

DEVASTATING DAY OF THE LORD

Commentary on the Book of Joel

by Paul G. Apple, May 2025

THE DEVASTATION OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD
(PREFIGURED IN THE LOCUST PLAGUE AND SEVERE
DROUGHT) SHOULD PROMPT HEARTFELT REPENTANCE
THAT WILL LEAD TO GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISES OF
RESTORATION AND BLESSING

Joel 2:12-13 *"Yet even now, declares the Lord, Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil."*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

This data file is the sole property of the author Paul Apple. However, permission is granted for others to use and distribute these materials for the edification of others under two simple conditions:

- 1) The contents must be faithfully represented including credit to the author where appropriate.
- 2) The material must be distributed freely without any financial remuneration.

This data file may not be copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Paul Apple. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to:

Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF JOEL

GENERAL

Both the book of **Hosea** and the book of **Joel** provide solid support for the dispensational position of maintaining a distinction between God's program for Israel and God's program for the church. How does a passage like **Is 49:14-15** fit into an amillennial perspective? **Edward Young** comments:

“Even though the forces of infidelity and unbelief, of indifference and ignorance, may attempt to overthrow the Church, yet God is with her, for she is ever before His eyes.”

That view really waters down the impact of Hosea where God restores His adulterous people to the covenant relationship. In Joel we are going to see more of the details of God's program for Israel as it relates to the coming **Day of the Lord**.

Promises remain certain for the nation as a whole; while enjoyment of the promises is dependent on the repentance and faithfulness of the immediate generation.

What events are spoken of in Joel?

- locust plague that devastated the land – actual, not just a threat
- language in **chap 2** that goes beyond that historical plague
 - possibly has a near fulfillment in some more immediate historical context
 - definitely looks forward to ultimate fulfillment in the eschatological Day of the Lord

John MacArthur: The phrase [**Day of the Lord**] does not have reference to a chronological time period, but to a general period of wrath and judgment uniquely belonging to the Lord. It is exclusively the day which unveils His character – mighty, powerful, and holy, thus terrifying His enemies. The Day of the Lord does not always refer to an eschatological event; on occasion it has a near historical fulfillment, as seen in **Eze 13:5**, where it speaks of the Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. As is common in prophecy, the near fulfillment is a historic event upon which to comprehend the more distant, eschatological fulfillment.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Joel is not a book for the faint of heart. It invites readers along on a wild ride through a catastrophic locust plague. It immediately hurls readers into a maelstrom of devastation caused by waves of locusts that have consumed every shred of vegetation and the entire human food supply (**1:4**). Readers are kept on edge by the figurative language, not fully knowing whether the insatiable invaders are really hordes of locusts or whether they symbolize unstoppable enemy warriors bent on conquest. The devastation initiated by the locusts deepens into scorching drought, blazing fire, and crushing invasion, all representing manifestations of the day of the Lord. The reader wonders if there can be any hope for the faith community. Hope lies in worshipful lament, prayer, and turning wholeheartedly to God. Once readers pass through the call to turn to God (**2:12-17**), the turbulence ends, and the ride becomes smooth. Joel guides readers through a landscape that has turned green and fertile because God has blessed it with abundant rain so that it can now provide generously for both wild and human creatures alike. The

ride continues through spiritual renewal for God's people and then political upheaval on the day of the Lord, which will see God destroy enemy nations on the way to restoring Israel's political fortunes.

Lloyd Ogilvie: As many of the other Old Testament prophets, Joel spoke to his people at a moment of crisis. The immediate crisis was an extraordinarily severe locust plague combined with drought, which destroyed most of the crops on which their food supply depended. It was so serious that it affected the harvest of more than one year. The very survival of God's people in Jerusalem and Judah was in question.

In the locust invasion Joel saw an even greater danger prefigured—the approach of the day of the Lord, when God would lead a fearsome army in judgment on His wayward people. They remained outwardly religious, but their hearts strayed from Him.

Joel spoke to wake up his people, so that they would realize the grave danger in which they were living. Then he exhorted them to come before the Lord sincerely, to return to the Lord with all their hearts, and to pray that the Lord would spare them. Finally Joel spoke God's words of encouragement to His threatened, but now repentant, people.

Raymond Dillard: [Regarding Plague of Locusts]

In our generation areas having the potential for a locust outbreak are monitored by international agencies using satellite reconnaissance and other technology; incipient swarms are met by aircraft and trucks carrying powerful pesticides. However, if the locusts are not destroyed or contained shortly after the hatch, once the swarm has formed, control efforts are minimally effective even today. For example, in 1988 the civil war in Chad prevented international cooperation in attacking the hatch, and a destructive swarm spread throughout North Africa devastating some of the poorest nations and threatening Europe as well. It is difficult for modern Western people to appreciate the **dire threat** represented by a locust plague in earlier periods. Such outbreaks had serious consequences for the health and mortality of an affected population and for a region's economy. Scarcity of food resulting from the swarm's attack would bring the population to subsistence intake or less, would make the spread of disease among a weakened populace easier, would eliminate any trade from surplus food products, and would stimulate high inflation in the costs of food products. Disease outbreaks are further aggravated when swarms die; the putrefaction of the millions of locust bodies breeds typhus and other diseases that spread to humans and animals (see the description in Augustine's *City of God* 3.31). Baron (*Desert Locust*, pp. 3-7) catalogues many locust outbreaks known to have been accompanied by outbreaks of pestilence.

It was only in 1921 that the mystery of the locust was solved. Prior to this date researchers wondered what became of the locust during the years in which there were no outbreaks. In 1921 B. P. Uvarov demonstrated that the swarming locust was none other than an ordinary species of grasshopper. However, when moisture and temperature conditions favored a large hatch, the crowding, unceasing contact, and jostling of the nymphs begin to stimulate changes in coloration, physiology, metabolism, and behavior, so that the grasshopper nymphs make the transition from solitary behavior to the swarming gregarious and migratory phases of the dreaded plague. Plagues continue as long as climatic conditions favor the large hatches. Once entering

their gregarious phase, swarms, of locusts can migrate great distances and have even been observed twelve hundred miles at sea. The swarms can reach great sizes: a swarm across the Red Sea in 1889 was estimated to cover two thousand square miles. A swarm is estimated to contain up to 120 million insects per mile Baro *Desert Locust*, (Raymond Dillard, *The Minor Prophets*, "Joel," p. 255-56).

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

J. Sidlow Baxter: Joel, whose name means "*Jehovah is God*," calls himself "*the son of Pethuel*" (i.1). Beyond this we are told nothing about him. His book makes it tolerably certain, however, that he exercised his prophetic ministry in or near Jerusalem. . . It is the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem which is then to be ended (iii. 1); and it is Judah and Jerusalem which shall "*dwelt forever*" (iii. 20). The ten-tribed northern kingdom is not once mentioned.

BibleHub.com: Joel is identified as the recipient of God's message, marking him as a prophet. The name "*Joel*" means "*Yahweh is God*," which is significant in the context of his message that calls the people back to faithfulness to God. Joel's role as a prophet is to convey God's warnings and promises to the people of Judah. The lack of specific historical markers in the book makes it difficult to date precisely, but Joel's message is timeless, addressing themes of repentance and divine judgment.

son of Pethuel -- This phrase provides a **genealogical detail**, which is common in biblical texts to establish the identity and credibility of the prophet. Pethuel is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, suggesting that Joel's authority comes not from his lineage but from his divine calling. This detail also serves to distinguish Joel from other individuals with the same name, ensuring clarity about the prophet's identity. The mention of his father may also imply a family known for faithfulness or spiritual insight, though specific details about Pethuel are not provided.

Thomas Constable: We know little about Joel, whose name means "*Yahweh is God*." He was the son of Pethuel ("*Persuaded of God*"), who does not appear to have been an especially famous person. Eleven other individuals in the Old Testament bore the name "*Joel*" (1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Chron. 4:35; 5:4; 7:3; 11:38; 15:7; 26:22; 27:20; 2 Chron. 29:12; Ezra 10:43; Neh. 11:9).

I prefer an **early or mid-pre-exilic date**, mainly because of Joel's position in the Hebrew canon among other writers of this period, which reflects Hebrew tradition. I think he was probably one of the earliest writing prophets. **John Calvin's** word of caution bears repeating:

"... as there is no certainty, it is better to leave the time in which [Joel] taught undecided; and, as we shall see, this is of no great importance."

David Guzik: The prophet Joel spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah without making reference to the northern kingdom of Israel. It's hard to know when he prophesied because Joel doesn't mention any other kings or prophets. Many scholars date the book of Joel to **835 B.C.**

i. This makes Joel a pre-exilic prophet, who served before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (721 B.C.) and the southern kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.). Other pre-exilic prophets

include Obadiah, Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Joel is one of the earliest prophets – only Obadiah prophesied before his time (845 B.C.).

ii. 835 B.C. was a time of turmoil and transition in Judah, at the end of the reign of the Queen Mother Athaliah and the beginning of the reign of King Joash. Athaliah seized power at the sudden death in battle of her son Ahaziah, who only reigned for one year (**2 Kings 8:26, 2 Chronicles 22:2**). Athaliah killed all her son's heirs, except for one who was hidden in the temple and escaped – one-year-old Joash (**2 Kings 11:3**). Athaliah's six-year reign of terror ended in 835 B.C. when the high priest Jehoiada overthrew her and set the seven-year-old Joash on the throne (**2 Kings 11:4-21**).

iii. During her six years as queen over Judah, Athaliah reigned wickedly. She was the granddaughter of the ungodly King Omri of Israel – making her daughter or niece to Ahab, one of Israel's worst kings (**2 Kings 8:26**). Athaliah raised her son Ahaziah to reign in the wicked pattern of Ahab, and even brought in Ahab's counselors to advise him (**2 Chronicles 22:2-4**). When Ahaziah was killed in battle Athaliah seized power and set her other sons to do evil, even desecrating the temple and its sacred things (**2 Chronicles 24:7**).

iv. If we are accurate in thinking that Joel prophesied in 835 B.C. then the judgment he described came toward the end of the six-year reign of ungodliness under Queen Athaliah. No wonder God brought a heavy hand on Judah!

Colonial Hills Baptist Church: Joel contains a list of the **enemies** that have attacked Judah, and the list sounds fairly early in the nation's history. Judah is concerned about Phoenicians, Philistines, Egyptians, and Edomites (**Joel 3:4, 19**). These countries were the main problem for Judah in her early days. Later, Assyria and Babylon would come to dominate the scene. This suggests, again, an **early date** for the writing.

Pulpit Commentary: The sin of idolatry is nowhere mentioned, and the regular worship of Jehovah is everywhere presupposed. Under the three monarchs preceding Joash, idolatry was prevalent; and under Joash himself pure worship was lamentably degraded as soon as the reverent hand of Jehoiada the high priest was withdrawn; so that it is concluded that Joel's prophecy must be set in the earlier part of Joash's reign, when the young king was under tutelage." This would place this book in the period of about 835 B.C. until 796 B.C., which is the time during which Joash reigned.

Leslie Allen: The early view was put on a scholarly footing by **K. A. Credner** in 1831. He assigned it to the early part of the reign of Joash in the ninth century B.C. Many nineteenth-century scholars enthusiastically took up Credner's arguments, such as **Ewald, Pusey, Keil**, and **von Orelli**; and some more recent ones have espoused his view and dated Joel between 870 and 860 B.C. The historical allusions to Egypt and Edom in **3:17, 19** are then explained by reference to Shishak's attack on Jerusalem in Rehoboam's reign (**1 K. 14:25f.**) and to the revolt of Edom in the reign of Jehoram (**2 K. 8:20–22**). It is assumed that citizens of Judah resident in Edom were massacred then, and that Amaziah's savage treatment of Edom (**2 K. 14:7**) was a reprisal for an earlier bloodbath. The nonmention of such national enemies of Judah as Syria, Assyria, or Babylon is easily explicable: Syria did not threaten Judah till later in Joash's reign, while the

other two belong to a later period. On this view the reference in **3:2** to “*dividing my land*” also applies to Edom as part of Judah’s former domain. On the other hand, the historical allusions in **3:3, 5, 7** are explained in terms of the raid of the Philistines and Arabs on Judah in the reign of Jehoram (**2 Chr. 21:16f.**), when the king’s sons and wives were seized. It is assumed that the Phoenicians played the role of slave-traders. It is significant, however, that **Keil** dissented from this interpretation. He considered that the terms used in **3:2, 3** were far too strong to be interpreted thus: he took the passage as a prediction of future judgment on Jerusalem and the later dispersion of the Jews; but **Keil**’s predictive view is exegetically doubtful, since the events do appear to lie in the author’s past. The fact that a king is not mentioned in the course of Joel’s oracles is explained on the early view by reference to the minority of Joash; hence his appeals to the priests are linked with the control of the high priest Jehoiada while Joash was a minor.

LITERARY STYLE:

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The book of Joel is a didactic work made up of a complex mix of genres (**Hadjiev** 2020a: 24–30). It imitates a liturgy of lament but fundamentally consists of a didactic narrative that is incorporated into a proto-apocalyptic vision of the end of the world. Its primary aim is to teach the audience how to act in crisis situations in the light of the Lord’s past actions in history and his decisive future intervention. The liturgical forms and the apocalyptic language are heuristic devices that correspond to its dual focus on the present and the future

J. Sidlow Baxter: Both in style and subject this Book of Joel is arresting. For vividness of description and picturesqueness of diction Joel is scarcely equaled. His pen-pictures of the plague-stricken land, the invading locust-army, and the final gathering of all nations to the valley of judgment, are miniature masterpieces of graphic vigour.

Pusey: The chief characteristic of the Prophet's style is perhaps its simple vividness.

David Baker: Joel is written mainly in poetry, as is the case for most prophecy. As such, it uses language carefully and for effect. Two literary devices used frequently in the book are simile and metaphor, figurative comparisons between things. Simile is evident through the twelve appearances of the comparative preposition “like” in Hebrew (see **Joel 1:8, 15; 2:2, 3, 4[2x], 5[3x], 7[2x], 9**).

Metaphor is also plentiful in Joel. These include various types:

- personification: “*nation*” of locusts (**1:6**); ground mourns (**1:10**); land fears, is glad, rejoices (**2:21**); “*innocent blood*” (**3:19**)
- animal: Yahweh’s roaring (**3:16**)
- plant: joy withers away (**1:12**)
- meaning extension: rend the heart (**2:13**); locusts as fire and flame (**1:19; 2:3**, possibly literal); locusts eating years (**2:25**); harvesting of sins (**3:13**); Yahweh as stronghold and fortress (**3:16**); pouring out Spirit (**2:28–29**); treading grapes as judgment (**3:13**, cf. **Jer. 25:30; Lam. 1:15**)

Duane Garrett: The Book of Joel uses a wide variety of rhetorical devices. **J. Crenshaw** has cataloged some of the techniques the book employs. These include **hendiadys** (using two words to express a single idea, as in “*great and dreadful*” in **2:31**), **merismus** (combining two antithetical ideas in order to express universality, as in “*sons and daughters*” in **2:28**), **rhetorical questions** (as in “*Are you repaying me for something I have done?*” in **3:4**), and **alliteration** (as in the Hebrew of **1:15**, *ûkēšōd mišadday*). Joel also used simile and metaphor effectively, as when the locusts are described as a powerful “*nation*” in **1:6**.

J. A. Thompson: [Identifies 8 functions of **repetition**]

1. Emphasis. Examples include simple repetition of the same word, as in “*multitudes, multitudes*” (**3:14**). Also Joel could use a wide variety of related words to give his message vivid imagery and emotional impact. In **2:1–11**, for example, the invading army is said to “*run*” (**2:4, 9**), “*leap*” (**2:5, 9**), “*charge*,” “*scale*,” “*march*” (**2:7**), “*plunge*” (**2:8**), and “*enter*” (**2:9**).

2. Correspondence. Joel often used similar language to link the various events his book describes. For example, the locust plague is said to be a “*dreadful day*” and the “*day of the Lord*” (**1:15**). The invading army of **2:1–11** also comes on a “*day of darkness*” and “*the day of the Lord*” (**2:1–2**). The eschatological age of **2:28–32** is also the “*day of the Lord*” when the sun and moon go dark (**2:31**), and the last great battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat is the dark “*day of the Lord*” as well (**3:14–15**).

3. Contrast. In **2:19, 22, 24** Joel describes the restoration of grain, wine, oil, pastures, trees, and vineyards. This reverses the destruction of these items in **1:7, 10, 12, 18–20**. Sometimes contrast is achieved by using the same verb with a different subject. In **2:13** the prophet exhorts the people to “*return*” (*šûb*) to the Lord, whereas in **2:14** he hints that the Lord may “*turn*” (same word in Hebrew) and have pity.

4. Climax. The description of the attack by the enemy army in **2:1–11** reaches its climax in **2:9**: “*They climb into the houses; / like thieves they enter through the windows.*” The many references to the “*day of the Lord*” throughout the book prepare the reader for the account of the last judgment of **chap. 3**.

