

Joel 2:2, cf. Zeph. 1:14–15;

Joel 2:3, the reverse of Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35;

Joel 2:6, cf. Nah. 2:10;

Joel 2:17, cf. Ps. 79:10;

Joel 2:27, cf. Isa. 45:5–6, 18; Ezek. 36:11;

Joel 2:28, cf. Ezek. 39:29;

Joel 2:31, cf. Mal. 4:5;
 Joel 2:32, cf. Obad. 17;
 Joel 3:4, cf. Obad. 15;
 Joel 3:10, the reverse of Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3;
 Joel 3:16, cf. Isa. 13:13; Amos 1:2;
 Joel 3:17, cf. Ezek. 36:11;
 Joel 3:18, cf. Amos 9:13;²

(3) mention of the wall of Jerusalem (2:7, 9), presumably rebuilt by Nehemiah (c. 445 BC); (4) reference to the Greeks (or Ionians, see above), often interpreted, especially by earlier commentators, as evidence of a Hellenistic date (post 332 BC); (5) if the heavenly portents are eclipses of sun and moon, dates based on astronomical calculations would be after 357 or 336 BC.³

None of these arguments can be deemed conclusive: (1) though apocalyptic literature is generally to be dated later than prophetic, the two genres are often so close, especially in the early stages of apocalyptic, that the borderline between the two is not clearly marked and the differences in literary motifs between Joel 2:28 – 3:21 and Daniel are more significant than the similarities; (2) even if the flow of quotations is one-way, with Joel as the recipient, none of them needs necessarily be later than 500 BC and several of them may reflect common use of a traditional saying rather than direct borrowing; furthermore, the scholarly consensus has come down heavily on the side of Joel's unity in recent years;⁴ (3) Jerusalem's wall prior to Nehemiah's

2. For a table of these quotations, see H. G. M. Williamson, *ISBE*, rev., II, p. 1078.

3. F. R. Stephenson, 'The Date of the Book of Joel', *VT*, 19, 1969, pp. 224–229.

4. G. W. Ahlström (p. 91), arguing from Joel's prophetic perspective that the future arises out of the present, from the absence of threat from world powers, from the lack of any connection between Joel and an historic figure under whose name he speaks, from the literary style, which is remarkably free of allusions to secret knowledge, puzzling riddles, or allegorical pictures of the world's end, concludes: 'Thus, Joel is not an apocalyptic book.' All the same, Ahlström acknowledges that

reconstruction does not seem to have been completely levelled; there could well have been substantial parts standing, as the brief rebuilding time (52 days, Neh. 6:15) may intimate;⁵ (4) contacts between Greek traders and merchants and their counterparts in the Levant, several centuries prior to Alexander's time, are now well documented;⁶ (5) the darkened sun (2:30–31) need not be understood literally as an eclipse but figuratively as a mark of *theophany* (cf. 2:10; 3:15; cf. Amos 8:9).

The *middle range of dates* (cf. 630–500 BC, just before to just after the exile) seems to offer the most promise in our effort to narrow the options. Composition during this period seems best to accord with the close parallels cited above between Joel and Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Obadiah. The affinities with Zephaniah, as well as Amos, are particularly striking in the passages that deal with the Day of Yahweh (see below). Joel's attention to the cult and his tantalizingly brief mentions of its role and functions seem to resemble the pictures of temple-worship preserved in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁷ There is not an insoluble problem with any of the names of cities or nations in such a sixth-century dating, as Kapelrud (his conclusion is Zedekiah's day; 598–587 BC; p. 191), Rudolph (597–587 BC) and Keller (his projected date is 630–600 BC; p. 103) have clearly

Joel 'may have contributed to the beginning of apocalyptic' by 'the strong emphasis on the paradisaical future'; cf. also Kuhl (p. 177) who sees Joel, as a 'transition' to apocalyptic, and Plöger (p. 104) who finds in Joel 'the beginnings of the path which leads to the later apocalyptic'.

