The Chronological Position of Joel among the Prophets.

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IN examining the question of the date of Joel, one is not forced to reckon with any generally accepted ancient tradition. Two hundred years ago Pocock was nonplussed by the variety of conjectures and, after enumerating dates from the time of David to that of Josiah and the drought mentioned in Jer. 14, he concludes that "the matter is no way certain, and it is sufficient for us to know that Joel was one whom God thought and made fit to be employed in his message to his people." To-day if one should merely enumerate authorities and dates, it might seem that the hopeless variety of conjecture had been multiplied, while the limit of possible date has been extended down more than two centuries after Josiah. The discussion for the past fifty years, however, shows certain general lines along which there is a measure of unity.

After Credner had published in 1831 his argument to prove that the conditions of the book were satisfied by fixing the date in the early part of the reign of King Joash, his view was adopted by Ewald, Delitzsch, and others, and was hardly questioned until about twenty years ago. But in 1879, when Merx in his commentary on Joel advocated a post-exilic date, he was able to summon an imposing array of opponents to Credner's view, including Vatke, Duhm, and Oort. After the publication of Merx's commentary the post-exilic date came to be generally accepted among critical scholars of England as well as Germany. A careful paper, however, was presented before this Society in 1888, in which it was strongly maintained that "the historical situation in Joel" was "that of the invasion of Hazael, seen from a strictly contemporary point of view," and in 1892 Kirkpatrick advocated Credner's view; but the discussion keeps itself narrowed to the alternatives, pre-Assyrian or post-exilic.

The main data for the argument are as follows: —

1. Relations with outside nations indicated. While Joel threatens Tyre, Zidon, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom, he seems to be absolutely

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silent as to the Syrians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. This omission is generally relied upon by those who favor the early date. While it seems to rule out any date from 800 to 536 B.C., in itself it does not weigh in deciding between the two great alternatives.

The fact that Edom and Philistia appear in Joel as free is thought to furnish a fairly definite *terminus a quo*, as it would seem that the prophecy must have been later than the successful revolt of Edom in the time of Joram, and might follow the successful attack of the Philistines upon Judah, recorded in 2 Chr. 21^{16}. The victory of Joash's immediate successor, Amaziah, over the Edomites seems to determine the date still further, limiting it to the fifty years between Joram and Amaziah. This argument, too, has no weight in determining between the early and post-exilic dates. The most that can be said is that we find a possible occasion for Joel's allusions to Edom and Philistia in the ninth century, and that somewhat similar charges are made by Amos in the next century. On the other hand, such references are little if at all less intelligible in the post-exilic period, when the surrounding peoples were hostile.[1]

No account satisfactorily explaining the terms in which Joel refers to Egypt and Phœnicia is found in the records of the ninth century.[2]

There are some decided difficulties for the advocates of the early date in the absence of allusion to northern Israel; the reference to the children of Javan; and the picture of the assembly of all the nations, which appears elsewhere only at a late date. The allusion to the Northerner in 2^{20} seems to furnish little more difficulty with one supposition as to date than with another. Passing over such difficulties, which are perhaps not insurmountable, the cautious student must admit that so far as Joel's statements reveal the relations of Israel with the outside nations, they find in some points a fairly satisfactory historical situation in the ninth century. He must admit further that the records of the post-exilic period furnish no definite, historical events to which Joel's allusions can be referred. On the other hand, he must recognize that the allusions are in a general way in accord with the conditions of the post-exilic period, so far as we know it. In a word, the allusions to the nations outside of Judah fail to furnish an absolute criterion.

2. Social and political condition of the nation. The fact that Joel does not allude to king or princes, although he enumerates various classes of the people, — farmers, elders, priests, etc., — led to the ingenious suggestion that he belonged to the first period of Joash's

[1] Neh. 4^{1}.

[2] This is admitted by Kirkpatrick.

reign, when the monarchy was held in tutelage by the priesthood. Yet the silence accords equally well with the known facts of the post-exilic period, and the mention of elders favors a date long after Joash. They are named, it is urged, in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the later Isaiah, while the admittedly oldest prophets make no allusion to them.

Joel pictures the Hebrews scattered among the nations, speaks of restoring the captivity of Judah, and alludes to a time when Jerusalem has been profaned by the presence of strangers. One advocate[3] of the early date freely admits that it is more natural to refer these allusions to the events of the later history than to any raid of the earlier history with its possible scattering in captivity. The social and political condition indicated by Joel seems to furnish no more absolute criteria than the allusions to the outside nations.