5. Succession. The text calls upon the old men to tell the story of the locust plague to their children, their children's children, and for generations to come (**1:3**). **Joel 1:4** may describe either successive waves of locusts or the stages of growth (instars) of the locust. Either way the rhetorical effect of **1:4** is that Judah had been hit by successive waves of infestation.

6. Irony. In **3:4** God asks the Phoenicians and Philistines, “*Are you repaying me for something I have done?*” and then continues, “*If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.*” The text goes on to describe how they will suffer the same treatment they inflicted on the Jews (**3:6–8**).

7. Anaphora, Beginning a Section. The phrase “*blow the trumpet in Zion*” initiates both the battle alarm of **2:1** and the liturgical call to repentance in **2:15**.

8. Epiphora, Ending a Section. The parallel phrases “*flames have burned up all the trees of the field*” and “*fire has devoured the open pastures*” (1:19–20) concludes the account of the locust plague in **chap. 1**. The repeated lines “*never again will my people be shamed*” (2:26–27) conclude the section on the healing of the land after the locust plague. In addition, **D. Marcus** has investigated the phenomenon of “nonrecurring doublets” in Joel. These are short phrases that occur twice but only twice in the book. According to **Marcus**, there are forty-seven such doublets, and they relate complementary ideas to one another, indicate reversals, and link passages through allusions.

John Goldingay: Parallels in Joel to Other Prophetic Texts

Joel	Parallel Text
1:15	Ezek. 30:2–3
1:15	Isa. 13:6 (also Zeph. 1:7; Obad. 15)
1:20	Ps. 42:1 [2]
2:1–2	Zeph. 1:14–15
2:3	Ezek. 36:35 (also Isa. 51:3)
2:6	Nah. 2:10 [11]
2:13	Jon. 4:2*
2:27	Isa. 45:5
2:32	Obad. 17
3:3	Obad. 11
3:10	Isa. 2:4 = Mic. 4:3
3:16	Amos 1:2
3:18	Amos 9:13
3:19	Obad. 10

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES:

John Barton: “Our Joel is the problem-child of Old Testament exegesis,” wrote **Adalbert Merx** in his important monograph on the book and the history of its interpretation.¹ And indeed, it has proved difficult for commentators to arrive at any consensus on this short and vivid book. It has been dated anywhere between the ninth and second centuries B.C.E. It has been regarded as a tightly composed unity but also as an almost random collection of disparate oracles. Joel has been thought of as a prophet like the preexilic prophets, with a message of imminent divine intervention, but also as a purely literary compilation of stock eschatological themes with no message of immediate relevance to anyone. In Christianity the promise that God will “*pour out [God’s] spirit on all flesh*” (**Joel 2:28**) has been seen as fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1–21**), but the rest of the book has scarcely had a distinctive profile among the Minor Prophets. And then there are the locusts: are they real or symbolic, bringers of a literal famine or harbingers of the last days, or all these things at once? It has proved difficult to get any real purchase on the message of this enigmatic prophet. Indeed, commentators cannot even agree on the unity of the book of Joel, with powerful voices defending an essentially single work and others thinking in terms of two separate collections, **1:1 – 2:27** and **2:28 – 3:21**, possibly deriving from quite different periods.

David Guzik: *He has given you the former rain faithfully . . . and the latter rain in the first month:* At the end of Joel 1, the prophet saw the destruction drought brought. Now with the eye of faith he sees God restoring both the former and latter rain to Israel.

i. Ancient Israel had no irrigation system, and relied on rain to water their crops. In a time of drought, nothing grew. God promises to restore both the former rain (falling in autumn) and the latter rain (falling in spring). When God restores these rains, Judah will have full threshing floors and wine vats.

ii. This passage along with others (**Deuteronomy 11:14, Hosea 6:3**) were taken to give the name of the “*Latter Rain Movement*” starting in 1948 by **William Branham**. Branham influenced a generation of Pentecostal preachers, including a young protégé named **Oral Roberts**. Marked by strange and aberrant doctrine and practices, the movement eventually faded from prominence and Branham himself died in a traffic collision with a drunk driver in 1965. He died on Christmas Eve, and his faithful followers believed that he would rise from the dead, so they delayed his burial for several days. But the influence of the Latter Rain movement lived on.

The Latter Rain popularized many attitudes and doctrines popular in revival movements today:

- ❖ The “five-fold ministry” and “restoration of apostle and prophets”
- ❖ The “foundational truths” of **Hebrews 6:1-2**
- ❖ An emphasis on signs and wonders as marks of true revival
- ❖ A strong emphasis on unity
- ❖ Replacement theology, replacing Israel with the church
- ❖ Dominion theology, saying the church will conquer and rule the world
- ❖ An elitist attitude, promoting the idea of a group of “superchristians”

Homer Heater Jr.: The most difficult issue in the book is the significance and relationship of the locusts in chapters one and two. This is tied into the issue of the meaning of **the day of Yahweh**. The problem is exacerbated by the tendency of the prophets to merge the past or present with the future. . . The ultimate concept is that God will set all things right in the eschatological future, and that this will include judging Israel and the other nations and the restoration and conversion of Israel as God's people on their land. At the same time, God's judgment at any period can be referred to as the day of Yahweh. My approach to the book of Joel is to see both chapters one and two as the same event (one that happened sometime in the history of Judah) that is being treated as a type of what is yet to come when God judges the world. As such Joel can slide into the great eschatological outpouring of the Spirit (**2:28-32**) and the complete restoration of Israel (**3:1-21**).

Leslie Allen: But most scholars interpret the locusts in both chapters in strictly contemporary terms, and this is the most natural way of construing the material. **1:2-4** speaks of the locusts as a present threat to Joel's generation and the occasion of his summons to lamentation. **1:16** confirms this impression of direct involvement with the ravages of real locusts. The past verbs of **2:18, 19** categorize Yahweh's response to the locust crisis and the people's penitential cries as having already occurred. It is significant that **the locusts behave in a literal manner**: they ravage fields, trees, and fruit, but do not kill or plunder, or take prisoners of war. They are indeed described metaphorically as an attacking army and are compared with soldiers, but to conceive of figurative locusts who are like the soldiers they are supposed to represent is a tortuous and improbable interpretation. Moreover, the restoration promised by Yahweh in **2:18-27** concerns the material damage associated with locust attacks. In **Amos 7:1-3** a locust plague is certainly a symbol of coming destruction, and **Rev. 9:3, 7-9** actually applies Joel's language to an apocalyptic event, but these passages provide no warrant for detaching the theme of Joel from its historical and literary contexts.

PURPOSE OF WRITING

John Piper: There are four things I think we should take to heart.

- 1) First, let us never lose sight of God's purpose in history—from grasshopper swarms, to world-wide judgment, to the dissolving of sun and moon—his purpose is to be God in the eyes of all the world. . .
- 2) Second, if our hearts wander from this God, he will fight against us to bring us to repentance.
- 3) Third, therefore, as Joel pleads, rend your hearts and not your garments, awake (**1:5**), lament (**1:8**), be ashamed and wail (**1:11**), declare a fast, and cry to the Lord (**1:14**) for mercy. Turn from the sin you cherish and for which you feel guilty every day. Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (**2:13**). Don't be bitter at God because he clogs your way and frustrates your day. Every divine stroke is the discipline of a loving Father and a blow against our pride, our self-reliance, and our love for the world. Turn and kiss the rod of God, and the Lord will become to you a gentle shepherd.

4) Fourth, and finally, let us pray and seek God earnestly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised in **2:28, 29**.

Thomas Constable: Joel wrote, at Yahweh's direction, in order to warn his audience about a coming day in which God would judge His people. He compared this devastating judgment to a terrible locust invasion that had fairly recently swept through the land. What he said about this coming judgment has only seen partial fulfillment; some of it still lies in the eschatological future (i.e., the eschaton or end times for planet earth). God would send blessing as well as judgment, however, and this too has only come partially on the Israelites so far. The prophet warned his hearers that unless they repented of their empty formalism in worship, and turned back to Yahweh wholeheartedly, devastating judgment would overtake them. If they repented, God would pardon them and restore His blessings to them abundantly.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Not only does Joel provide a model for how Israel is to respond to present or future hardships (Seitz 2016: 35); it also seeks to reassure a struggling community that God is compassionate and will respond graciously when Israel turns to God in all sincerity.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The blessings of God experienced in the present show that God is good and he cares for his people. In this way Joel validates the theological importance of present reality. What happens in history matters, not least because it shapes human understanding of God. It is legitimate, normal, even commendable, to seek to experience blessing and to rejoice in the good gifts that God lavishes upon his people. This is the default position of human existence. When this position is disrupted for reasons that are beyond current knowledge, the community of faith is called not to abandon the Lord but to seek him even more earnestly. . .

Taken as a whole, the book of Joel invites its readers to interpret their present experiences in the light of the past and future actions of God, and to live in accordance with that understanding. It sees the world as a dangerous and mysterious place, riddled with insecurity, ambiguity and threat. The only way to navigate this complex reality is to constantly turn to the Lord: to rejoice in his goodness in times of plenty, and to lament and cry out to him in times of disaster.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

Chuck Swindoll: Using what was at that time the well-known locust plague in Judah, Joel capitalized on a recent tragedy to dispense the Lord's message of judgment and the hope of repentance. In referring to the terrible locust plague, Joel was able to speak into the lives of his listeners and imprint the message of judgment into their minds, like a brand sears the flesh of an animal.

One commentator notes that the **day of the Lord**, which is a reference not to a single day only but to a period of judgment and restoration, consists of three basic features:

- The judgment of God's people
- The judgment of foreign nations
- The purification and restoration of God's people through intense suffering

We find each of these elements in the book of Joel, as it offers one of the most complete pictures in Scripture of this ultimately redemptive event (**Joel 2:1–11; 2:28–32; 3:1–16**).

David Baker: There is a distinction, therefore, between the near term “*day*,” which is black indeed for everyone, and a more distant “*day*,” which anticipates a time of hope for the faithful (cf. **2:29; 3:1, 18**). In light of the despair facing everyone because of the current calamities, there needs to be a ray of future hope, but also a warning that there is no restoration without repentance.

Trent Butler: Joel concentrates on one theme—the **Day of the Lord**. He plays several variations on that theme. The day is past, being experienced in a plague of locusts and in a natural drought and famine. The day is current or imminent, carried out by an enemy military force. The day is future: immediately in the salvation of Jerusalem from current problems; long-range in the giving of the Spirit of God on all people and the deliverance of all who call on the name of the Lord; and ultimate in the eternal holiness of Jerusalem, protected from its enemies, flowing with fertility, lived in obedience to the one true covenant God, and enabled by God's pardon of Israel's guilt.

Thomas Constable: The sovereignty of God and the inevitability of divine punishment for covenant unfaithfulness are dominant themes in Joel. The severity of God's judgment stands out in Joel.

"Joel's depiction of the absolute authority of Yahweh over all the peoples of the earth is among the strongest in the Old Testament." [**Douglas Stuart**]

So is Yahweh's compassionate forgiveness in response to repentance. “*The day of the LORD*”—both judgment and blessing aspects—is also a prominent theme (**1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14**). Thus the administration of God is a strong motif: how God exercises His sovereignty when His people sin. Another important theological contribution of Joel is his prediction of God pouring out the Holy Spirit in the last days (**2:28–32**).

ESV.org: Key Themes:

- I. *Day of the Lord.* The dominant theme of the book is the “**day of the Lord**.” This describes a time when the presence of the Lord brings judgment and/or deliverance and blessing, depending on the circumstances. Therefore, although the “day” results in destruction for the nations, it can also be seen as a time of salvation for God’s people. The Lord remains a refuge in the chaos of judgment (**3:15–16**).
- II. *Repentance.* If the whole community would cry out to the Lord (**1:13–20**) and look to him—not merely with external actions but in sincerity and commitment (**2:12–13**)—then judgment may be prevented. However, the Lord is not bound by the acts of the community (**2:14**). It is his decision to either send or withhold the destruction by the locusts (**1:15**), just as the army is his to command (**2:11**).
- III. *The Lord in their midst.* The reason the Lord will turn from judgment to blessing is to express his covenant-keeping character (**2:13, 18–26; 3:18**). His promise to dwell in the midst of his people is prominent not only in Joel (**2:27; 3:17, 21**) but also throughout the OT (**Num. 35:34; Isa. 12:6; Zeph. 3:15, 17; Zech. 2:10–11**). God restores what the

locusts have destroyed (**Joel 2:27**) and protects Israel as the world crumbles (**3:16–17**) so that the people will know his presence. This theme is restated at the end of the book (**3:21**), showing how important it was for Joel.

- IV. These three themes come together in the *promise of the future outpouring of the Spirit* (**2:28–32**). This outpouring is associated with the day of the Lord (**2:31**) in both its judgmental (**2:30–31**; see **2:10**; **3:15**) and its saving (**2:32**) roles. The outpouring of the Spirit is also related to repentance: those who are saved call “on the name of the LORD” (**2:32**). The giving of the Spirit is the ultimate evidence of God “in the midst of” his people (**Isa. 63:11**; see **Hag. 2:5**).

David Baker: A “health and wealth gospel” understands blessing as flowing inevitably from a right relationship with God, while suffering indicates a breach in one’s relationship with him. Joel gives a different take on this. He does not imply that blessing means elimination of obstacles and pain, but rather that God’s presence, bringing one through these events, which are a natural concomitant to all human existence, is where blessing really resides.

James Nogalski: The theology of Joel flows from the dynamic interplay of its imagery, its juxtaposition of judgment and hope that is connected by calls to change, its exploration of a variety of day of Yahweh concepts, and its creative use of other biblical texts. Combined, these characteristics create a paradigm that assumes a cause-and-effect theology of judgment and mercy has implications for Yahweh’s people here and now.

STRUCTURE

Jeffrey Ingraham:

- I. the disaster that gets attention.
- II. the repentance that gets blessings.
- III. the unrepentance that gets judgment.
- IV. a promise that gets fulfilled.

John Hannah:

1. Introduction (1:1)
2. The day of the Lord in Joel’s time (1:2–20)
 1. The disastrous locust plague (1:2–14)
 1. The destruction of the plague (1:2–4)
 1. The rehearsal of the plague (1:2–3)
 2. The totality of the plague (1:4)
 2. The directions to the people (1:5–14)
 1. The drunkards (1:5–7)
 2. The people (1:8–12)
 3. The priests (1:13–14)
 2. The disastrous drought (1:15–20)
 1. The nature of the drought (1:15)
 2. The effect of the drought (1:16–20)
 1. On daily life (1:16–17)

2. On animal life (1:18–20)
3. The day of the Lord in the latter time (2:1–3:21)
 1. The invasion from the north (2:1–11)
 1. The announcement of distress (2:1)
 2. The analysis of the “day” (2:2–3)
 1. The darkness and the destroyers (2:2)
 2. The destruction (2:3)
 3. The adversaries described (2:4–9)
 1. Their swiftness (2:4–6)
 2. Their precision (2:7–8)
 3. Their conduct (2:9)
 4. The awfulness of the “day” (2:10–11)
2. The challenge to the people (2:12–17)
 1. To turn to Jehovah (2:12–14)
 1. The plea and the reason (2:12–13)
 2. The result (2:14)
 2. To call upon Jehovah (2:15–17)
 1. The participants (2:15–16)
 2. The result (2:17)
3. The restoration of Israel (2:18–32)
 1. The healing of the land (2:18–27)
 1. The renewal of natural resources (2:18–19)
 2. The removal of the enemy (2:20)
 3. The renewal of God’s blessing (2:21–25)
 1. On animal and plant life (2:21–22)
 2. On mankind (2:23–25)
 4. The results of the renewal (2:26–27)
2. The outpouring of the Spirit (2:28–32)
 1. The time and extent (2:28–29)
 2. The evidence (2:30–31)
 3. The work (2:32)
4. The judgment of the nations (3:1–17)
 1. The time of the judgment (3:1)
 2. The participants in the judgment and the basis for the judgment (3:2–6)
 1. The dispersion of Israel (3:2)
 2. The enslavement of Israel (3:3)
 3. The pillage of Israel (3:4–6)
 3. The result of the judgment (3:7–8)
 4. The gathering for the judgment (3:9–12)
 5. The actuality of the judgment (3:13–16)
 6. The result of the judgment (3:17)
5. The blessing of Israel (3:18–21)
 1. The description of Israel’s blessing (3:18)
 2. The desolation of Israel’s enemies (3:19)
 3. The duration of Israel’s blessing (3:20)
 4. The activity of Israel’s God (3:21)

Thomas Constable: OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1
- II. A past day of the Lord: a locust invasion 1:2-20
 - A. An initial appeal 1:2-4
 - B. A call to mourn 1:5-13
 - C. A call to repent 1:14
 - D. The significance of the plague 1:15-20
- III. A near future day of the Lord: a human invasion 2:1-27
 - A. The invading army 2:1-11
 - 1. The nearness of the army 2:1-2
 - 2. The destructive power of the army 2:3-5
 - 3. The relentlessness of the army 2:6-9
 - 4. The invincibility of the army 2:10-11
 - B. A call to repentance 2:12-17
 - 1. An appeal for private repentance 2:12-14
 - 2. An appeal for public repentance 2:15-17
 - C. The possibility of forgiveness and restoration 2:18-27
 - 1. The Lord's gracious response 2:18
 - 2. The Lord's promise of blessing 2:19-27
- IV. A far future day of the Lord: another human invasion and deliverance 2:28—3:21
 - A. Israel's spiritual renewal and deliverance 2:28-32
 - B. God's judgment on Israel's enemy nations 3:1-17
 - 1. The announcement of judgment 3:1-8
 - 2. The description of judgment 3:9-17
 - C. Israel's ultimate restoration 3:18-21

The prophecy of Joel unfolds in **chronological sequence**. It begins with reference to a severe locust invasion that had come as a judgment on the Judahites for their covenant unfaithfulness to Yahweh (**1:2-20**). Even though it is impossible to date this plague, it happened in the recent past from Joel's perspective. The Lord used this severe judgment to call His people, through His prophet, to anticipate an even worse devastation coming in the near future, not from insects but from foreign invaders. He called on the Jews to repent and promised that if they did He would forgive them and save them from this invasion. This would be a **day of deliverance** in which they would learn that He was at work for them. This is what happened when the Assyrians under Sennacherib's leadership attacked Jerusalem unsuccessfully in 701 B.C. (cf. **2 Kings 18—19; Isa. 36—37**). Yet another similar day was coming farther in the future in which they would again experience an invasion by foreigners who hated them. Nevertheless, Yahweh promised to deliver them in that day and to restore them to unprecedented blessing because He was their covenant-keeping God.