5. See W. S. LaSor, 'Jerusalem', *ISBE*, rev., II, p. 1017.
6. Kapelrud, pp. 153–158; J. M. Myers, 'Some Considerations Bearing on the Date of Joel', *ZAW*, 74, 1962, pp. 177–195; D. Auscher, 'Les relations entre Grèce et la Palestine avant la conquête d'Alexandre', *VT* 17, 1967, pp. 8–30. Bič (pp. 90–91) has gone so far as to remove the reference to Greeks (Ionians; 3:6) by reading the Heb. *yāwān* (Ionian) as *yāwān* 'sediment', 'mire' (cf. Pss 40:2; 69:2). 'Sons of mire' he then understands as the Egyptians (cf. 3:19), so named thanks to the yearly flooding and silting of the Nile.
7. See Ahlström, pp. 35–61, for detailed arguments to this effect.

shown (cf. also Koch, pp. 158–159). The arguments from language, word-usage, syntax, spelling, etc. can be pressed only with considerable tentativeness but tend to weigh against an early pre-exilic date (Ahlström, pp. 1–22).

The only major data which may help to narrow further the time-spread are the descriptions of the havoc wrought against Judah by the nations (3:1–8): parcelling out the land and giving it away, casting lots for the people, selling children into slavery for a pittance, stripping the people of their silver and gold, auctioning the citizens to the Ionians as slaves and thereby scattering them throughout the Mediterranean basin. The text sounds literal not hyperbolic and appears to leave us with only one period in Judah's history where all this could have happened on the scale that Joel implies: the *exile*, with its total disruption of life in Judah and Jerusalem. The Old Testament clearly remembers how viciously opportunistic were the Edomites (3:19) at Jerusalem's fall (586 BC; Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 25:12–14; 36:5; Obad. 10–14) and how impotent at best and treacherous at worst were the Egyptians on whom Judah relied in her futile rebellion against Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1–7; Jer. 46:1–26). That the people of Tyre, Sidon and Philistia may also compound Judah's suffering both by direct involvement (Ezek. 25:15–26:7) or by buying slaves from Edom (cf. Edom's stellar role in slave-trade; Amos 1:6, 9) will not surprise anyone acquainted with the vaunted cruelty and insatiable ambition which the Old Testament and other historical records attribute to them.

Judah has been exiled, so we surmise: no king is summoned (cf. Hos. 5:1), only citizens and elders (1:2, 14; 2:15–16). Yet the temple ritual is in full operation, so Joel states. This combination of inferences suggests a date for Joel roughly contemporary with Haggai and Zechariah but after the completion of the second temple, rebuilt by Zerubbabel at the urging of the two prophets and completed about 515 BC. Malachi's picture (c. 450 BC) of the abuses of public worship and his style of prophetic declaration, heavily influenced both by the catechetical techniques of the wisdom teachers and the *tôrâ* disputes of the priests and scribes, are sufficiently different in tone and content to suggest that Joel's work must have been some decades earlier. Worth noting here is that Joel (3:19) sees Edom's devastation as yet in the future, while Malachi (1:2–5) describes it as past. When all

is said, a date for Joel in the vicinity of 500 BC may not be too wide of the mark.⁸

4. The setting of the book

We have so little personal information about Joel (no more than his father's name) that we can only guess at how he lived, where he worked and what lay behind his prophetic utterances. There are no historical notes about his ministry (cf. Hos. 1:2; Amos 7:10–17) and no record of his call or commission.

Some lines of evidence combine to suggest that he may have had an official attachment to the temple. His familiarity with temple practices and procedures, his knowledge of liturgical formulas, his featuring of the role of priests both in the suffering and recovery from the plagues, his concern for Jerusalem in her present distress as well as her future deliverance, his focus on Mount Zion as the dwelling place of Yahweh mark him, at the very least, as a pained yet hopeful citizen of the capital and probably as a participant even in the temple services. Worth special note is what seems to be Joel's role as spokesman for Yahweh in describing the setting of the salvation oracle (2:18) and delivering the oracle itself (2:19–3:21). It is the combination of the *temple setting*, so expressly prescribed, and the *oracle itself* that marks off Joel's prophecy from other salvation oracles.

Clearly fashioned with material from Judah's liturgical literature, especially her communal complaints (often called 'laments'),⁹ the

8. Among recent commentators, there is a strong tendency to settle for a late 6th-century to mid-5th-century date: Ahlström (p. 129), 515–500 BC; Watts (p. 13), 'period of the second temple between the revival of Haggai and Zechariah and the reforms of Ezra'; Myers, *loc. cit.*, c. 520 BC; L. C. Allen (p. 24) agrees with Ahlström and Myers; Williamson, *loc. cit.*, places the book between 515 and 345 BC; W. S. Prinsloo (pp. 5–9) surveys the various theories without adding to them, except for his brief 'after the exile' in the concluding chapter (p. 127). H. W. Wolff (p. 5) settles for 'the first half of the fourth century' and thus departs somewhat from the current consensus. Cf. also Hanson, pp. 313–314.