3. Moral and religious condition of the nation. Joel furnishes us with definite data for determining the religious, and to some extent the moral, condition of the nation. There can be no difference of opinion as to the striking condition of affairs existing. It is only when we attempt to determine the date indicated by the condition that there is room for discussion. A cursory reading of the book shows the prominent position of the priests, the importance of the regular meat and drink offerings, and the central significance of the temple. The advocates of the early date account for this condition by attributing the book to the regency of Jehoiada. Perhaps it is impossible to say that priests, temple, and offerings did not hold such a commanding position for a few brief years. Yet this can hardly be called more than a reasonable conjecture. We know that such a condition did exist in the post-exilic period.

When one compares Joel with the prophets known to be early, the fact that he does not denounce moral wrong is most striking. Apparently the great sins against which Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah inveighed did not exist in the days of Joel. They did not hesitate to attack the priests and to speak slightingly of ritual service.[4] The conflict between true and false worship is prominent in the prophets from Amos to Jeremiah. Can it be that under the sway of Jehoiada and his priesthood there was no idolatry in the land? Athaliah the daughter of Ahab had just been removed from the throne; before her Ahaziah had reigned a year, and, according to the narrative in Kings, had walked in the way of the house of Ahab.[5] His reign had been

[3] Reuss, quoted by G. B. Gray in *The Expositor* viii.

[4] Hos. $6^{8\,ff.}$ Mi. 3^{7} Am. 5^{21-25} Is. $1^{11\,f.}$

[5] 2 Kings 8^{27}.

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preceded by the eight years of Jehoram, who walked in the way of the kings of Israel as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife.[6] It is recorded, it is true, that the people had destroyed the house of Baal and slain his priest,[7] but it is hardly conceivable that the insidious Baal worship could have been so completely wiped out that Joel would not have found in it a cause for the threatened destruction. Even in the days of Joash and Jehoiada the priests appear in rather an unfavorable light.[8]

This brief statement of facts as to the social, political, and religious conditions reflected by the Book of Joel has made it clear that while many facts fit remarkably into the reign of Joash, there are allusions to outside nations which are hard to understand at that date, there are social and political conditions of Judah which seem more in accord with the post-exilic period, and there is a moral and religious condition of the nation which hardly seems possible at the time of Joash. On the other hand, none of the facts seem absolutely inexplicable on the supposition of a post-exilic date.

4. Language, style, and parallel passages. Holzinger gave a very elaborate presentation of the linguistic argument in the *ZATW.* for 1889, and concluded that "the book plainly belongs to the latest period of Old Testament literature." It has been suggested by an advocate[9] of the late date that the facts which he gathered hardly warrant such a strong statement as this; yet his investigation is the most thorough which has been made in this direction.

The purity of the style has been urged as an evidence of antiquity; but there seems to be force in the reply that it is cultivated and polished rather than powerful and original.

An interesting and careful discussion of passages in Joel parallel with those in other prophets appeared in the *Expositor* for 1893.[10] The conclusion reached was that Joel shows dependence upon the early prophets, rather than the early prophets upon Joel. These recent discussions as to language and parallel passages are hardly sufficient in themselves to determine the date of the book, but it is interesting to observe the conclusion reached from different standpoints.

5. The ideas of Joel compared with those of other prophets. We have already trespassed upon the ground which we are now to tread.

[6] 2 Kings 8^{18}.

[7] 2 Kings 11^{18}.

[8] 2 Kings $12^{5f.}$.

[9] G. B. Gray, in *The Expositor* viii.

[10] G. B. Gray. "Parallel Passages in Joel, and their Bearing on the Date." *The Expositor* viii. 208 ff.

It was impossible to consider the moral and religious condition of the nation without touching upon Joel's own moral and religious ideals. We are now to look at these more closely, with a view to discovering indications of Joel's chronological position among the prophets.

Not only does the Book of Joel reveal the fact that priests, temple, and ritual worship hold a supreme place; it also shows that Joel himself is in the closest sympathy with all of these. He finds nothing to condemn in the priests and existing ritual. To Joel the cessation of the ritual was equal to a break between the land and Yahweh, a view which is very unlike all the prophets down to Jeremiah.[11] It is only when we come to Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah that we find other prophets attributing such importance to the temple. All this is perfectly natural on the supposition of the late date; but if Joel was early, we must suppose that in the ninth century the priestly and prophetic religion were at one, and that the distinction between the two which was so conspicuous from the time of Amos and Micah to that of Jeremiah arose in the years between Joash in the ninth century and Amos and Micah in the eighth.