John MacArthur: Following **1:1**, the contents of the book are arranged under 3 basic categories. In the first section (**1:2-20**) the prophet describes the contemporary Day of the Lord. The land is suffering massive devastation caused by a locust plague and drought. The details of the calamity (**1:2-12**) are followed by a summons to communal penitence and reformation (**1:13-20**).

The second section (2:1-17) provides a transition from the historical plague of locusts described in **chap. 1** to the eschatological Day of the Lord in **2:18 – 3:21**. Employing the contemporary infestation of locusts as a backdrop, the prophet, with an increased level of intensity, paints a vivid and forceful picture of the impending visitation of the Lord (2:1-11) and, with powerful and explicit terminology, tenaciously renews the appeal for repentance (2:12-17).

In the third section (2:18 – 3:21), the Lord speaks directly, assuring His people of His presence among them (2:27; 3:17, 21). This portion of the book assumes that the repentance solicited (2:12-17) had occurred and describes the Lord's zealous response (2:18, 19a) to their prayer. **Joel 2:18-20** forms the transition in the message from lamentation and woe to divine assurances of God's presence and the reversal of the calamities, with **2:19b, 20** introducing the essence and nature of that reversal.

The Lord then gives 3 promises to assure the penitents of His presence:

- material restoration through the divine healing of their land (2:21-27),
- spiritual restoration through the divine outpouring of His Spirit (2:28-32),
- and national restoration through the divine judgment on the unrighteous (3:1-21).

Warren Wiersbe: Outline:

- I. The Immediate Day of the Lord (1:1-20)
- II. The Imminent Day of the Lord (2:1-27)
- III. The Ultimate Day of the Lord (2:28 – 3:21)

Joel refers to three important events, each of which he calls a "*day of the Lord*."

- He sees the plague of locusts as an immediate day of the Lord (1:1-20),
- the invasion of Judah by Assyria as an imminent day of the Lord (2:1-27),
- and the final judgment of the world as the ultimate day of the Lord (2:27 – 3:21).

In the first, the locusts are a metaphorical army; in the second, the locusts symbolize a real army; in the third, the locusts aren't seen at all and the armies are very real and very dangerous.

John Goldingay: Outline

- I. Preface (1:1)
- II. Listen, face facts, cry out to Yahweh (1:2–20)—a vision of a locust epidemic and of Yahweh's day, and a series of biddings
- III. Sound a horn in Zion (2:1–17)—a vision of an invasion and of Yahweh's day, and a series of biddings
- IV. Promises of restoration (2:18–27)
- V. Then afterward (2:28–3:21 [3:1–4:21])—a vision of Yahweh's day, of judgment and of restoration

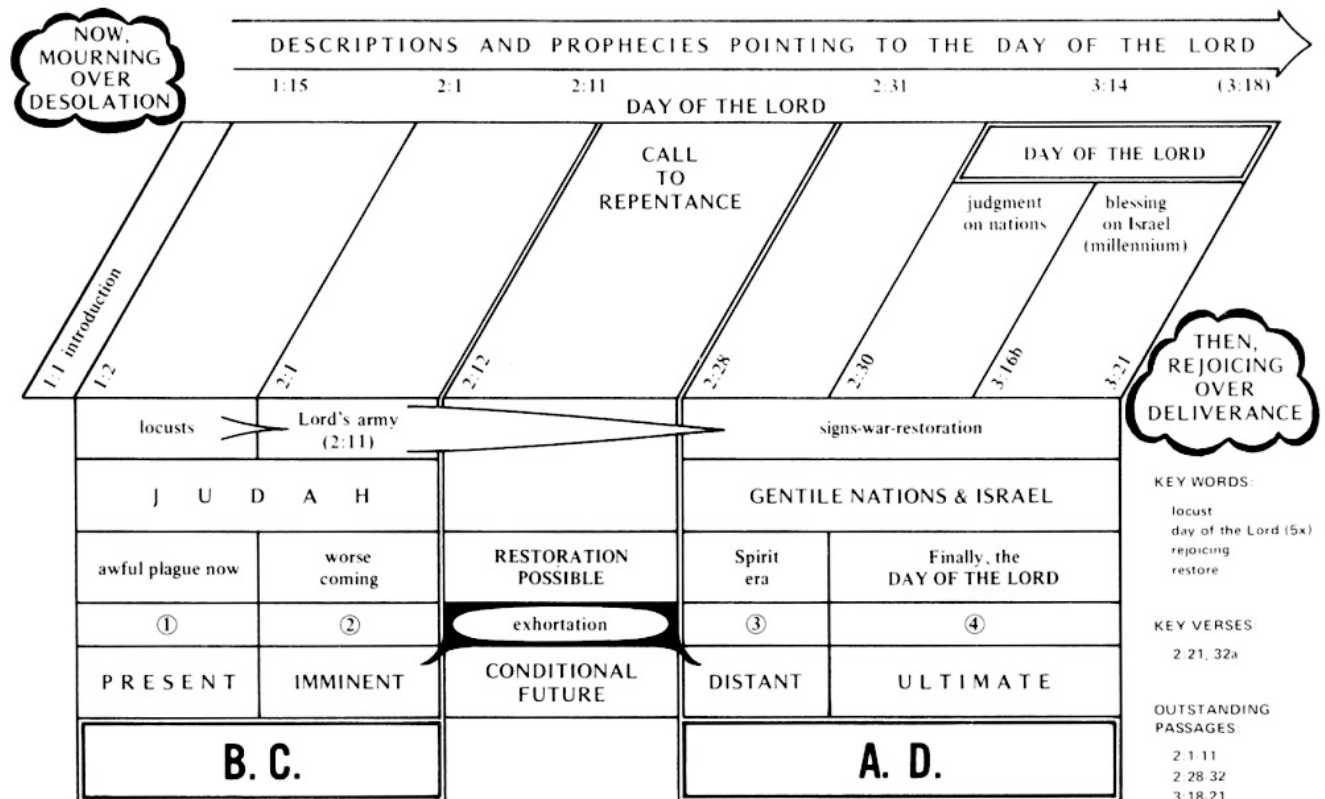
David Malick: Ultimate deliverance from Yahweh at the time of his future judgment upon the nation will occur as they cry to him in repentance just as they did during the local devastation through the swarms of locust.

I. Introduction: Joel, the prophet and son of Pethuel, urged the people to hear his message, in view of the locust plague, and to pass it on down through their generations **1:1-3**

II. An Historical Judgment of God and Deliverance: After Joel described the “local” Day of the Lord through terrible devastation caused by the locusts on the land and the people, he urged them to repent and the Lord had pity for the people and promised to remove the “northern army” away from them and to restore the land and the people **1:4 -- 2:32**

III. An Eschatological Promise to Judge the Nations and Restore Judah: Joel proclaims that in the future Day of the Lord Yahweh will pour out His Spirit upon those who call upon Him, judge the nations with a swift talionic judgment because of their treatment of Judah, and restore Judah to a covenant relationship of blessing with His presence among them forever **2:28 -- 3:21**

Irving Jensen:




Bruce Hurt:

The Book of Joel				
Focus	The Day of the Lord			
Divisions	The Day of the Locust	The Day of the Lord	The Judgment of the Nations	The Blessing of God's nation
	1	1 2	2 3:1	3:17 3:18 3:21
Topics	Locust Invade	Locust Described	Valley of Decision	
	Joel Speaks		Jehovah Speaks	
Place	Judah & Jerusalem			
Time	After 835 B.C.			
Author	The Prophet Joel			

Chuck Swindoll:

JOEL

	<div><div>The Plague of Locusts</div><div><u>The past plague</u></div><div><u>The future invasion</u></div><div><u>Historic Day of the Lord</u></div><div><u>Imminent Day of the Lord</u></div><div><i>CHAPTERS</i> <i>1:1–2:11</i></div></div>	<div><div>The Call to Repentance</div><div><u>“Return to Me”</u></div><div><u>The character of God</u></div><div><u>KEY: 2:13</u></div><div><u>The universal appeal</u></div><div><i>CHAPTER</i> <i>2:12–17</i></div></div>	<div><div>The Future of Judah</div><div><div>One of the greatest promises of hope in all the Old Testament</div><div>Concerning the Spirit of God</div><div>Concerning the judgment of God</div><div>Concerning the kingdom of God</div><div>Ultimate Day of the Lord</div></div><div><i>CHAPTER</i> <i>2:18–27</i></div></div>	<div><div>Concerning the Spirit of God</div><div>Concerning the judgment of God</div><div>Concerning the kingdom of God</div><div>Ultimate Day of the Lord</div><div><i>CHAPTERS</i> <i>2:28–3:21</i></div></div>
Emphasis	Desolation	Exhortation	Restoration	
Emotion	Mourning now  Rejoicing later			
Parallel Verse	“For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; / Weeping may last for the night, / But a shout of joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).			
Theme	Repent, for the day of the Lord is near.			
Key Verses	2:12–14, 18, 25–27			
Christ in Joel	The coming of the Holy Spirit, who applies Christ’s redemption, is predicted in 2:28. Jesus Christ is the One who judges nations but who also restores His people.			

Copyright © 1980, 1997, 2009 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.

OUTLINE OF JOEL

DEVASTATING DAY OF THE LORD

THE DEVASTATION OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD (PREFIGURED IN THE LOCUST PLAGUE AND SEVERE DROUGHT) SHOULD PROMPT HEARTFELT REPENTANCE THAT WILL LEAD TO GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISES OF RESTORATION AND BLESSING

Joel 2:12-13 *"Yet even now, declares the Lord, Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil."*

I. (1:1-20) DEVASTATING LOCUST PLAGUE – **THE DEVASTATION OF THE IMMEDIATE LOCUST PLAGUE AWAKENS** **WEeping AND WAHing AND CRYing OUT TO GOD**

A. (:1-3) DEVASTATION UNPARALLELED

1. (:1) Introduction of the Prophet = Joel
2. (:2a) Call for Attention
 - a. Directed to the Leaders
 - b. Directed to the People
3. (:2b) Uniqueness of the Devastation (Extent / Severity)
4. (:3) Testimony to Succeeding Generations

B. (:4) DEVASTATION DESCRIBED

1. Army of Gnawing Locusts
2. Army of Swarming Locusts
3. Army of Creeping Locusts
4. Army of Stripping Locusts

C. DEVASTATION LAMENTED

1. (:5-7) Lamented by Wine Lovers
 - a. (:5) Call Addressed to 2 Different Categories of Offenders
 - i. Alcoholics
 - ii. Sophisticated Pleasure Seekers
 - iii. Same Deprivation
 - b. (:6) Characteristics of Invading Forces
 - c. (:7) Consequences of Devastating Calamity

2. (:8-10) Lamented by Worship Leaders
 - a. (:8) Contradictory Deprivation
 - b. (:9) Cessation of Sacrifices
 - c. (:10) Complete Devastation
3. (:11-12) Lamented by Working Laborers
4. (:13) Lamented by Worship Leaders

D. (:14-15) DEVASTATION INTERPRETED

1. (:14) Response of the People: Consecration to the Lord
2. (:15) Threat from the Almighty: Impending Day of the Lord

E. (:16-20) DEVASTATION DETAILED

1. (:16) Summary Impact
 - a. In the Physical Realm – Very Abrupt
 - b. In the Emotional and Spiritual Realms
2. (:17-18) Lack of Food Impacts Both Man and Beast
 - a. (:17) Impact on Man – No Harvest to Collect and Store
 - b. (:18) Impact on Beast – No Pastureland for Grazing
3. (:19-20) Desperate Turning to God – Combination of Fire, Drought, Famine
 - a. (:19) Impact on Man
 - i. Only One Source for Deliverance Known to Man
 - ii. Impact of Fire, Drought and Famine
 - b. (:20) Impact on Beast
 - i. Only One Source of Deliverance Available for Beasts
 - ii. Impact of Fire, Drought and Famine

II. (2:1-17) URGENT NEED FOR REPENTANCE – THE ANTICIPATION OF FUTURE COMING DAY OF THE LORD (EMPHASIS ON POSSIBLE IMMEDIATE INVASION BUT DEFINITE ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT) PROMPTS PLEA FOR HEARTFELT REPENTANCE

A. (:1-11) PICTURE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD – LIKE AN INVADING, CONQUERING ARMY

12 Notable Characteristics:

1. Fearsome Event – Directed against Jerusalem and Judah
2. Imminent Event – Certain and Coming Soon
3. Characterized by Darkness and Gloom
4. Characterized by Innumerable Troops
5. Unique in Its Manifestation and Devastation
6. Accomplishes Complete Devastation
7. Deploys the Strongest Imaginable War Machinery
8. Spreads Fear and Panic and hopelessness and Despair
9. Organized, Relentless, Thorough Assault
10. Accompanied by Cosmic Upheaval
11. Authorized by the Omnipotent Lord Himself
12. Unparalleled and Unstoppable

B. (:12-17) PLEA FOR REPENTANCE

1. (:12a) Gracious Offer – Patience of Longsuffering Lord
2. (:12b-13) Genuine Repentance – Inward Orientation
3. (:14) Goodness Restored
4. (:15-16) Gathering the People
5. (:17) Glory of God = Best Grounds for Appeal for Mercy

**III (2:18-32) BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE IN THE LAST DAYS –
THE PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT OF BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE**

A. (:18-27) FULFILLMENT OF DELIVERANCE PROMISES BASED ON HISTORICAL REPENTANCE

1. (:18) Restoration of Divine Favor
2. (:19) Restoration of Material Prosperity
 - a. Response to Repentance and Appeals to God's Mercy
 - b. Resources for Contented Living
 - c. Reputation as the People of God
3. (:20) Removal of Threatening Enemies
4. (:21-24) Rejoice in the Lord's Blessings / Do Not Fear
 - a. (:21) Encouragement Directed to the Land
 - b. (:22) Encouragement Directed to the Beasts
 - c. (:23) Encouragement Directed to the Israelites
 - d. (:24) Encouragement Realized in Abundant Harvests
5. (:25-27) Reversal of Former Judgments
 - a. (:25) Reversal of Devastation
 - b. (:26) Reversal of Deprivation
 - c. (:27) Reversal of Disgrace

B. (:28-32) ESCHATOLOGICAL PROMISES IN ANTICIPATION OF NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

1. (:28-29) Promise of the Outpouring of the Spirit
2. (:30-31) Promise of Cosmic Signs before the Second Coming
3. (:32) Promise of Deliverance to Those Who Repent and Call on the Lord

**IV. (3:1-21) JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH –
JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS IS CONTRASTED WITH THE RESTORATION OF JUDAH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD**

A. (:1-12) AWESOME JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

1. (:1-3) Day of Reckoning for the Nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat
 - a. (:1) Timetable
 - b. (:2a) Triggering Event
 - c. (:2b-3) Treachery Punished

2. (:4-8) Disdain for the Pride and Prosperity of the Nations
 - a. (:4) Over-Inflated Self-Assessment by the Nations
 - b. (:5-6) Overreach and Oppression by the Nations
 - c. (:7-8) Overturning of Fortunes by Divine Judgment
 - i. (:7) Restoration of God's People
 - ii. (:8) Retribution on the Nations
3. (:9-12) Dispensing of Judgment
 - a. (:9-10) Call to the Nations to Prepare for Conflict
 - b. (:11-12) Call to the Nations to Stand before God's Judgment

B. (:13-16a) ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD

1. (:13) Calendar of God's Judgment Indicates Time for Harvest
2. (:14) Crisis Time of the Day of the Lord Is Near
3. (:15-16a) Cosmic Disturbances Signal the Terror of God's Wrath

C. (:16b-21) ASSURANCE OF FINAL RESTORATION OF JUDAH

1. (:16b) Protection for the Jewish Nation
2. (:17) Purpose of Judah's Restoration = Holy and Majestic Enthronement
3. (:18) Prosperity and Fertility for Judah
4. (:19) Promised Desolation of Judah's Enemies
5. (:20) Possession of Promised Land Guaranteed Forever
6. (:21) Pledge of Final Avenging

TEXT: Joel 1:1-20

TITLE: DEVASTATING LOCUST PLAGUE

BIG IDEA:

**THE DEVASTATION OF THE IMMEDIATE LOCUST PLAGUE AWAKENS
WEEPING AND WAILING AND CRYING OUT TO GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Some stories are so meaningful and important to a community or group of people that they must be passed on from generation to generation. The opening passage in Joel seeks to grab the reader's attention by announcing that the book will tell just such a story, with a message for the ages. Elders and inhabitants of the land are summoned to listen as Joel asks whether such a thing has ever happened in the memory of either the living or the dead (1:2). The suspense is heightened as the text continues to withhold the crucial information regarding what this unprecedented event actually is. But it is of such magnitude and critical importance that readers must tell every succeeding generation about it (1:3).