9. I find it useful to distinguish *complaints* (e.g. Lam. 3; 5) where rescue is

prophecy of Joel is not itself a liturgy but a call to participate in one (1:2 – 2:17) accompanied by a record of what happens when the people do (2:18 – 3:21).¹⁰ As to whether the book or its parts were ever put to liturgical use during the centuries immediately after its composition, we have no information though we assume from Micah 7, Habakkuk 3 and other prophetic passages that liturgical editions of prophetic materials were not uncommon.

Joel's interest in the temple worship may show itself in his repeated attention to the Day of Yahweh, which as Amos (5:18–20, 21–27) informs us was a theme associated with the cultic assemblies of Israel. The new and the familiar turns which Joel gives to the Day (cf. on 3:14) may reflect both his continuity with Judah's joyful expectations of divine protection and restoration under the aegis of the covenant, and his certainty that none of this would happen without the judgment on God's people foreseen by Amos and Zephaniah.

This leads us to the major point. If Joel was a temple prophet, as he may well have been, he was no routine functionary, no mere mouthpiece for the priests and their teaching of Torah. His close acquaintance with prophetic writings (see above for list of quotations) and his eschatological vision mark him as much more than a cultic herald.¹¹ The close attention given to the cult and its imminent collapse, thanks to the grasshopper hordes, may well signal that the cult itself was corrupt. Without overtly singling out the sins of the

yet possible from *laments* (Lam. 1; 2; 4) where death or total destruction have set in and grief is outpoured without any hope of redress.

10. G. S. Ogden, 'Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses to National Laments', *JSTOT*, 26, 1983, pp. 97–106, has noted a number of connections between the four oracles of ch. 3 (Heb. 4) and the psalms of national complaint, describing *military* disaster. Kapelrud (pp. 7, 44, 55, 72–74, 90, 132, 159, 167) finds the setting of Joel in the liturgies of the New Year Festival which purportedly included royal enthronement ceremonies connected with the Day of Yahweh. Such a liturgical setting seems to assume more than can be proved.
11. See Coggins, pp. 88–93, for a balanced interpretation of Joel's ministry that links him to the Jerusalem cult without implying that he is distanced in form and shape of ministry from the other prophets of his time.

religious leaders and their compromises, perhaps even to the point of idolatry, Joel almost subliminally may be calling for a renewal and purification that can be found only with a full return to Yahweh. The attention paid to Yahweh's uniqueness, especially in the recognition/self-introduction formulas (2:27; 3:17), would seem to underscore the religious syncretism or pluralism that lay at the heart of Judah's problems. Since the disaster had already occurred at the point where the prophecy begins, Joel's crisis is unlike that of most prophets, who can focus on the sins of the people while there is still time and sharpen that focus by the threats of judgment yet to come; Joel's attention is fully occupied by the disaster all around him, so the normal pattern of a judgment speech (cf. Amos 1:3ff.) is not available to him. He has to point the way out and he does that with a brilliant and passionate call and summons in 1:2 – 2:17. But into these calls and their accompanying descriptions of disaster he folds hints of the religious corruption which was costing the cult its life.

The calls issued to *drunkards* (1:5), *farmers* (1:11) and *priests* (1:13) may contain more than meets the eye. Drinking to excess within the cult was a crime that more than once drew prophetic fire (Hos. 4:11; 9:2; Amos 1:8). Not surprisingly, drunkards are *not* singled out for blessing in the restoration (2:21ff.), even though wine is promised among the divine blessings. For the farmers, confoundment and wailing have replaced joy and gladness. The reason may be more than agricultural; it may be religious. The farmers, most of all, were vulnerable to Canaanite fertility practices. Their threshing floors and wine vats (2:24; Hos. 9:1–2) were the arenas where the power of their fertility cults was proved or disproved. When crops failed, thanks to Yahweh's judgment, their work places were inevitably turned from sites of joy to scenes of lamentation (1:11; cf. Amos 5:16–17). The priests (1:13) may be earmarked not only as those who suffered keenly because the offerings ceased but as those who merited suffering through failure to keep the cult pure. The weeping to which they were summoned may have included tears of contrition as well as petition (2:17). The failures for which Hosea held them explicitly culpable (Hos. 4:1 – 5:7) Joel may have been alluding to implicitly, in a subtle form of matching punishment to crime.