We have noticed the fact that Joel does not charge priests or people with sins. Some color may be given to the claim for the early date, by assuming that this would be characteristic of the time before the great prophetic insistence upon justice and mercy rather than sacrifice. That seems to have been a new idea in the time of Amos, and it might be that Joel wrote before such a conception had arisen. On the other hand, the fact that Joel does not attack unrighteous conduct toward one's fellow-men would be very natural in the post-exilic period.

In Joel's picture of the ideal future there are elements common to nearly all the prophets, but there is at least one conception which, if Joel is early, seems to have disappeared from the prophetic teaching for two hundred years. It then appears again in part in Zephaniah, but in its fulness only in Ezekiel and Zech. 14. It is difficult to suppose that Joel originated in the ninth century the ideal picture of the gathering of the nations against Judah, there to be judged by Yahweh, and that this dropped utterly out of the prophetic anticipations for so long a time, although successive prophets predicted bitter ruin to the enemies of Israel. If Joel was early, we should expect them to have adopted this picture, since they did not hesitate to adopt his ideas and even his language.

[11] A. B. Davidson, *Expositor*, 1888.

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The Book of Joel has been termed "a monograph on the day of Yahweh." Let us look at it as such, and try to trace the thought. At the outset the writer is confident, from the terrible scourge which has devastated the country, that the day of Yahweh is at hand. Here it is evidently a day of terror to Zion. Later the idea that the day was upon them is seen to be a mistake, and the assurance is given that that day will not come without full warning, and then it will not result in the utter destruction of Yahweh's people, but there will be a remnant. This is followed by another aspect of the day as a day of judgment upon the nations which have injured Israel, to come at the time of her restoration.

Evidently the idea of the day of Yahweh in Joel is a complex one, involving elements which seem almost contradictory, or else there is a progress of thought in the book from an erroneous idea of the day of Yahweh as a day of judgment upon Zion to the true idea as a time of judgment upon her enemies.

The effort to comprehend just what Joel meant by the day of Yahweh, when he pictured it at one time as a day of destruction upon Zion, and at another as one of destruction upon her enemies, led me to try to trace out the course of this prophetic figure, studying the prophecies as nearly as possible in chronological order. The study included not only the passages where the exact phrase 'day of Yahweh' occurs, but also those in which 'the day,' 'that day,' 'the time,' 'that time,' seem to refer to some occasion of especial divine manifestation which is evidently the same as the occasion termed the 'day of Yahweh.'

It is impossible, as Cheyne says, to unite in a single picture all the various features of this day as given in the different prophecies; but it is possible to enumerate the chief features of the picture, and in a measure to trace their history, as the different prophets emphasize one feature or another at this or that particular juncture. Our final view of the original meaning of the phrase will depend upon the date we assign to Joel. If he is the earliest of the prophets, we must say that, so far as the extant writings show, Joel is the first to introduce the doctrine of the day of Yahweh, and this will lead us to adopt the "current idea that the day of Yahweh is primarily a day of judgment or assize day." If, on the other hand, Joel proves to be of late date, we first find the idea in the Book of Amos, and infer that the original meaning was that of the popular conception which Amos combats, the day of Yahweh's especial manifestation for the benefit of his people. All his people by right of birth apparently

expected to share in the benefit. Amos saw that a righteous God must judge and could not champion such a people. If Joel preceded Amos, then we are not indebted to Amos for this great truth; he is rather emphasizing the view already familiar in the first chapter of Joel, and attacking the confidence which the last chapter of Joel had fostered.