James Limburg: In reading the Book of Joel, one gets the impression of a man of great **sensitivity**. He has been impressed by the sound of a bride's weeping (1:8). He has heard the groans of starving cattle and describes them as perplexed, dismayed, even crying to the Lord (1:18, 20). He has noticed the suffering of boys and girls in times of warfare (3:3).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The chapter is a tapestry of traditional images of natural disaster, conflated together so that the prophecy can be read and applied by future generations regardless of their specific circumstances. It is not the concrete historical details but the theological significance of the events that is of paramount importance.

Leslie Allen: The little country of Judah has been overwhelmed by crisis. It is Joel's responsibility to relate the human catastrophe to the purpose of God. As part of this task he interprets the crisis as constituting a dire need for divine help. He points toward the temple and so toward God. Christian countries have in the past held national days of prayer, when citizens have flocked to the churches and in earnest supplication besought God's saving mercy. So in Israel there was a tradition of holding special services of national lament in response to a variety of misfortunes. **Judg. 20:26** describes such a service prompted by military defeat, a day of fasting, weeping, and sacrificing at the sanctuary of Bethel. A similar service is alluded to many centuries later in Jer. 14, this time by way of reaction to a severe drought; rites of fasting, sacrificing, and prayers of lament were performed by the people gathered at Jerusalem. It is Joel's conviction that the time is ripe for the community to meet in Jerusalem to hold such a service of lamentation in the temple. He reminds the people of the serious nature of the calamity that has come upon the country and makes it his basis for an appeal for a national time of lamentation.

I. (:1-3) DEVASTATION UNPARALLELED

A. (:1) Introduction of the Prophet = Joel

“The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel”

Historical Context / Dating Issues:

Thomas Constable: some scholars advocate an **early pre-exilic date** during the reign of King Jehoshaphat (872-848 B.C.) or possibly his grandson, King Joash (835-796 B.C.). Arguments in favor of this period include the position of Joel in the Hebrew canon; it appears among other prophetic writings of this period. Also the enemies of Israel that Joel named (Tyre, Sidon, Philistia [cf. 2 Chron. 21:16-17], Egypt [cf. 1 Kings 14:15-16], and Edom [cf. 2 Kings 8:20-22]; 3:2-7, 19) were enemies of Israel during this time. The prominence Joel gave to Judah's priests and elders rather than to her king—Joash was a boy king under the influence of Jehoiada, the high priest, early in his reign—is a further argument for this view.

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/joel.pdf>

Amos 4:9 with dating reference to Uzziah, king of Judah in 1:1 = more of a **mid pre-exilic date** (early eighth century)

David Baker: The Hebrew term lying behind “*the LORD*” is *yhwh*, the personal name of Israel’s God. Technical studies refer to the name as the Tetragrammaton, that is, the four-letter word par excellence. Its pronunciation is not known, since between the Testaments it stopped being pronounced, being replaced by the Hebrew word for “*Lord*” (‘*ādōn*). From here it passed through Greek (*kyrios* = “*Lord*”) to most of our English translations, which also use “*Lord*,” though often done in small caps as “*LORD*.” The New Jerusalem Bible is rare among English translations in presenting the form correctly as “*Yahweh*.”

The difference between the “*Yahweh*” and the term “*Lord*” can at times be significant since *Yahweh*, a **personal name**, indicates an intimacy and covenant whereas “*Lord*” suggests a relationship of hierarchical and power differentiation. In other words, Israel is addressed by their God, with whom they are on a first-name basis, rather than by one who holds himself aloof because of his superior position. *Yahweh* plays the key role in the book, his name occurring more than any other word (thirty-three times). He is also the Author of the book, or at least the one inspiring its message. We know much more about him, not only from this book but also from the rest of Scripture, than we know about the book’s human author.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The word of *Yahweh* came not merely to communicate information, but as a word of power, an agent to accomplish the purpose of God in difficult times. The word came “to” Joel, but was not to stop there. It was a word for Joel’s generation and beyond (1:3), continuing to accomplish God’s purpose long after Joel had left the

scene. This is the quality of all of God's word given to us in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17), but seldom is it so explicit as in the opening verses of Joel.

Thomas Constable: *the son of Pethuel* (lit. "Persuaded of God," "Openheartedness of God," or "Sincerity of God").

B. (:2a) Call for Attention

Lloyd Ogilvie: Joel begins his communication of the Lord's Word with an impassioned call to attention. The call to hear and give ear marks the message to follow as especially crucial, worthy of undivided attention. First Joel addresses the elders, the leaders of the community. He wants to make sure that they understand God's word for their position of responsibility and influence in the community. But Joel does not rely upon them alone to communicate the message. He also addresses all the inhabitants of the land. This is a message for all the people of Judah and Jerusalem. A vital connection needed to be made between something that happened and what the Lord wanted to say to His people.

1. Directed to the Leaders

"Hear this, O elders"

James Nogalski: By evoking **covenant curse imagery**, this prophetic composition calls the community to recognize the dangers confronting it and functions as the mirror image of the covenant curses in **Deut 28–29**. Whereas **Deut 28–30** addresses Yahweh's people on the far side of the Jordan and admonishes them about the importance of covenant obedience when they enter the land, Joel calls the community to see the curses happening in the land as a sign to return to Yahweh. In Deuteronomy, the curse is proleptic; in Joel, it is happening.

2. Directed to the People

"And listen, all inhabitants of the land"

Devastation targeted against *the land* which is the source of all material prosperity in their agrarian culture

James Nogalski: The commands reflect classic **synonymous parallelism** where the two verbs (*hear, lend an ear*) are followed closely by the vocative subject (*elders, inhabitants of the land*). Synonymous parallelism does not mean that the two parts of the command are identical. In actuality, the verbs function here as virtual synonyms, but the two subjects serve as a **merism** (polar opposites that express a totality). These subjects address two different groups, the leadership and the general population, but taken together they signify that what follows affects everyone in the entire country.

C. (:2b) Uniqueness of the Devastation – extent, severity ...

*"Has anything like this happened in your days
Or in your fathers' days?"*

David Baker: The message starts with rhetorical questions (cf. **1:16; 3:4**), which draw the audience into the message from the beginning, seeking a response rather than asking for actual information. When the audience's thinking is thus engaged, they are already invested in receiving the rest of the message.

Lloyd Ogilvie: He challenges them to analyze the present situation and compare it with past events, and thus to recognize the extraordinary quality of what was happening to them. This recalls some of the descriptions of the extraordinary events during the Exodus (**Ex. 10:6, 14; Deut. 4:32–35**).

Duane Garrett: The point of the verse is that this locust plague is no ordinary misfortune; it is **unique**. The alert reader sees an echo of **Deut 4:32–34** here. In that text Moses asked if anyone could remember anything since creation so wonderful as the election of Israel. Joel used the same rhetorical device to point out that God had done a **new thing** that was as uniquely terrible as the election of Israel was uniquely wonderful. In the locust plague he had undone creation itself. This was the day of the Lord.

Leslie Allen: After the imperatives he stimulates his audience further by posing **rhetorical questions**, a stylistic device also used by Isaiah after similar invitations to listen. The crisis in which the state is engulfed is unprecedented. He challenges his hearers to cull a parallel from personal experience or from the traditions of their national history. Indeed, momentous history is being written in their own times, as the prophet implies in his call to pass on an account of what has happened to their children for posterity to remember. “*Never before and never again*” is the dramatic style by which the prophet describes the exceptional nature of the tragic experience the people have been living through. His purpose is to drive them to perceive some meaning in this nadir of unique disaster and to relate it and themselves to the providential purposes of God. Their encounter with the extraordinary demands a special religious response to the divine Maker of history.

Biblehub: This rhetorical question is designed to provoke reflection and acknowledgment of the unprecedented nature of the events being described. It suggests a calamity so severe that it surpasses any previous experiences of the current generation. This could refer to the locust plague described later in the book, which serves as both a literal disaster and a metaphor for impending judgment. The uniqueness of the event is meant to awaken the people to the seriousness of their situation.

D. (:3) Testimony to Succeeding Generations

*“Tell you sons about it,
And let your sons tell their sons,
And their sons the next generation.”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: As **Jeremias** (2007: 12) rightly observes, the motif of telling the future generations about the mighty deeds of the Lord is common in Old Testament

literature (**Pss 22:30–31; 44:1; 48:13; 78:1–4**). It plays an important role in the exodus tradition (**Exod. 12:26–27; 13:8, 14**), especially in the narrative about the locust plague (**Exod. 10:2**). The point of remembering what God has done in the past is to develop an attitude of trust, obedience and adoration (**Deut. 6:20–25; Pss 22:4–5; 79:13**).

Therefore, what is to be passed onto the children is the story of how the community turned to the Lord with weeping (**2:12–17**) in a time of great suffering (**1:4 – 2:11**) and how God delivered and blessed them (**2:18–27**).

II. (:4) DEVASTATION DESCRIBED

from Surprising Enemy -- Four Waves of Locust Attacks

(Different types of locusts or describing waves of attacks)

Duane Garrett: The impact of the verse is that the wrath of Yahweh is **inescapable**; those who think they have avoided one stage of the calamity are caught by another. In this **Joel 1:4** is like **Amos 5:19**: “*It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.*” The expositor of Joel, rather than give his congregation a lesson in entomology, would do well to drive home this lesson. Also the emphasis on the last remaining bits of food being consumed by the locusts reflects the story of the plague of locusts in Egypt during the exodus. What God had once done to his enemies he was now doing to Jerusalem.

A. Army of Gnawing Locusts

“What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten”

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: In the ancient Near East, locusts were among the most feared of natural disasters because they could eat all the grain crops of subsistence farmers, defoliate fruit trees and grapevines, and consume the vegetation that livestock depended on. Locust hordes meant malnutrition, illness, and starvation. Not surprisingly, locusts are a feared natural disaster or form of divine punishment in the Bible (**Exod 10:3-20; Deut 28:38; Judg 6:3-6; 7:12; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chron 6:28; 7:13; Pss 78:46; 105:34-35; Jer 46:23; Amos 7:1-3; Nah 3:15; Rev 9:1-11**).

B. Army of Swarming Locusts

“What the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten”

Thomas Constable: Four different words for “locusts” appear in this verse (and in **2:25**), but a total of nine occur in the Old Testament. These words have led some interpreters to conclude that four subspecies of locusts are in view. Others believe that locusts in four stages of maturity are meant. It seems better, however, to view “these piranhas of the sky” as coming in four waves: gnawing, swarming, creeping, and stripping—as they devoured the vegetation.

C. Army of Creeping Locusts

“What the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten”

D. Army of Stripping Locusts

Lloyd Ogilvie: It was the **degree** of the destruction that made the locust attack in Joel's time an extraordinary event. Yet Joel's main burden was not to have his people pass on the report of a locust infestation. It was primarily what the locust plague exposed about the people's relationship to God. They had drifted from Him and were ill-prepared to face the crisis. The significance of this extraordinary event is developed in the rest of the word of the Lord to Joel.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The piling of near synonyms combined with the skillful use of repetition creates the overall impression of the enormity of the locust plague, a disaster of breathtaking magnitude.

John Goldingay: Locusts are a type of grasshopper that is mostly harmless but sometimes breeds abundantly, swarms from place to place, and consumes everything that grows in an area. The four nouns for locust might denote different species, though it's odd that the regular word for "*locust*" comes second, and one wonders whether Joel would expect his audience to be that expert in entomology. More likely he simply uses a variety of words for the insects, like an English speaker referring to flies, wasps, mosquitos, and hornets; Hebrew has several other words that are sometimes translated locust (see, e.g., **Amos 7:1**). The point in the list is to convey the dimensions of the disaster and the relentless sequence of destructive invaders. The repetition of "*leavings*" conveys how the locusts have demonstrated their devastating capacity to consume crops. Though the idea that the locust plague is unprecedented may be an exaggeration, the hyperbole indicates the monumental nature of what has happened.

Anthony Gelston: Almost two-thirds of Joel is concerned with a plague of locusts. These insects are notorious for their tendency to multiply and for their systematic feeding in large groups, leaving whole areas stripped of vegetation. To a fragile natural economy like that of ancient Israel they represented a serious threat to human subsistence, and it is only in modern times that effective countermeasures such as the aerial spraying of insecticides have emerged. One of the plagues of Egypt at the time of the Exodus consisted of locusts (**Exod 10:1–20**), while they figure in the list of natural disasters associated with famine in the prayer attributed to Solomon at the dedication of the temple (**1 Kgs 8:37**). A plague of locusts was thus seen as a natural disaster fit to occasion a religious response in the form of a communal fast, while it was always possible that it might be interpreted as a divine judgment on the people for their sins. A good example may be seen in the first of Amos's visions (**7:1–3**), where the threatened judgment takes the form of a plague of locusts, in response to which the prophet intercedes that the plague may be averted since it would threaten the survival of the people.

III. (:5-13) DEVASTATION LAMENTED

Robert Chisholm: This section contains four units (vv. 5-7, 8-10, 11-12, 13), each of which includes a call proper (vv. 5a, 8, 11a, 13a) followed by the reasons for sorrow (vv. 5b-7, 9-10, 11b-12, 13b). The personified land (or city?) as well as some of the groups most severely affected by the plague (drunkards, farmers, priests) were addressed.

Thomas Constable: Joel called on four different groups of people to mourn the results of the locust invasion: drunkards (vv. 5-7), Jerusalemites (vv. 8-10), farmers (vv. 11-12), and priests (v. 13). In each section there is a call to mourn followed by reasons to mourn.

A. (:5-7) Lamented by Wine Lovers

1. (:5) Call Addressed to 2 Different Categories of Offenders

- a. Alcoholics – Using wine as an Escape
“Awake, drunkards, and weep”

Lloyd Ogilvie: This group may be blind to the present distress because of their intoxication, but they will be wide awake when their supply of wine is exhausted without any way to replenish it. Not only drunkards, but all drinkers of wine are called to wail in lament, because the “*new wine*” is cut off. This refers to the juice just taken from the winepress, before it has turned to wine. The locust plague has denuded the vine and blocked its production.

- b. Sophisticated Pleasure Seekers
“And wail, all you wine drinkers”
- c. Same Deprivation
“On account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.”

Nothing wrong with drinking the fruit of the vine

Leon Wood: called attention not only to the debased nature of society but to the people’s insensitivity to their own condition, a moral decadence that if unchecked would bring on national disaster. Times of ease too often result in dissipation.

2. (:6) Characteristics of Invading Forces

*“For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number;
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness.”*

Trent Butler: Lions are another image of fierceness and fear. Locusts had neither teeth nor fangs. Neither did an enemy army, but the locusts attacking the land and the army attacking the nation gave the impression of being fierce and fearful in the Judean psyche. The prophet thus piled up poetic imagery to create an emotional aura of dread, fear, helplessness, distress, and disaster.

David Baker: The attackers are devastating—“*powerful*” in strength and numbers (**Joel 2:2, 5, 11**; cf. **Ex. 1:9**; **Zech. 8:22**) and “*without number*” as they were in Egypt (**Ps. 105:34**; cf. **2 Chron. 12:3**; **Ps. 104:25**; **Jer. 46:23**). Their ferocity is also accentuated, comparing their teeth to those of known killers, the lion (**1 Kings 13:24**; **20:36**; cf. **Job 4:10**; **Rev. 9:8**) and lioness (**Deut. 33:20**; **Hos. 13:8**). The regular term for “*tooth*” (*šen*) is used first. The second, parallel term (*metalle ‘ôt*) is rarer, occurring only in conjunction with the former (**Job 29:17**; **Prov. 30:14**; cf. **Ps. 58:7**, with a reordering of two letters). A use of both terms in the Dead Sea material compares them with sword and spear (1QHa 13:10), sharp, offensive weapons of war.

