

Some prefer a simpler two part outline:

- I. The Coming disaster 1:1--2:20
- II. The Promised blessing 2:21--3:21

I suppose you may want to make up your own in the face of such indecisive presentations.

Joel has a key place in the history of redemption largely by virtue of his instruction on the Day of the Lord and his predictions of a time of enlargement coming by the Spirit of God (2:28-32) The Day of the Lord is cited in 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; and 3:14. It is obviously a time of God's wrath on a particular party at any given time rather than the reference to one set day that will be uniform on all. (Consult the citations in Isa 13:6, Amos 5:18, Zech. 14:1, Zeph. 1:8 among others to see the reality of this point.) So it is that God is going to bring a great day of trial that will seem utterly catastrophic to his people. But when his will of judgment is accomplished he will bring the promised blessing. He is not a God who forgets or who acts in a pique. He has a purpose and a goal in all that he does. In this way Joel serves as an Old Testament in-rodutory book to the larger picture of judgment that will come with the book of Revelation.

In showing Israel the fidelity of God and the achievement of divine purpose, the prophet emphasizes the blessing that is coming (2:21-32) and the state of blessing that will uniquely mark Israel (3:18-21). We will remind ourselves that redemption is not accomplished without cost.

Some interesting questions on this line will stimulate our thinking in the book: Did the predictions of Joel center in his day or in the days to come? how is the prediction of Joel 2 to be understood in the light of the citation of fulfillment in Acts 2? What is the "northerner" (who may be the better term) and are the locusts literally understood or figuratively understood for a conqueror? What is the impact of the "valley of decision 3:14 and the renewed emphasis on the sun and moon being darkened(3:15)?

Regarding archaeological information little is available that relates directly to Joel. The practices described in 3:6-8 are confirmed practices but they are confirmed over many centuries and may not only apply to this section of history.

In seeking to understand Joel better it is important to note that his message is chiefly to Judah and when the term Israel is used it is used as the covenantal name, not, apparently, the name of the northern nation. (2:27) The action centers around Zion (2:15; 3:16-17) and develops about a people judged and blessed. (2:21). Many interesting aspects enter into this such as 1:4 and 2:25 where the various stages of insect life have devastated the land.

Study aids that will give you further interest in this prophecy include discovering the nature of the creatures of 1:4; comparing passages in Joel and Amos (Joel 3:16, Amos 1:2) and Joel and Isaiah (Joel 1:15, Isa. 13:6) and seeing if further comparative passages may be found; studying the famous valley of 3:14 and learning what is behind the KJV word "decision"; and looking up the Joel citations in the New Testament. You can easily read Joel at a single sitting and it is interesting to compare Joel phrases and ideas with similar concepts in other parts of the Old Testament: the trumpet of Joel 2:1, for example, with the trumpets of Numbers 10. You may also, with a concordance, look up all the occurrences of the "Day of the Lord."