The clearest case that Judah's failing, for which the locust plague

was retribution, was a cult-gone-wrong is found in the language that calls for *return* and displays the results of that return (2:12–14). Return implies defection, disobedience, covenant-rebellion. Return is the reversal of waywardness. The call is not general but specific – ‘unto me’ (2:12); ‘to Yahweh, your God’ (2:13). And the return is to be effected in and through the cult, the official, public worship: its *signs* are fasting, weeping, mourning (2:12); its *site* is the temple; its *spokespersons* are priests (2:17); its tangible *result* is material blessing, the means of presenting cereal offerings and libations of wine to Yahweh (2:14); its *climax* is the recognition of the truth of Yahweh’s self-proclamation – ‘I am your God and there is none else’ (2:27; cf. 3:17). The reminder that ‘there is none else’ coupled with a seven-fold use of ‘your God’ (1:14; 2:13, 14, 23, 26, 27; 3:17) is calculated as rebuke and reassurance. Along with the call to return, the stress on Yahweh’s exclusive relationship to his people is strong evidence that *idolatry* had not been completely purged from the second temple. Like their ancestors in Josiah’s day (c. 621 BC), the men and women of post-exilic Judah had succumbed to syncretism and compromised the exclusivity of Yahweh’s sovereignty and their covenant commitment to him.

Their cult had become as corrupt as it was crucial. Its activities continued at full pelt, but its focus had been badly blurred. Hence, the locusts, commissioned by an offended Sovereign. Hence, the call to return, uttered by an aggrieved prophet. Hence, the cries of penitence, addressed by a contrite congregation to their one Lord, whose uniqueness became dazzlingly clear in the midst of their deprivation. Hence, the spirit, outpoured on the entire people to make endemic the knowledge of the one true God through manifold means of revelation (2:28–29).

If this reconstruction of Joel’s setting is reasonably accurate, the purpose of his book becomes plain. He saw in the locust-plague God’s means of correcting, of purifying, the cult and, beyond that, of preparing the way for the full blessing of Yahweh on the people through the gift of his spirit, the defeat of his enemies, and the permanent prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem. None of this would have happened without the divinely induced return to the chief stipulation of the covenant: ‘You shall have no other gods before me’ (Exod. 20:3). That the exile with all its agony and dislocation did not

permanently purge the people of their idolatrous inclinations is a potent reminder of the truth of the old hymn, 'Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.' Through Joel's plague and the thousands of catastrophes that followed it, God has prompted his people of both covenants to return to him.¹²

5. Unity and structure

The strongest evidence for the unity of Joel is found in its tight-knit structure and its pattern of repeating key words and phrases throughout the book. These marks of unity have impressed recent scholars more strongly than have the earlier arguments for disunity based in the main on supposed differences in tone between 1:1 – 2:27, where the locust-plague and the recovery from it dominate, and 2:28 – 3:21, with its eschatological picture of the Day of Yahweh.¹³

The arguments for structural unity have been discussed and even diagrammed in various ways. Representative of these efforts would be Williamson's tabular revision (*ISBE*, rev., II, p. 1079) of Allen's analysis (pp. 39–43):

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12. For a thorough, though at times overdrawn, picture of the cultic background of Joel, see Ahlström, pp. 23–61. Markedly different is the reading of G. S. Ogden, *op. cit.* He views the locusts, the fire and the drought all as images of military invasion and, in sharp contrast to Ahlström and the approach of this Commentary, contends that Judah's suffering is undeserved (as in certain psalms where protests of innocence are found) and that Joel, therefore, 'does not regard repentance as necessary' (p. 105).
13. B. Duhm, 'Anmerkungen zu den Zwölf Propheten', *ZAW*, 31, 1911, pp. 184–187, viewed 2:28 – 3:21 as Maccabean additions reflecting the apocalyptic views of a synagogue preacher. Among these influenced by his bifurcated view of Joel have been Bewer, Sellin, Robinson, R. E. Wolfe, 'The Editing of the Book of the Twelve', *ZAW*, 53, 1935, pp. 90–129, H. Birkeland, *Zum hebräischen Traditionswesen. Die Komposition der prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Oslo: ANVAO, 1938), pp. 64–66, and Soggin.