3. (:7) Consequences of Devastating Calamity

*“It has made my vine a waste, And my fig tree splinters.
It has stripped them bare and cast them away;
Their branches have become white.”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The vine and the fig trees appear together as a proverbial image of security and blessing (**2 Kgs 18:31**; **Mic. 4:4**) which is here reversed. Three times the first-person singular pronoun appears (*my land, my vines, my fig trees*). The speaker could be God, but more likely the pronoun refers to the prophet who is identifying himself with his audience and their plight (see the first-person singular in **v. 19**).

Biblehub: **it has stripped off the bark and thrown it away --**

Stripping off the bark signifies a complete stripping away of protection and vitality, leaving the tree vulnerable and exposed. This can be seen as a metaphor for the removal of God's protection over Israel due to their disobedience. The act of throwing it away suggests a disregard for what was once valuable, highlighting the consequences of turning away from God. This imagery is reminiscent of the stripping away of blessings and protection when the covenant is broken, as seen in **Deuteronomy 28**.

the branches have turned white --

The branches turning white indicates death and desolation, as the life-giving sap is no longer present. This can symbolize the spiritual death that results from sin and separation from God. The whiteness of the branches may also suggest a form of leprosy, a condition often associated with sin and impurity in biblical times. This imagery serves as a stark warning of the consequences of unrepentant sin, urging the people to return to God for restoration and healing.

B. (:8-10) Lamented by Worship Leaders

1. (:8) Contradictory Deprivation

*“Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth
for the bridegroom of her youth.”*

Thomas Constable: The next entity called to mourn appears to be Jerusalem. The gender of “*Wail*” is feminine (singular), and Jerusalem is often compared to a virgin

daughter in the Old Testament (e.g., **2 Kings 19:21; Lam. 1:15**; cf. **Joel 2:1, 15, 23, 32**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: Sackcloth was a coarse garment made of goat or camel hair, which was often worn as a sign of mourning. A virgin mourning for her husband seems to us a contradiction in terms. Scholars have generally agreed that this points to a time of death after engagement but before the wedding. The extreme sorrow of a woman in that bitter moment indicates the intensity of the lament to which Joel calls his people in their present distress.

Leslie Allen: Joel claims that a tragedy has befallen the city which must evoke a demonstration of bitter grief. The tragedy is comparable with a personal bereavement. In the ancient Near East, marriage took place in two stages, the first of which was betrothal, an act more binding than the modern engagement. Although the consummation of marriage was delayed till after the second stage, so close a bond did betrothal create that the betrothed man could be called “*husband*,” as more literally here, and the betrothed woman could be called “*wife*.” One can imagine the anticipation of a betrothed girl as she looked forward to the wedding and life shared with the man who was already her own—and the bitter frustration of his being snatched from her waiting arms by death. The poet depicts a scene of acute pathos. Instead of donning the customary embroidered, gaily colored wedding robes and enjoying the usual merrymaking, she puts on her widow’s weeds of sackcloth and wails a dirge. Amos had drawn a similar analogy of wearing sackcloth in mourning for an only son to illustrate intense grief.

2. (:9) Cessation of Sacrifices

*“The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
From the house of the Lord.
The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord.”*

Leslie Allen: Although various rites of sacrifice would be affected, principal reference is probably being made to the traditional daily ritual in which every morning and evening the sacrifice of a lamb as a burnt offering was accompanied by an offering of meal moistened with oil and by a libation of wine. Shortage of supplies of important ingredients made these divinely ordained services impossible. The clock of religious routine, which it was the duty of each generation of Israelites to keep ticking, had to be allowed to run down and stop. Members of other cultures in which ritual traditions do not play a compulsive part can hardly understand the overtones of emotional horror with which the simple statement is invested for Joel and especially for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, across whose lives fell the shadow of the adjacent temple.

3. (:10) Complete Devastation

*“The field is ruined, the land mourns;
For the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails.”*

David Baker: In **verse 10**, the grounds for the deprivation and mourning are established: Three staples of life—grain, wine, and oil—fail from earth and field. The assault on life is accentuated at many levels through literary means that are lost in translation: through staccato pounding of five, two-word clauses, each having an identical beat number for both words; through pervasive alliteration and assonance;³⁴ and through piling on verbs of destruction. Devastation comes to the cultivated field (**vv. 11, 12, 19, 20; Gen. 37:7; Mic. 3:12**) as it does to its grain (**Joel 1:17; 2:19**), the source of flour for daily bread (**2 Kings 18:32**).

Biblehub: Oil was essential for daily life, used in cooking, lighting, and anointing. Its failure signifies a breakdown in both domestic and religious life. Oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit and God's anointing (**1 Samuel 16:13**), and its absence suggests a withdrawal of divine favor and presence. This failure can be linked to the parable of the ten virgins in **Matthew 25:1-13**, where oil represents readiness and spiritual preparedness. The lack of oil underscores the urgent need for the people to return to God and seek His restoration.

C. (:11-12) Lamented by Working Laborers – in the farms and vineyards and orchards

*“Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers,
For the wheat and the barley,
Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.
The vine dries up and the fig tree fails;
The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree,
All the trees of the field dry up.”*

James Nogalski: The commands to be ashamed and lament imply **guilt**. In other words, they assume that the current situation should be understood as punishment from Yahweh and calls for them to respond. They do not, however, specify what the people have done to merit this wrath. As already noted, scholars have explained the lack of specific crimes in various ways. What is clear, however, is that the prophet's words assume the people are guilty of something.

Key = Connection Between Physical Deprivation and Happiness

“Indeed, rejoicing dries up from the sons of men.”

Trent Butler: The reasons to howl in lamentation continue. The grape-producing vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered away. The pomegranate (**Deut. 8:8**), the date palm (**Lev. 23:40**), and the apple tree (**Prov. 25:11**) represent fruit that was eaten as well as objects revered for their beauty and their connection with lovers. The sweetness of life had disappeared. Throughout the section the prophet uses a play on Hebrew words meaning to be ashamed (*bosh*) and to dry up (*yabesh*). This comes to a climax here as the prophet summarizes all he has tried to say. Add up his inventory of resources, and you discover that “*the jubilation has been put to shame* (or withered away) *from among the sons of man*” (author's translation). Causes for joy are now causes for shame. Joy has dried up and withered away from Judah and Jerusalem.

D. (:13) Lamented by Worship Leaders (priests / ministers of the altar)

*“Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests;
Wail, O ministers of the altar!
Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God,
For the grain offering and the drink offering
are withheld from the house of your God.”*

Thomas Constable: Tragedy of curtailed worship

James Limburg: What could the people do, having experienced such a plague in the past and now being faced with even more peril in their immediate future? Where could they turn? The prophet tells them that there is only one thing to do. They should gather for prayer and fasting and return to the Lord.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: The community is grief-stricken by the total failure of agricultural production, which has curtailed the required grain and drink offerings at the temple (1:9; cf. Exod 29:40-41; Lev 23:13, 18; Num 6:15; 15:24; 28:3-10; 29:11, 16-39). For pious Jews, this represented a loss of communion and right relationship with God, a threat to the covenant relationship. The spotlight shines on the priests, who would have multiple reasons to mourn. Now unable to exercise their vocation of offering sacrifices, they more than anyone should be grieved by the end of important rituals, and they should also feel deep sadness over the condition of the starving people they are called to represent before God. Moreover, priests depended for their physical sustenance on receiving a share of the offerings that people brought to the temple (Lev 2:3, 10; 6:16-18; 7:9-10). So important to Joel are the temple offerings that he mentions them at least two more times (1:13; 2:14; cf. 1:16).

IV. (:14-15) DEVASTATION INTERPRETED

(the immediate historical context is but a foreshadowing of the awful coming destruction of the eschatological Day of the Lord)

These are the key verses in Chap. 1

A. (:14) Response of the People: Consecration to the Lord

1. Fasting

“Consecrate a fast,”

2. Assembling (for national day of repentance and pleading)

*“Proclaim a solemn assembly;
Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land
To the house of the Lord your God,”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The magnitude of the disaster is measured by its effects on temple worship; the way out of it is in the performance of cultic actions. The priests are called to Come to the temple and pass the night in sackcloth and prayer (cf. 2 Sam. 12:16). A fast accompanied mourning, weeping (2 Sam. 1:12) and wearing of sackcloth (1 Kgs

21:27; Ps. 35:13) to signify grief or remorse. For a communal fast people gathered at the temple (**Jer. 36:6, 9**) in response to a natural (**Jer. 14:1–12**) or a military (**Judg. 20:25–26**) disaster. This is what Joel is inviting the people to do in response to the locust plague.

3. Petitioning

“And cry out to the Lord.”

B. (:15) Threat from the Almighty: Impending Day of the Lord

“Alas for the day!

For the day of the Lord is near,

And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.”

John MacArthur: The Heb term “*destruction*” forms a powerful play on words with the “*Almighty*.” The notion of invincible strength is foremost; destruction at the hand of omnipotent God is coming.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Joel’s special burden is to lift the gaze of his people from their present distress to the more awesome destruction that it foreshadows and to lead them to a proper response.

John Goldingay: Yahweh’s day is a day when he acts to bring horrific calamity and devastation. It brings destruction (*šōd*) from the destroyer (*šadday*). While the divine title *šadday* recurs in the First Testament and has various possible etymologies, the only interpretation it ever receives is the link with the verb meaning “*destroy*” (*šādad*), here in Joel and in **Isa. 13:6**. In that passage, the calamitous destruction that Yahweh brings is disaster overtaking Israel’s oppressors and enemies, so that it is good news for Israel, as in Ezekiel and in Obadiah. But it may be disaster that overtakes Israel itself. The oldest reference to Yahweh’s day (**Amos 5:18–20**) presupposes the first significance, disaster for enemies, as desired by Ephraim. But for Ephraim in his own day, Amos replaces it with the second, disaster for Ephraim. This occurrence in Joel has the same effect for Judah in relation to **Isa. 13:6**. People need to see the disaster that he portrays as a destructive act of God like the day of Yahweh that came for Ephraim in 722 and for Judah in 587 (**Lam. 1:12, 21; 2:1, 21, 22** speak of the fall of Jerusalem as the announced day of Yahweh’s wrath).

David Baker: A new section is discernable here because of the change of address to the first person; the speaker himself comes more to the fore (see **1:6**). The previously dominant litany of imperatives also stops. This is a **cry of distress** (cf. **Judg. 11:35**). It introduces for the first time in this book the concept of “*the day of the LORD*,” an important event developed in previous and subsequent prophecies. It provides the speaker’s own perspective on the calamity that has happened to him and his people.

V. (:16-20) DEVASTATION DETAILED

A. (:16) Summary Impact

1. In the Physical Realm – Very Abrupt

“Has not food been cut off before our eyes”

2. In the Emotional and Spiritual Realms

“Gladness and joy from the house of our God?”

B. (:17-18) Lack of Food Impacts Both Man and Beast

1. (:17) Impact on Man – No Harvest to Collect and Store

“The seeds shrivel under their clods;

The storehouses are desolate,

The barns are torn down,

For the grain is dried up.”

2. (:18) Impact on Beast – No Pastureland for Grazing

“How the beasts groan!

The herds of cattle wander aimlessly

Because there is no pasture for them,

Even the flocks of sheep suffer.”

Leslie Allen: The prophet moves from failure of the crops to a poignant description of farm animals in distress. His heart goes out in remarkable tenderness to the thirsty, starving creatures in response to their piteous lowing. He interprets their noise in human terms as groans. As he had imaginatively depicted the countryside as mourning in vv. 10, 12, so now he fancies that the very animals join in the lament. The whole creation seems to be groaning, as Paul was to affirm in another age (**Rom. 8:22**). And if brother ox and brother sheep are responding in this way, implies the prophet, ought not we ourselves join in unison? There is an implicit contrast between the response of brute animals and the people’s insensitivity. He observes with compassionate eye the weary wandering of cattle in search of pasture, driven by the hunger pangs of empty stomachs. His sympathetic eye has also seen the sheep suffering from lack of grass and whole flocks dying off.

C. (:19-20) Desperate Turning to God -- Combination of Fire, Drought, Famine

James Nogalski: The prayer in 1:19–20 is structured in two parts: the prophet’s cry (1:19) and the prophet’s report of the longing of the animals (1:20). An **inclusio** at the beginning and end of the prayer joins the two parts: for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

1. (:19) Impact on Man

a. Only One Source for Deliverance Known to Man

“To You, O Lord, I cry”

b. Impact of Fire, Drought and Famine

“For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness

And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.”

2. (:20) Impact on Beast

a. Only One Source of Deliverance Available for Beasts

“Even the beasts of the field pant for You”

b. Impact of Fire, Drought and Famine

“For the water brooks are dried up

And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”

Thomas Constable: The brooks were dry, and even the wild animals panted for water. Joel could say they panted for Yahweh because the Lord was the provider of the water these animals sought (cf. **Ps. 42:1**). By panting for Yahweh these animals set a good example for the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Trent Butler: In another poetic leap of language, the prophet says the wild animals pant for God. The verb really means to “*crave, long for*.” The animals join the prophet and the cattle in lamenting over the situation they face. They have neither food nor drink. What can they do? They can only moan and pant after God to see if he will supply their needs. This is the pattern the people also must follow. Must God's people go to the cattle and the wild beasts of the field to learn how to pray and depend on God in time of desperation and hopelessness?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When is it appropriate to view natural disasters as a wakeup call from God?
- 2) How are we actively passing life lessons down from generation to generation?
- 3) How are people around us drunk and oblivious to the impending spiritual dangers which will soon fall upon them?
- 4) Do we have a sense that the day of the Lord is almost upon us and how are we preparing for such a difficult time?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Nogalski: The chapter's rhetoric lays the groundwork for the book's theological movement from threat, to repentance, to hope. The first half of Joel (**1:1 – 2:17**) deals with the reality of judgment, both current and imminent. The prophet depicts the contemporary setting ominously. He references wide-scale devastation using language that treats these events as signs of punishment for a wayward people, but the prophet

warns that even greater devastation will soon come. The major units of the chapter consist of the superscription (1:1), the call to the community (1:2–14), and the prophet's intercession (1:15–20). The superscription functions as the title of the book. The call to the community demands that people change their behavior. The prophetic intercession calls to Yahweh on behalf of the people for deliverance on the day of judgment. **Joel 2:1–11** picks up where **1:15–20** leave off and describes the day of Yahweh as an imminent attack against Zion by Yahweh's army (**2:1–11**) from which no one will escape, unless the people turn and repent (**2:12–17**). The second half of Joel (**2:18 – 3:20** [**2:18 – 4:20**]) unfolds a series of promises of deliverance: from the immediate judgment that threatens the land (**2:18–27**), to a portrayal of a restored Zion (**2:28–32** [**3:1–5**]), to punishment of the nations on the day of Yahweh (**3:1–21** [**4:1–21**]).

John Goldingay: Listening, facing facts, and crying out to God summarize key aspects of the relationship between the people of God and God himself. There is a responsibility for listening, facing facts, and crying out that rests with the leaders of the people and a responsibility that rests with the people themselves. The responsibility of the leaders is to draw the people into listening, facing facts, and crying out. What are the facts? . . . For people listening to the Joel scroll who were not Joel's immediate audience, the answer to the questions about actual or visionary or about literal or metaphorical might make little difference. For them, the reality of disasters is what matters, and the reality of disasters of different kinds (e.g., natural or military).

Like prophets such as Amos and Jeremiah, Joel assumes that things happening in nature can indicate what God is doing. There is a unity about reality. And days of Yahweh come to the people of God and to the world from time to time. The people of God need to be able to recognize the harbingers of a day of Yahweh, though it is easy not to do so. Who responds to drought by fasting and crying out to God? Who responds to racial tensions by fasting and praying? The worst thing about a disaster may be that it takes away from people's capacity to worship and celebrate together, with God. On the other hand, the possibility of bringing calamities before God may make it possible to face them. There are times when prophets must confront people about the nature of their worship (see Hosea). There are times when prophets must confront people about their life outside worship, which makes their worship offensive (see Amos). There are times when prophets must confront people about not coming to worship (see Joel). There are times for critiquing fasting because it does not express the whole person's turning to God. There are times for urging fasting because people are not turning to God. There are times for critiquing formal expressions of worship such as dressing in the garments of mourning or dressing in garments of splendor, and times for urging them because the formal expression is an outward expression of the real.

