



# 1.

## Introduction to the Prophecy

### The Man

Apart from his name and that of his father, the prophecy itself provides only scant information about the author. Attempts to ascertain his exact identity are further limited by the commonness of his name, for the Old Testament mentions at least a dozen different men by the same name (1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Chron. 4:35; 5:4, 8, 12; 6:33, 36; 7:3; 11:38; 15:7, 11, 17; 23:8; 26:22; 27:20; 2 Chron. 29:12; Ezra 10:43; Neh. 11:9). Acts 2:16 provides the only New Testament reference.

The name Joel is a compound form of two Hebrew designations for deity, Yahweh and Elohim, and means 'Yah[weh] is El[ohim].' The Hebrew name carries over into the Septuagint (LXX) and the New Testament with the same meaning.

Assuming the date of Joel is correct (see later discussion), the name of the contemporary prophet Elijah is similar, meaning 'my El[ohim] is Yah[weh].' The name itself is either a tribute to the faith of the parents, reflecting on their piety, or a confession of faith made by the prophet when he selected the name.

Joel distinguishes himself from others who had the same name by giving the name of his father. Pethuel means 'open-



heartedness' or 'sincerity toward/of God' and, like the name of his son, reflects well upon his character. Facts concerning his father are equally obscure, this being the only occurrence of the name. The substitution of 'Bethuel' in the LXX is unfounded, being either a scribal error or an attempt to relate the prophet with the patriarchal period (Gen. 24:15).

Due to the prophet's profound interest in the various aspects of the temple worship and his zeal for the continuation of the prescribed sacrifices, it has been suggested that Joel was of priestly descent. Some have even connected Pethuel with Pethahiah (1 Chron. 24:16), giving additional support to this theory. It is doubtful, however, that Joel was a Levite. In 1:13-14 and 2:17 he addresses the priests objectively, distinguishing himself from them as a group to which he did not belong.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, his frequent reference to the pastoral and agricultural life, as well as his familiar contacts with people, implies a background other than the normal seclusion of the priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

His considerable knowledge of the temple and the levitical procedures has led others to classify Joel as a 'temple-prophet' or as belonging to one of the schools of the prophets.<sup>3</sup> This conclusion is strengthened further by the contention that the prophecies possess the dramatic movement of ritual, borrowed from the cultic liturgy and designed to be spoken on the occasion of a great festival.<sup>4</sup> While the composition of the book will be discussed below, it should be noted that the utilization of certain liturgical

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1. Cf. J. A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Obadiah and Joel*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1974), 67.
  2. Cf. J. Hardee Kennedy, *Joel*, in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. by Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 61.
  3. Cf. A. S. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1948) 176. Due to the visible zeal of Joel for the maintenance of religious rituals, some contend that many of the prophets were temple servants, receiving their support from the temple revenue (cf. A. A. MacRae, 'Prophets and Prophecy,' in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed., Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975] IV: 889-890).
  4. John D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 12.

phrases and forms merely implies an active participation in the religious and does not necessarily suggest that he was a 'temple-prophet.'

Extra-biblical tradition records that Joel was from the tribe of Reuben. Pseudo-Epiphanius in *Vitae Prophetarum* as well as the end of G<sup>22</sup> suggest that he came from Bethom.<sup>5</sup> The legend is unsupported, however, having been derived apparently from 1 Chronicles 5:4 where a certain Joel is mentioned as the descendant of Reuben. The impression emanating from the whole prophecy is that Joel was a Judean who made his home either in Jerusalem or in the immediate vicinity. He speaks from the temple, bidding the priests to blow the trumpet in Zion (2:15) and gather the nation for a solemn assembly in the house of God (1:13-14; 2:15-17); he envisions the enemy besieging and entering Jerusalem (2:9); he addresses the people as the sons of Zion (2:23), Judah, and Jerusalem (3:6). In all of these he speaks as one who is intimately related and personally acquainted with them. The tone of a stranger is absent. The existence of the northern ten tribes of Israel goes unmentioned, except for their inclusion with Judah in three eschatological references to Israel (2:27; 3:2, 16) which describe God's restoration of the fortunes of His covenant people. 'The absence of any direct promise of the extension of those blessings to the ten tribes (such as occur in Hosea and Amos) implies that he had no office in regard to them.'<sup>6</sup>

### The Date

Not only is the book undated in the superscription but there is a noticeable absence of significant temporal references within the text. Consequently, dating is dependent upon internal allusions, references that are at best sketchy and have multiple explanations. Although the position of Joel in the Hebrew canon implies an early date and this

5. Bewer, 67. This town, sometimes called Bethharan, was located north-east of the Dead Sea on the border of Reuben and Gad. It should not be confused with the city of Bethhoron (Beit Ur) located ten miles northwest of Jerusalem.

6. E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, in *Notes on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), I, 143.