When one traces out thus the various elements of the complex picture in the prophetic writings, he finds that the elements of Joel's representation of the day, at first sight contradictory, are the common property of the prophets. If Joel is late, then we may read his somewhat disconnected presentation of the various elements of the picture in the light of the other prophets from whom he evidently drew. We may fill in the gaps and find a clear order of thought. For centuries the prophets have taught that Yahweh would manifest himself in judgment; there is a terrible scourge which seems likely to destroy the whole nation. This must be the forerunner of the expected day, yet Israel may be spared if she turns to Yahweh. The turning brings relief and assurance of plenty. Afterward there will be spiritual blessing, and there will be warning of the approach of the day; yes, and it has been predicted that there will be a remnant, and the prophets have declared, too, that that day shall be one of judgment to the enemies of Judah, to be followed by her establishment. The great difficulty which we find in putting together the parts of Joel's picture lies in the fact that he leaves out the recognition of Israel's sinfulness and the conception of the judgment on Israel as resulting from sin. He gives us the different aspects of the day of Yahweh which are intelligible together only as we fill in this ethical element from the other prophets. It seems impossible to harmonize the two sides of the great picture which are given by Joel — judgment on Israel on the one hand, and judgment on her enemies with the blessing of a remnant of Israel on the other — without positing the prophetic ethics.

If Joel lived before the day when the prophets of righteousness arose, whence did he get this double picture? If there was no distinction made between the righteous and unrighteous Hebrews, it is not easy to see how the conception of a remnant saved from the general destruction arose, or how it came to be imagined that the day of the God of Israel could be one of terror for his people. It is possible that the answer to the latter difficulty may be found in the inability of the people to pay the sacrifices demanded, but apparently all alike were suffering from that difficulty, and there would be no

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ground for a remnant to hope. The conception of the day as one of judgment upon the enemies is the natural one for a people and prophet who are doing their best to keep up a ritual which is deemed the one thing needful.

If we leave Joel out of the investigation, we find the different features of his picture of the day of Yahweh appearing with the men and the circumstances which would be expected to produce them. If Joel were late, he had studied the earlier prophets with great assiduity. One of his chief teachers had been Amos, who had declared the day of Yahweh to be one of darkness. A day of darkness had indeed come to the people. This must be the day predicted by Amos and enlarged upon by Zephaniah. The darkness is changed to the light of hope, and the prophet remembers that his predecessors had given assurance that when the day did come, it should have no terrors for a part of the people: besides, the day was to be one of destruction to the enemies of Israel, and was to usher in a glorious future for Judah. We have still a complex, almost an incongruous picture of that day; yet it is possible to comprehend it in part, if we regard Joel as a very late prophet, who put together ideas from many predecessors, leaving out the one element which makes both sides of the picture true, namely, the ethical element.

We may not feel able to say with Cornill, "Few results of Old Testament research are as surely determined and as firmly established as that the Book of Joel dates from the century between Ezra and Alexander the Great," and yet it is difficult to see how one can study Joel in the light of the other prophets and advocate an early date, unless he is ready to deny that progressive development of Israel's religion through her prophets which has seemed to be growing clearer through all recent investigations.

Hitherto we have been considering whether Joel belongs to the ninth century or the post-exilic period. Incidentally some facts have been noticed which tend to locate the book more definitely.

When Joel prophesied, the temple was standing, so that we must put him after Haggai and Zechariah, after the completion of the Second Temple. Quite probably the walls of Jerusalem were finished,[12] in which case the date is after 444. Other considerations tend in the same direction. Malachi, who prophesied perhaps shortly before the mission of Ezra in 458, or more probably about 432, just before or during Nehemiah's second visit, finds marked

[12] Joel 2^9.

abuses to attack: degeneracy of the priesthood, intermarriage with foreigners, and remissness of the people in the payment of sacred dues. These abuses, especially the second and third, were very actively attacked by Ezra and Nehemiah.[13] Even during Nehemiah's second visit, after the formal adoption of the law and his severe measures of reform, he was obliged to deal with the abuses of mixed marriages, neglect to support the priesthood, and Sabbath desecration. The fact that such sins are not even mentioned in Joel argues as strongly against the time of Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah as it does against the pre-exilic period. These abuses had not grown up in a night, so that Joel is equally excluded from the years immediately preceding Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It may be possible to ascribe his work to the period immediately after the completion of the temple in 516, when, in the absence of records to the contrary, we may imagine that the abuses had not become keenly felt. On the whole, however, the ritual atmosphere of the book seems to accord better with what we believe to have been the condition of affairs and the national temper after Nehemiah had completed his reforms. Hence if it is granted to be post-exilic, the century after Nehemiah seems to be the most probable period to which to ascribe the prophecy of Joel.

[13] Ez. 9^{2} $10^{3.\ 16-44}$ Neh. $10^{30.\ 32\ ff.}$ $13^{4\ ff.\ 26b}$.

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