TEXT: Joel 2:1-17

TITLE: URGENT NEED FOR REPENTANCE

BIG IDEA:

THE ANTICIPATION OF A FUTURE COMING DAY OF THE LORD (EMPHASIS ON POSSIBLE IMMEDIATE INVASION BUT DEFINITE ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT) PROMPTS PLEA FOR HEARTFELT REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION:

David Baker: The description of the Day builds up throughout this passage, starting with the warning (v. 1), a description of the darkness of the Day (v. 2a), which is compared to the approaching army (v. 2b). The metaphor changes to overwhelming fire (v. 3) and then to an inexorable army (vv. 4-9). Its coming results in an apocalyptic cataclysm affecting the entire universe (v. 10). Possibly even more devastating than its physical presence is the identity of the army's commander, God himself (v. 11).

John Barton: The major debate among commentators about this passage concerns its relationship with chapter 1. A decision about this both depends on and itself influences what is taken to be the reference of the lengthy description of the invading hordes. One possibility is that, whereas chapter 1 is about a locust plague, this chapter concerns military invasion; another is that the locusts of chapter 1 are seen as the precursors for something on a larger scale, the invasion of an "apocalyptic army," as **Wolff** calls it. Some commentators, as we have seen, believe both chapters are about an enemy army, under the figure of locusts. It is possible to think that they concern two successive incursions of locusts, and we might point in support of this to **2:25**, with its reference to the "years" (plural) that the swarming locust has eaten

My own hypothesis is that chapter 2 represents a second description of the same calamity as related in chapter 1, namely, the locust invasion. I see no difficulty in the idea that the prophet might have formulated a response to the same event in two different ways. I believe that the enemy of chapter 2 are still locusts and that there is no more of an "apocalyptic" element here than in chapter 1. What is predicted is a perfectly literal locust invasion, described with magnificent poetic hyperbole, rather than some event that breaks the mold of human history; and I would distinguish this from the language and imagery of **2:28 – 3:21**, where we are in a different world and can genuinely begin to use the term apocalyptic..

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: **2:1-11** has features suggesting we should not read it as only a metaphorical account of invasion by a locust army. The vocabulary is primarily military rather than locust related, with particular focus on conquering and looting Jerusalem. The consequences of the invasion rock the cosmos and shut off all light from the heavenly bodies (**2:10**), indicating that more is going on than locusts. The text fuses imagery of a locust plague with military invasion and with biblical theophanies,

passages where God appears with awe-inspiring splendor and cosmic signs. Through this sophisticated melding of images, the locust crisis of chapter 1 becomes intensified into the ultimate threat in chapter 2 (Wolff 1977: 42). This fusing of images indicates that the present day of the Lord locust crisis and the future day of the Lord invasion crisis are two sides of the same reality (Jeremias 2012: 81). This reality is Israel's encounter with a God who can be terrifying in judgment. . .

The appeal in 2:12-17 to turn to God comes at a **pivotal point** in the book. With horrifying imagery, Joel has sketched out the terrors of the already present and yet imminent day of the Lord. The present passage suggests that a bleak future is not inevitable.

Duane Garrett: We misread Joel if we think the text demands we exclusively see either locusts or a human army. On the contrary, Joel consciously drew the two ideas together here so that an army is described under the metaphor of a locust invasion. He spoke of chariots, armies drawn up for battle, and the scaling of walls, but the picture of the locust plague from chap. 1 still prompts and to some degree determines the descriptions. Thus the fact that a locust swarm may sound like wildfire and look like horses does not contradict but contributes to the vision of the fury of the northern army. The locusts were both the symbol for that army and its precursor, and Joel used language that projected both pictures into the readers' minds. To use an example from the modern world of computer-aided multimedia, it is as if we see the locusts of chap. 1 "morphing" into soldiers and cavalry before our eyes.

Tchavdar Hadjiev: At its most basic level we have here a metaphorical description of the locust swarm from **chapter 1**. The description, however, is outlandish and ends on an apocalyptic note, with the cosmos writhing in darkness and fear. The fantastic imagery conveys effectively the dread caused by the locust plague. It offers a theological interpretation of the meaning and significance of a specific natural disaster: the locusts are a manifestation of the terrible Day of the Lord (Allen 1976: 75–76). Simultaneously, the imagery allows the locusts to be interpreted symbolically, as pointing beyond themselves (Assis 2013: 137–138). The text possesses a liturgical dimension which transcends the narrow confines of one particular historical event and addresses a variety of possible future crises. The picture of a natural disaster morphing into a military attack of universal proportions makes that possible. The key is not the precise nature of the enemy but the feeling of weakness and the inability to resist. The relentless advance of a vast unstoppable host draws the gaze of the reader and dominates the passage. Nothing else attracts attention, not even the reactions of the besieged citizens of the holy hill. Transfixed by the march of the attackers, the reader is filled with a sense of complete and utter impotence. Judah has now taken the place of Egypt from the exodus story and Babylon from **Isaiah 13**. **God is about to fight his people in a battle they cannot win.**

I. (:1-11) PICTURE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD – LIKE AN INVADING, CONQUERING ARMY

Attention-getter -- *“Blow a trumpet in Zion
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!”*

Leon Wood: Joel portrayed a coming army, in particular, that of the Assyrian armies of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The appearance and martial activities of the locusts were analogous to those of a real army. . . The locust plague of **chapter 1** was a precursor of the locust-like plague of the Assyrian armies of **chapter 2**. The judgment affected by the Assyrian armies was in turn to be a harbinger of a still greater eschatological judgment (**2:28 - 3:21**).

David Baker: The place where the alarm is raised is called “Zion” (cf. **Joel 2:15, 23, 32; 3:16, 17, 21**) and “my holy hill.” In **3:17**, the latter modifies the former in apposition. As the site of the temple, the dwelling of God himself (**Ps. 76:2**), it is the natural source for his warnings. It is also where the people gather to meet the onslaught. During war, they man the battlements from whence comes the call (**Ezek. 33:2–4**), but this type of attack rendered by nature demands a different type of response, a cultic one, which is also an occasion for trumpet and cry (**Lev. 25:9**).

Analogies derived from the assault of locusts described in **chap. 1**

Twelve notable characteristics of this Day of the Lord:

1. Fearsome event – directed against Jerusalem and Judah
 “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble”
2. Imminent event – certain and coming soon
 “for the day of the Lord is coming; Surely it is near”
3. Characterized by darkness and gloom
 *“A day of darkness and gloom,
 A day of clouds and thick darkness”*

Robert Chisholm: Darkness and clouds-often associated with the Lord in His role as the mighty victorious Warrior (cf. **Deut. 4:11; 5:22-23; Pss . 18:9, 11; 97:2**)- here symbolize both judgment and destruction (cf. **Jer. 13:16; Ezek. 30:3, 18; 32:7-8; 34:12; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:15**).

4. Characterized by innumerable troops
 *“As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
 So there is a great and mighty people”*

Robert Chisholm: The innumerable size of the invading force receives special attention. Like the rays of the morning sun (dawn) its hosts will cover the horizon. This army is said to be more awesome than any that had ever come or would come. The hyperbolic language may echo **Exodus 10:14**. If so, it emphasizes that the “locusts” of **Joel 2:1-11**

would be even more overwhelming than those that overran Egypt. Something even worse than the Egyptian plagues was about to engulf the land!

James Nogalski: Beginning with **2:2b** and continuing through the end of the unit in **2:11**, the poem focuses upon the army that is attacking on the day of Yahweh, its effects, and its progression toward Jerusalem. **Joel 2:2b** describes the location, the power, and the uniqueness of the army. In contrast to the darkness of **2:2a**, the army fills the horizon like the dawn over the mountains. Several interpreters assume that this army is an extension of the locust imagery from **1:4**. This reading is possible; it is more likely, however, that this army represents yet another threat rather than a reprise of the locusts. Following the logic of **Joel 1**, the locust plagues have already occurred, while **2:1** anticipates an impending attack. Relatedly, the location of this army in **2:1** also flows from the simile it uses to describe the army. The reader's imagination is drawn to the mountaintops as the place from which the attack begins. The power of the army reflects its massive size. A people many and mighty accentuates the size of the army in terms of its numbers and power. Finally, **Joel 2:2b** expresses the uniqueness of the army in chronological terms; neither the past nor the future has seen an army like this.

5. Unique in its manifestation and devastation

*"There has never been anything like it,
Nor will there be again after it."*

6. (:3) Accomplishes complete devastation

*"A fire consumes before them
And behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them
But a desolate wilderness behind them,
And nothing at all escapes them."*

7. (:4-5) Deploys the strongest imaginable war machinery

*"Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains,
Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble,
Like a mighty people arranged for battle."*

David Baker: Verses 4–5 provide five different comparisons of the invader with an army. Thus, this is not a literal army but rather a metaphorical one—the locust horde (cf. **1:4, 6**). The first three liken the locusts to cavalry forces: the fierce look of charging horses, the swiftness of war horses (NIV “cavalry”), and the sound of the careening chariots. The description of the latter indicates the figurative nature of these analogies, since chariots cannot operate in mountain heights but need level terrain (**Josh. 17:16**). The verb is appropriate, since “*skipping, skittering around*” (*rqd*) applies to both animals (and insects) and chariots (**Ps. 29:6; Isa. 13:21; Nah. 3:2**). This poetic heightening of the actual illustrates the dread this unprecedented force brings on those

who encounter it. Habakkuk 3:8 also uses this image of Yahweh as a divine charioteer with horses.

Constable: It is interesting that locusts look like tiny armored horses, and they behave like them as well (cf. **Job 39:19-20; Rev. 9:7**). The Italian word for locust means "little horse," and the German word means "hay horse." Thus the correspondence between the army of locusts that had recently swept through the land swiftly and this future invading army is unmistakable. Even their sounds were similar. However, the point of the comparison is probably the horse as a symbol of power and might (cf. **Isa. 31:1-3; Hos. 14:3; Mic. 5:10; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 9:10; 12:4; Rev. 9:7**).

Duane Garrett: When chariots in full charge erupted over the tops of hills and down onto a plain, the sound that had been muffled by the intervening hillside suddenly and deafeningly would have exploded on the people below. One can imagine troops caught in a valley who abruptly find themselves facing a mass of chariots they had neither seen nor heard. The image is one of a surprise attack and of the terror it inspires. A raging grass fire similarly overwhelms the senses with sound as well as smoke and heat, and it drives people to fear and frantic helplessness. Again the emotional impact of these sights and sounds, not the sights and sounds themselves, drive the imagery. In short, this army is absolutely **terrifying**.

8. (:6) Spreads fear and panic and hopelessness and despair
*"Before them the people are in anguish;
All faces turn pale."*

David Baker: The second clause in **verse 6** apparently indicates a physiological response to the stress of the situation. It involves the peoples' faces (a play on the first word in the verse, [lit.] "*because of*," which in Hebrew derives from the word for "*face*"). Literally they are said to "*gather a glow/glory*." The verb is straightforward, used for collecting such things as people, crops, or water (**2:16; 3:2, 11**; cf. **Isa. 22:9; 62:9**). Most translations understand this as the color caused by blood flow being removed, resulting in a pallor, which is indeed a result of fear. What appears more likely, based on word meaning as well as context, is that this refers to the **glow or pinkness** from the collected blood in the face, resulting in **flushing**, which is the opposite physiological phenomenon to pallor. The verb usually indicates a gathering toward, not away from a place. Also, flushing is more in keeping with labor contractions and strain than is pallor, which more often follows delivery. An almost verbatim parallel to this clause occurs in **Nahum 2:11**, also in the context of enemy attack, but with no mention of labor pains. This is yet another place where Joel uses material from another source. He also structures his material to provide a multileveled chiasm.

9. (:7-9) Organized, relentless, thorough assault
*"They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers;
And they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths.
They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path;*

*When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks.
They rush on the city, they run on the wall;
They climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief."*

David Baker: Verse 9 describes the actual progression of events for the marauding forces: ranging around the city (**Isa. 33:4; Nah. 2:5**), attacking the walls, and climbing up to and into the house windows. The final comparison to a thief likely does not refer to their means of entry, by stealth at night (**Jer. 49:9; Obad. 5**), but to their purpose, taking what is not rightfully theirs (**Gen. 31:19, 20, 26, 27; Ex. 22:6–7**). This, then, is the awe-inspiring picture of an unswerving foe.

Duane Garrett: Breaking in through windows like a thief implies the idea of violation. Just as a thief has no regard for property rights or for entering a house only with the permission of the owner, so these soldiers cared nothing for the persons or property of their victims. They intruded suddenly from every direction.

James Nogalski: The location of the army changes from the distant mountaintops (**2:2, 5**) to the city. The unstoppable force rushes the city and scales the wall. The army moves forward en masse, collectively forming an invincible force that is greater than the sum of its parts. The army runs like elite soldiers (*gibbôrîm*). A *gibbôr* is not the average foot soldier but represents the most formidable fighter (**1 Sam 17:51**) or the commanders of military units (**1 Chr 11:15**). The verbs describing the movement of the army convey speed and discipline. The army runs and ascends the city wall. Each soldier travels in his own path as assigned and they do not veer from those paths. Hence, they advance speedily, as a disciplined unit, each part of the whole following the other. This imagery conveys the idea that resistance is futile because, even if a member of this army is felled by an arrow or a spear, the army moves forward undeterred.

10. (:10) Accompanied by cosmic upheaval
*"Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble,
The sun and the moon grow dark
And the stars lose their brightness."*

11. (:11a) Authorized by the Omnipotent Lord Himself
*"The Lord utters **His** voice before **His** army;
Surely **His** camp is very great,
For strong is he who carries out **His** word."*

David Baker: The mounting litany reaches its climax in verse 11. The focus moves from humans (attacker and attacked) to the earth and heavens, and now specifically to the Creator of all, Yahweh (**1:1**), Israel's own covenant God. He now reveals what is going on from his perspective, and it is not a comforting message to his people.

12. (:11b) Unparalleled and Unstoppable
"The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome,

And who can endure it?"

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Using a bracketing device called an **inclusio**, the final statement of the passage returns to the theme of the day of the Lord (**2:11b**), with which the passage began (**2:1b**), thereby enclosing everything described in between within the embrace of this day. To summarize, Joel utilizes an expression also found in Malachi to describe this day as great and terrible (**Mal 4:5**), closing with a paraphrase of the ominous question from **Malachi 3:2**, *who can endure it?* (**Joel 2:11b**). This cry of **hopelessness** sums up the communicational goal of the entire passage. Joel takes readers into the abyss of terrors that potentially await, only to make them receptive to the hope to which the next verse points.

II. (:12-17) PLEA FOR REPENTANCE

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: This unit falls into two closely related parts. First, God calls the community to turn to him, a summons on which Joel builds by holding out the possibility that God might relent (**2:12-14**). Then Joel issues a series of commands regarding the concrete steps required for turning to God (**2:15-17**). God begins by declaring, *Yet even now ...* Even at this late time, when the destructive day of the Lord has already dawned and more of its fury is imminent, God refuses to be done with Israel, yearning to grant life rather than death (**Achtemeier** 1996a: 319). God, the source of the threat, now proposes a potential way out. The significance of this *Yet even now* possibility is heightened by the words *declares the Lord* (NIV), a common prophetic formula to designate divine speech. It stands out here because this is the only occurrence of the formula in Joel.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Outline

The Response God Wants (**2:12-16**)

A Petition with Motivation (**2:17**)

How God Calls Us to Repent (**2:13**)

A. (:12A) Gracious Offer -- Patience of Longsuffering Lord

"'Yet even now,' declares the Lord"

David Baker: The appropriate response to the devastation brought by God is **repentance** (v. 12). Triple transition indicators mark it. "*Even*" (cf. **2:3, 29**) and "*now*" (**Gen. 50:21; Ps. 2:10**) indicate a new, sequential element to what precedes. It allows a brief window of opportunity to respond in the face of the rapidly approaching Day of Yahweh. The direct discourse indicator ("*declares the LORD*") identifies the exhortation to repent as originating from Yahweh himself (e.g., **Gen. 22:16; Hos. 2:15; Obad. 8**). Yahweh does not wait for the people to turn to him; he initiates the discussion.

B. (:12B-13) Genuine Repentance -- Inward Orientation --

Whole-hearted, Sincere, Penitent Repentance

*“Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;
And rend your heart and not your garments.
Now return to the Lord your God.
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, And relenting of evil.*

John Goldingay: Joel then provides his gloss on Yahweh’s invitation and challenge (v. 13), adding that (on the other hand), neither is the turning to be one that is merely outward. In addition to being body as well as inner self, it’s to be inner self and not just externals. It means an inner circumcision, not just an outward one (cf. **Deut. 30:6**). The basis for a confident turning is who Yahweh is: gracious, compassionate, long-tempered, and big in commitment. The description corresponds more or less word for word with his self-description at Sinai (**Exod. 34:6**), which is often alluded to in the First Testament. Joel’s words correspond particularly to the version in **Jon. 4:2**, which also adds the additional note that he is “*relenting about dire action*.” These words resonate further with Sinai (see **Exod. 32:12, 14**), though the formulation in Joel and Jonah is even closer to **Jer. 18:8**. Joel thus invites people to turn to Yahweh on the basis of the assurance that he will behave in a way consistent with his behavior at Sinai (a fortiori if they do not have apostasy to turn from) and consistent with his dealing in relation to Nineveh (a fortiori if they do not have gross waywardness to turn from). While the exhortation to fast, cry, and lament thus recapitulates **chapter 1**, the motivation is different—not the awfulness of the calamity but the graciousness of Yahweh. . .

Joel characterizes the one to whom people may turn as gracious, compassionate, long-tempered, and big in commitment. He thereby nails **key characteristics of God**. Graciousness means that the relationship between God and his people has its basis in God’s love and generosity and not in what they deserve. Compassion means that God has the feelings of a mother for the children of her womb, especially when they are threatened by disaster. Commitment means that God is not only faithful when his people are faithful to him but that he stays faithful even when they have forfeited any right to faithfulness. Long-temperedness means that God looks in the eye the shortcomings of the people of God but keeps resisting the temptation to act in anger against this people, even though it doesn’t mean that God is incapable of letting his temper have its way eventually. God’s being long-tempered is thus a key expression of his love. It opens up the possibility of response; indeed, it exists in expectation of response. “Everything that God is, is implied and included in the statement that He is patient.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: When you do not know where to turn, return to the Lord. Why? Because He is not some cosmic policeman or sadistic headmaster who delights in our suffering, but is “*gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness*” (**Joel 2:13**). We see these qualities of God through the pages of the Old Testament and in the Book of Joel which we are considering, but nowhere do we see them more clearly than in Jesus, the Son of God and the Word of God to us.

C. (:14) Goodness Restored

*“Who knows whether He will not turn and relent
And leave a blessing behind Him,
Even a grain offering and a drink offering, for the Lord your God?”*

James Nogalski: **Joel 2:14** presents a rhetorical question that simultaneously represents an affirmation of Yahweh’s sovereignty and an expression of hope in Yahweh’s compassion. The question begins with the phrase *Who knows ... ?* For the prophet, while the outcome is uncertain, the phrase implies that God alone is the only one who can change the situation. The prophet does not dare to claim this knowledge for himself. Nevertheless, the lexical connections also imply hope that genuine repentance on the part of the people (**2:12–13**) will prompt Yahweh to respond positively as well. Likewise, the hope that Yahweh will leave behind a blessing anticipates a reversal of the current situation in which the land has experienced curses for its covenant disobedience.

Attention-getter -- *“Blow a trumpet in Zion”*

D. (:15-16) Gathering the People

*“Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly,
Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders,
Gather the children and the nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom come out of his room
And the bride out of her bridal chamber.”*

E. (:17) Glory of God = Best Grounds for Appeal for Mercy

*“Let the priests, the Lord’s ministers,
Weep between the porch and the altar,
And let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O Lord,
And do not make Your inheritance a reproach,
A byword among the nations.
Why should they among the peoples say, Where is their God?’”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is the day of the Lord presented as “**near**”?
- 2) How **terrifying** are the images of the day of the Lord?
- 3) Are we to interpret the **cosmic disturbances** literally or figuratively?
- 4) What **attributes of God** encourage His forgiveness of His people’s sins and

restoration to covenant blessing upon repentance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson (2:1-17) Judah's Repentance and God's Repentance

Joel's message of repentance is the same as that of John the Baptist – with exception of different time reference; “*repent*” in NT = “*return to me*” in OT; Joel is prophet of repentance; Day of the Lord seems to include both Trib Period, Second Coming and Millennial kingdom aspects.

I. (:1-11) Description of the Coming Day of the Lord under image of locust plague Will be a time of judgment on Judah (surprising message)

A. (:1-2) Introductory Warning – theme emerging; vs. 11 mentions it as well
“*Blow a trumpet*” = an alert for enemy attack

B. (:3,6,10) – delineate 3 sections

1. (:3-5) The locusts and the land – military metaphors abound
2. (:6-9) The locusts and effect on the people
Apprehension and alarm; terminology cannot be limited to locust plague
3. (:10-11) The locusts and relationship to universe as a whole – Impressive Climax
Picture enlarges in the prophet's focus; locusts on the ground can make it look like the earth is moving; so many in the sky that they blot out the light of the sky

II. (:12-14) Prophet Calls on Judah to Repent (National Repentance)

Only the person who has repented can endure the Day of the Lord; Urgent necessity of repentance right now

III. (:15-17) Repentance of the Lord

David Baker: Rather than thinking that the disaster that befell them is only a fluke of nature, the people realize that it is from God. While God is instigator, he also desires to restore the relationship and actually commands his people to approach him for restoration. All society has suffered; now all must turn to the Lord for aid. Their attention is now directed away from the calamities of the past and toward the possibility of restoration through God's response in the future to their previous laments.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: In three distinct units (2:2b-3, 4-6, 7-10), obscured by the paragraphing in the NIV, NRSV, and CEB, Joel piles up images and metaphors depicting the invading army. After each description follows the key Hebrew expression *before it* (2:3a, 6a, 10a AT), referring to the invading army (Nogalski 2011a: 229–30). Unfortunately, the expression cannot be easily recognized in translations. The expression *before it* begins an observation about the devastating impact that the army

will have on some element of creation. According to the first unit, the invading army, more massive and powerful than any seen before, blankets the hills around Jerusalem like approaching nightfall (2:2b). Before and behind this army, a fire consumes, turning a lush landscape like that found in the garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness (2:3). Fire is a frequent image for divine judgment and a common feature of the theophanies referenced above, illustrating that Joel provides “a theophanic portrayal of the threat” (Sweeney 2000a: 161). Joel reverses the hopeful image in **Isaiah 51:3** and **Ezekiel 36:35** of God turning wilderness into Eden, thereby indicating that Israel is in danger of forfeiting the bright future promised elsewhere.

Building on common perceptions in the ancient world that a locust’s head resembles that of a horse, the second unit describes the locust army charging like speedy cavalry (2:4). Its chariots are so nimble that they jump effortlessly from one mountaintop to the next. Cavalry and chariots were the most advanced and deadly military technology of the day, not unlike modern tanks, fighter jets, or drones. Joel also mentions the ominous rumbling of chariot wheels and the crackling sound of fire burning stubble that may refer to the crackling sound made by millions of locust jaws chomping on vegetation, or perhaps the whirring of locust wings. Inscribed on every human face is the terror inspired by this army arrayed in battle formation (2:6). It is no accident that the book of Revelation draws on Joel’s imagery of locusts as warhorses to portray an apocalyptic locust plague that will contribute to God’s elimination of evildoers from the earth (9:7-10; Yeatts: 164–68, 174–75).

Joel’s third description focuses on how the invaders will overrun and loot Jerusalem (2:7-9). They are a perfect fighting machine that advances with relentless precision and discipline, with no soldier veering from his path. With little effort the attackers smash through defenses. The city’s defensive wall is useless as the locust soldiers easily scale it and run along its top, meeting no resistance from any defenders. The text drives home the horror of the situation by shifting focus to the intimacy of people’s homes, violated by soldiers who crawl through windows to loot and pillage. Conquering soldiers would be more likely to smash doors than bother crawling through windows, so the picture here suggests invading locusts. Though the imagery is overwhelmingly militaristic, much of it can also be ascribed to locusts, for which city walls pose no obstacle and which can be portrayed as marching in rank like an army (**Prov 30:27**) and invading the privacy of every home (**Exod 10:6**). Joel’s language evocatively fuses imagery of human and locust invaders.

James Nogalski: In the modern world, the God of the Old Testament is often considered vengeful because of the violent imagery in many stories and in the language of the prophets. Nevertheless, the Old Testament itself portrays Yahweh as a God of compassion and forgiveness, a God who is repeatedly willing to restrain his desire for punishment when his own people break covenant with him.

TEXT: Joel 2:18-32

TITLE: BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE IN THE LAST DAYS

BIG IDEA:

THE PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT OF BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE

INTRODUCTION:

James Nogalski: Joel 2:18 functions as the dramatic turning point of the book. Serious disagreement, however, exists regarding whether one should read 2:18 as a narrative description of God's reaction to the repentance described in 2:12–17, as a continuation of the prayer of 2:12–17, or as a contingency statement, reporting what Yahweh might do should the people repent and Yahweh relent. It is clear to anyone who reads Joel that 2:18 begins something radically different.

John Barton: It is widely held that laments or pleas for help uttered in the Temple cultus were customarily followed by an oracle declaring that God had heard the lament, and that this explains the sudden transition from lament to assurance in some of the psalms. Thus, in **Psalm 20**, a prayer for the king to be blessed by YHWH in vv. 1–5 is followed in vv. 6–8 by a thanksgiving that YHWH will certainly do so: "*Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed.*" It is plausible to think that after the first part of the psalm a cultic official (priest or prophet) arose and uttered a favorable oracle in response to the intercession. Similarly, in **Psalm 60** a lament about military defeat (vv. 1–5) is followed by a declaration that God will favor the people and give them dominion over their enemies. It seems likely that this pattern, lament followed by oracle of blessing, was well established in the Temple cult even in preexilic times.

Leslie Allen: After a short narrative introduction the first divine oracle comes in two parts, vv. 19, 20 and 24–27. It is split by a prophetic song of encouragement which applies God's promises to the hearts of his hearers, and calls for a joyful response (vv. 21–23). Both the two-part oracle and the song present a glorious reversal of the grim situation of distress depicted in 1:4 – 2:17. Earlier motifs are deliberately taken up and put in a new setting of salvation. It is mainly the factually descriptive phraseology of 1:4–20 that is echoed, but elements from 2:3, 11, 17 are also repeated in these **promises of victory and blessing**.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Outline

- The Voice of Pity (2:18–20)
- A Word of Promise (2:21–24)
- Restoring the Years (2:25–27)
- The Outpouring of the Spirit (2:28–29)
- The Prophet in Your Skin Deliverance (2:30–32)

From **2:18** to the end of the book we find promises of prosperity and restoration for God's people and judgment upon their enemies. . . **Joel 2:18–27** has been characterized as an **oracle of assurance**, a promise that the petition offered has been heard and will be answered.

I. (:18-27) FULFILLMENT OF DELIVERANCE PROMISES BASED ON HISTORICAL REPENTANCE

A. (:18) Restoration of Divine Favor

*“Then the Lord will be zealous for His land
And will have pity on His people.”*

James Nogalski: This verse promises that Yahweh will respond positively to the repentance described in **2:12–17**. While the prophet's call to repentance affirms that the decision on how to respond to the people's actions remains the prerogative of Yahweh himself, Yahweh's promise in **2:18** reinforces the characterization of Yahweh as compassionate and willing to show mercy. The subsequent verses (**2:19–27**) explicate in more concrete terms what Yahweh intends to do if the people actually do repent. Nowhere in Joel, however, or in the Twelve, do the people actually follow through explicitly on this call to repentance until **Zech 1:6**.

Duane Garrett: The idiom for being “*jealous for*” something occurs several times in the sense of people being devoted to and defending the honor of Yahweh (e.g., **Num 25:13**). Here, as in **Ezek 39:25; Zech 1:14** and **8:2**, Yahweh is **zealous** for the nation in the sense that he identifies himself with it, protects it, and upholds the covenant. This quality especially emerges in the context of the nations' abuse of Israel, as in **Zech 1:14–15**: “*I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry [i.e., with Jerusalem], but they [i.e., the Gentiles] added to the calamity [i.e., by tormenting the Jews].*” At the same time, Yahweh is motivated by **pure compassion**. Thus the two grounds for God's work of salvation are his **covenant bond** with the people and his **merciful nature**.

Robert Chisholm: In response to this genuine repentance, the LORD was jealous for His land and took pity on His people. The Lord's jealousy is His passionate loyalty toward what is His, a loyalty that prompts Him to lash out against anything that would destroy it (cf. **Isa. 26:11; Ezek. 36:5–6; 38:19; Zech. 1:14; 8:2**). The military protection described in **Joel 2:20** is in view here.

B. (:19) Restoration of Material Prosperity

1. Response to Repentance and Appeals to God's Mercy

“The Lord will answer and say to His people”

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Verse 19** states explicitly that the Lord has answered the prayer of His people. First, He promises to send grain, new wine, and oil—the trio of **1:10** which represents the sum of agricultural produce and was destroyed by the locust plague and

the drought. Not only does He promise to send these staples again, but He assures the people that there will be sufficient quantity, that they will be “*satisfied*” or filled.

2. Resources for Contented Living

*“Behold, I am going to send you grain, new wine and oil,
And you will be satisfied in full with them”*

3. Reputation as the People of God

“And I will never again make you a reproach among the nations.”

Duane Garrett: Yahweh proleptically decreed that he would undo the two curses of agricultural disaster (1:9–17) and humiliation among the Gentile powers (2:17; cf. **Jer 51:51; Ezek 5:15; 22:4**). This verse is proleptic in the sense that it only announces in brief what is explored in much more detail in the following verses. Restoring the grain, new wine, and oil reverses the calamity described in 1:10. Putting an end to their “*reproach among the nations*” implies an end to the military defeat, famine, and plague that had dogged them. It specifically looks for a **restoration from exile**.

C. (:20) Removal of Threatening Enemies

*“But I will remove the northern [army / one] far from you,
And I will drive it into a parched and desolate land,
And its vanguard into the eastern sea,
And its rear guard into the western sea.
And its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up,
For it has done great things.”*

Duane Garrett: Whatever else one may make of the armies of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel, they are armies “*from the far north*” brought against Israel (38:15; 39:2). They are a vast horde that advances like a cloud (38:15–16) and schemes to assault Jerusalem and carry away plunder (38:10–14). They will fall in the slaughter of the day of the Lord. Birds and wild animals will eat their corpses, and the Israelites will be occupied for seven months with burying the dead and for seven years with burning the equipment. The burial ground will occupy “*the valley of those who travel east toward the sea*” and will be so extensive that it will block the passage through (39:1–20). . .

All in all, everything in this verse points toward a human army, apocalyptic in its power and significance, whose victories represent judgment upon Israel but whose destruction is a sign of eschatological salvation.

Thomas Constable: Instead of leading this army against Jerusalem (v. 11), the Lord would drive it from Judah. He would drive its soldiers into a parched and desolate land (Arabia?) and into the eastern (Dead) sea and the western (Mediterranean) sea (cf. **Dan. 11:45**). In other words, He would turn against them rather than leading them and scatter them rather than uniting them against Jerusalem. The smell of the dead carcasses of the many soldiers would fill the air because they had done many great things. In short, they had tried to overthrow God's people (cf. the Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea).

Masses of dead locusts also smell terrible, especially after dying in the sea and then being washed ashore.

James Nogalski: Rhetorically, this verse functions as part of Yahweh's promise that reverses the curses of **Joel 1:2 – 2:11** and provides internal evidence that the compiler of the book understood "*locusts*" of Joel as **attacking nations**. The invading nation in **1:6**, which surely interprets the final locust plague of **1:4** as an attacking army, implies to the reader of Joel 1 that a nation entered the land. **Joel 2:20** promises to remove the northern army from the land, a promise that makes little sense if the northerner is not the same as the nation in **1:6**. Additionally, the language in the second half of **2:20** conceptualizes this army in near mythic terms so that its "*face*" will be driven to the Dead Sea and its "*hind part*" toward the Mediterranean. Metaphorically, the northern army will be cleaved in two and scattered into arid lands where its carcass will rot. The "*northerner*" is generally interpreted through the tradition of the enemy of the north, a tradition that plays a significant role in Jeremiah (see **1:13–15; 3:12, 18; 4:6; 6:1**; etc.) as a cipher for Babylon. Most military attacks from Mesopotamia did not take a straight line from the east because of the desert separating Israel and Judah from Babylon or Assyria. Rather, Mesopotamian armies tended to follow the rivers of the Fertile Crescent, which means that they marched from the north into Israel and Judah.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: God will employ a double-pronged strategy to destroy the northerner, first driving him into a desolate land, where the locust army will presumably starve because there is no vegetation (**2:20**). Then, in language reminiscent of how God ended the locust plague upon Egypt by driving the locusts into the sea (**Exod 10:19**), God promises to split the locust army in half, driving its vanguard into the Dead Sea and its rearguard into the Mediterranean. The carnage will be so massive that the stench of rotting bodies, either human or locust, will foul the air.

D. (:21-24) Rejoice in the Lord's Blessings / Do Not Fear

James Nogalski: Each of these three calls contain similar structural elements: a command telling the people not to fear but to rejoice and be glad, followed by specific reasons introduced by the conjunction *kī* ("*because, for*"). . .

These paired commands provide cohesion across the calls to three different addressees, as does the fact that each of the three groups are exhorted for specific reasons. The prophet tells the land to rejoice because Yahweh has magnified his own actions. The prophet exhorts the beasts of the field not to fear because the pasturelands and the trees will soon be fertile again. And the children of Zion shall rejoice because Yahweh will restore the cycle of rain upon which the ecosystem depends.

John Goldingay: Joel takes up the **implications of Yahweh's promises**. His bidding the ground not to be afraid in light of them is a standard prophetic encouragement to Israel. The ground has had reason to be afraid, and specifically to mourn, and celebration and gladness had disappeared from people's worship because the ground did not produce the wherewithal for worship (**1:10, 16**). It is now encouraged to celebrate and rejoice

instead of mourning. The ground celebrates by being colorful and by manifesting its produce, but the exhortation to celebrate has a metonymic aspect; Joel is also encouraging the community to celebrate and rejoice. Prophets commonly encourage kings or Israel itself not to be afraid; Joel indirectly encourages Judah by directly encouraging the natural world in this direction. In such biddings, the encouragement can be based on something that has been declared though not actually yet implemented (e.g., **Isa. 41:13; 43:1**), and so it is here. A promise from Yahweh changes the face of its recipients before they see its implementation. The specific event that is declared though not yet actual is described in a neat contrast with **v. 20bβ**. Yahweh is the one who is in a position to act big in what he does and to put down the pretender. **Psalm 126:2–3** applies to Yahweh the language of acting big in what he does, in a context like the one Joel presupposes, when Judah needs Yahweh to act in this way again.

Joel addresses a parallel exhortation to the wild animals (**v. 22**), who have reason to be afraid because a locust epidemic deprives them of their food. They have been straining toward Yahweh because of the fire that has afflicted the wilderness meadows (**1:19–20**). Confidence can replace fear for them, too. The metonymy implicitly reappears in the comment about fruit trees. Human beings would not want the wild animals celebrating too much over the trees' fruitfulness. That fruitfulness is indeed a reason for human celebration, especially given the symbolic significance of vine and fig tree.

At last the community is openly invited to celebrate and rejoice (**v. 23**). Of the verbs in **v. 21a**, the first was thus taken up in **v. 22** and the other two reappear here. While epidemics are an occasional problem in Judah, drought is more common, so the basis of rejoicing here is the promise of the gift of rain. The first rain in October and November softens the ground after the summer drought and makes plowing and sowing possible. The crops come to fruition with the aid of the late rain in March and April, which counts as the beginning of the year if one treats Passover as “*the beginning of months*” and its month as the first month (**Exod. 12:2**). The main rain comes in between the first and the late rain; while these two play key roles, the reference to them may imply a merism: they also cover everything in between, which might also be denoted by the word “*downpour*.” Yahweh's making the year work out as it should and as it needs to will be an expression of his faithfulness, the faithfulness that makes him act in passion to restore his people in a way that's unrelated to what they deserve.

The happy result will be a superabundance of the three archetypal products of the harvest (**v. 24**; contrast **1:10** and compare **2:19**).

1. (:21) Encouragement Directed to the Land

*“Do not fear, O land, rejoice and be glad,
For the Lord has done great things.”*

Duane Garrett: In Isaiah, however, the refrain “*Do not fear*” (using a Hebrew phrase identical or similar to that of **Joel 2:21**) is a signal that **redemption has come**. In **Isa 40:9–11** the herald is to cry out to Zion, “*Do not fear!*” because Yahweh himself is coming to redeem and care for his people. In **Isaiah 41** God reassures Israel that he has

chosen them, reminds them that their God is no powerless idol, and tells them three times (**Isa 41:10,13,14**) not to fear. In **43:1** he tells Israel not to fear because he has called them by his own name, and in **43:5** he again reassures them that they need not fear because he will bring the people back from exile. In **44:2–3**, much as in **Joel 2:21–32**, he encourages them not to fear because he will pour out water on the land and his Spirit on the people. In **Isa 54:4** God tells Israel not to fear because he is about to remove their reproach among the nations. In short, the Book of Isaiah addresses many of the themes that appear in Joel, including the healing of the land, the triumph over their enemies, the end of Israel's shame among the nations, the return from exile, and the gift of the Spirit. “*Do not fear*” is the **refrain of reassurance** that runs through them all. Joel's command to the land not to fear similarly signals the **promise of redemption**.

2. (:22) Encouragement Directed to the Beasts

*“Do not fear, beasts of the field,
For the pastures of the wilderness have turned green,
For the tree has borne its fruit,
The fig tree and the vine have yielded in full.”*

3. (:23) Encouragement Directed to the Israelites

*“So rejoice, O sons of Zion,
And be glad in the Lord your God;
For He has given you the early rain for your vindication.
And He has poured down for you the rain,
The early and latter rain as before.”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Three different words for rain are used in **verse 23**: abundant rain (*gešem*), early . . . rain (*môreh*) in the autumn and later rain (*malqôš*) in the spring; *môreh* is repeated twice so the fourfold mention of rain matches the four types of locusts in **verse 25**. . . The rain falling in its season functions as an integral part of the created order. God rolls back the forces of chaos and destruction and restores blessing and harmony to his world.

Duane Garrett: In trying to determine the correct translation of the phrase in question, “*a teacher for righteousness*” or “*rains in righteousness*,” two contradictory pieces of evidence stand out. The first is that the meaning “*rains*” perfectly suits the context, whereas “*teacher*” is discordant. Nothing in the immediate vicinity or in the wider context of the book supports the sudden appearance of a teacher here. In addition to these considerations, **L. C. Allen** points out that the phrase “*he has given*” supports the position that rains and not a teacher are meant. On the other hand, notwithstanding that “*righteousness*” in Hebrew implies vindication or even salvation, the idea of giving “*rains for righteousness*” sounds harsh if not incongruous. Also several ancient versions see in this phrase a reference to a teacher.

The **ambiguity of the phrase** is such that we must ask ourselves if we have a **double entendres** here. The surface or immediate meaning is that Yahweh will vindicate the Jews in the presence of the nations by sending rains to heal their land. At the same time,

it seems, Joel used a wordplay to hint that the salvation of the nation would come from a teacher of righteousness.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Rain was typically in short supply in Canaan, so the references to abundant early and late rains are especially hopeful, indicating that God is restoring the annual rainfall cycle and ending the devastating drought (cf. **1:10, 12, 17-20; 2:3**). The early rains that come in November and December, after six months of no rain, moisten and soften the soil so that grain can be seeded. The late rains in March and April are important for ensuring that the grain produces well and various fruits size up. The rain that God sends will result in abundant harvests so that threshing floors will be full of grain and vats overflow with new wine and olive oil (**2:24**), in contrast to the previously empty food storage facilities (**1:17**) and the lack of grain, wine, and oil (**1:5, 9-13**).

Trent Butler: The rain represents God's gift of righteousness, his loyalty to the covenant, his faithfulness, and thus his goodness and kindness to Israel, his people. The rain also represents a vindication of Israel's righteousness in repenting and turning back to God with fasting and prayer. It represents a gift in response to Israel's renewed loyalty. The rain is righteous in the sense that just the right amount fell. The rain was faithful in coming and loyal in adhering to the standards by which rain is normally measured.

4. (:24) Encouragement Realized in Abundant Harvests

*“The threshing floors will be full of grain,
And the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil.”*

James Nogalski: **Joel 2:24** articulates its promise to Judah in a manner that verbally reverses the judgment pronounced against Ephraim/Israel in **Hos 9:1–2**:

Hosea 9:1–2

do not rejoice (*śmḥ*), Israel (**9:1**)

nor exult (*gīl*, **9:1**)

Threshing floor (*gōren*) and vat

(*yeqeb*) will not feed them (**9:2**)

wine (*tîrôš*) will fail them

Joel 2:21–24

rejoice (*śmḥ*, **2:21, 23**)

exult (*gīl*, **2:21, 23**)

Threshing floors (*gōren*) will be

full of grain (**2:24**);

the vats (*yeqeb*) will overflow with wine
(*tîrôš*) and oil (**2:24**)

E. (:25-27) Reversal of Former Judgments

1. (:25) Reversal of Devastation

*“Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has
eaten,*

*The creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust,
My great army which I sent among you.”*

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The four terms for locust from **1:4** are repeated here, creating an envelope around the first major part of the book.

2. (:26) Reversal of Deprivation

*“You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied
And praise the name of the Lord your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
Then My people will never be put to shame.”*

3. (:27) Reversal of Disgrace

*“Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
And that I am the Lord your God, And there is no other;
And my people will never be put to shame.”*

Lloyd Ogilvie: A further result of the new bounty is found in **verse 27**: the people will confidently know God, His presence, and His uniqueness. They will know that He is in their midst, effectively present with them, that He is their God, active on their behalf and the One to whom they owe allegiance. They will know that there is no other God, that He alone is worthy of their worship and praise. It is only as the people live in the light of this knowledge of God that they can truly fulfill His design that they be a light to the nations. . .

Verse 27 also provides a transition to the promises relating to the more distant future day of the Lord. The people will never again be put to shame, recalling the shame of foreign domination and the threatened conquest by the apocalyptic army. The more distant future is the subject of the rest of the Book of Joel.

James Nogalski: Rhetorically, the consequence of this fertility (**2:19–26a**) leads to a heightening of the sense that the relationship between Yahweh and the people will be strengthened in **2:26aβ–27**. The people will praise the name of Yahweh (**2:26**), will have their shame removed (**2:26, 27**), and will recognize Yahweh’s presence in their midst (**2:27**). These promises allude to canonical traditions using language that evokes echoes of the exodus (“*Yahweh, your God who worked wonders with you*”) and the first commandment of recognizing Yahweh as God (cf. **Exod 20:1–3**).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: Two aspects are emphasized in particular:

- (1) the Lord is in the midst of Israel, that is, his redeeming presence is with his people;
- (2) the Lord is God and there is no other, that is, he is unique and has no rival among the gods of the nations that mock Judah (cf. **2:17**).

The motif of the knowledge of God plays a key role in the exodus narrative (**Exod. 5:2; 6:3, 7; 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 14:4, 18**) and the recognition formula is frequently used in Ezekiel (**34:30; 36:11, 38; 37:6, 13; 38:23; 39:6–7**). Acts of judgment and salvation make the Lord known as Redeemer and Judge, and reveal his power, goodness and incomparable nature.

The mocking question of the foreign nations *Where is their God?* (2:17) has now been answered definitively. God is in the midst of his people Israel. The blessings he has poured upon them prove that. Abundance of rain brings plentiful crops and bountiful harvests. The forces of chaos have been rolled back and creation is restored to harmony and peace. Deprivation and humiliation are replaced with jubilation that ultimately leads to a deeper knowledge of God as Creator, Provider and Redeemer. The material and the spiritual are closely linked. Israel experience God in the course of history as a Lord who intervenes, alters circumstances and touches the everyday realities of their lives. That intervention is a testimony to the power and care of God, who has no rival and no equal.

John Goldingay: The people will thus acknowledge Yahweh's presence (v. 27). Acknowledging him actually is the key to a good harvest and to security in relation to other nations, as Hosea argues. Yahweh's caring for them in both these practical ways will be the vindication of him as the faithful one (cf. v. 23). It will provide an answer to the people who might ask, "*Where is their God?*" (v. 17). Matching the argument of **Isa. 40–55** is the recognition that the problem of whether people acknowledge Yahweh is not merely a problem about other peoples; it is a problem about Israel itself. Yahweh's marvelous provision will issue in its own recognition of Yahweh as the one who lives among them. He is Yahweh their God. The further declaration that there is no other again takes up **Isa. 40–55** (e.g., 45:5). The end result—that people will acknowledge Yahweh in this way—makes a fitting close to a section (e.g., **Ezek. 6:13; 7:27; 12:20; 13:23**), though a repeat of the promise about shame rounds it off and also makes a fitting close (cf. **Isa. 45:17**); the two promises come together in **Isa. 49:23**. A further contribution to a fitting close is this last subsection's double reference to "*your God*" and "*my people*," the two sides to the committed relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The end result of God's work of restoration will be an acknowledgment of Yahweh as the only God and a resealing of the relationship between "*your God*" and "*my people*."

David Baker: Israel has been psychologically defeated by the natural attacks it suffered, with even its neighbors convinced that God abandoned them, because he is apparently nowhere to be found. Now Yahweh proclaims that Israel ("*you*"), and secondarily her neighbors, **knows three things for a surety**. This is a bold affirmation, unlike the uncertainty of knowing whether God would forgive noted previously (2:14). Yahweh has forgiven, God will restore, and they can know the following (2:27):

1. He has not abandoned Israel, his people whom he for the first time calls by their name, "*Israel*." He is still in her midst in power, as he was when the nation was first being born (cf. **Num. 14:14**).
2. His relationship with them has not changed from the time he entered into a covenant relationship with them..

3. In stark contrast to the apparently absent God for whom Israel's neighbors sought to ridicule her, Yahweh is the only God there is; none other exists.

These three are sufficient reasons for Israel to forget any of her shame, not only now but forever. The ultimate ground for her confidence and hope does not ultimately lie within her and her identity, but in Yahweh, her eternally present God.

II. (:28-32) ESCHATOLOGICAL PROMISES IN ANTICIPATION OF NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

Lloyd Ogilvie: The “*afterward*” of **verse 28** is a signal that the gaze of Joel's prophecy moves from the near future with its promise of agricultural restoration to the more distant future. Israel will experience new wonders “*before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD*” (**2:31**). **Verses 28–32** portray three aspects of this distant future:

- a new experience of God's Spirit (**vv. 28–29**),
- amazing signs in the heavens and earth (**vv. 30–31**),
- and the way of deliverance from the dangers of that time (**v. 32**).

Tchavdar Hadjiev: The story about the locust plague (**1:2 – 2:27**) now reaches its goal. In the future a new Day of the Lord will appear. The forces of chaos will be unleashed again and the whole world will writhe in confusion and pain. But those who have learned the lesson of the previous Day of the Lord, and as a result have come to know the Lord and trust in his goodness, will be safe. God will pour his life-giving spirit on them and will protect his true worshippers who have taken refuge on his holy mountain.

Anthony Gelston: This is the best-known and most important passage in the book. In the Hebrew Bible it is reckoned as a separate ch. 3, ch. 3 in the English Bible being ch. 4 in the Hebrew Bible. There is both continuity and discontinuity with the earlier and later parts of the book. The continuity is indicated most clearly by the continuing treatment of the “*day of the LORD*” theme, while the discontinuity is marked by the vague indications of time sequence in “*afterward*” in **2:28** and “*in those days and at that time*” in **3:1**, both indicating events in a remoter future than the removal of the locust plague. Another marked difference from the earlier part of the book is that, whereas there the focus was on the judgment of Judah herself, in the later part it is Judah's foreign attackers who undergo judgment, while Judah herself experiences divine salvation and restoration.

This passage itself comprises three sections. In **2:28–29** the theme is the universal outpouring of the spirit of God, resulting particularly in visions and prophecy. This is one of the relatively few passages in the OT where there is a direct link between prophecy and the spirit of God. It is reminiscent particularly of **Num 11:16–17, 24–30**, where seventy elders of Israel receive the spirit and prophesy, including two who had been designated but had not gone out to the tent with the others. When Joshua protested, Moses expressed the wish that all the people of God might receive his spirit

and prophecy. In Joel this concept is extended even further to include not simply designated leaders but all levels of membership in the community, including specifically the slaves. The use of the expression “*all flesh*” carries at least a further implication that the outpouring of the spirit would not be restricted to the people of God but extend to all humankind, even if this is not explicitly drawn out in the prophecy itself.

2:30–31 predict natural portents as an indication of the imminence of the “*day of the LORD*.” This is traditional imagery, with overtones both of divine theophany and of judgment, although the sequel shows that the latter is the primary connotation here.

2:32 promises salvation to a certain group who will escape the coming judgment. They are defined as those who call on the name of the LORD, but the passage makes clear that they are also those whom God himself calls, and that the place where this community is to be found is Mt. Zion (i.e., the temple). The original intention of the prophecy is probably to indicate that a “*remnant*” of the chosen people will experience salvation rather than judgment at the “*day of the LORD*,” while the expression “*everyone who calls on the name of the LORD*” is clearly patient of a more universal interpretation.

A. (:28-29) Promise of the Outpouring of the Spirit

*“It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy;
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.
Even on the male and female servants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”*

Lloyd Ogilvie: “*All flesh*” in the Old Testament can indicate all of humanity (**Gen. 6:12; Is. 40:5, 6**) or even all of humanity and the animal kingdom (**Gen. 6:17, 19; Ps. 136:25**). However, in this context it is more likely that “*all flesh*” refers to **all Israel**. The term is clarified by the following subgroups. God is speaking reassurance to His frightened people in Jerusalem and refers to “*your sons and your daughters*,” “*your old men*,” “*your young men*,” “*My menservants, and . . . My maidservants*.” The possessive pronouns and the context of the promise indicate that Joel and his listeners would probably have understood this as a promise to Israel alone. Moreover, the lot of the other nations as described in **chapter 3** would seem to exclude them from this promise. Even if we limit the promise to Israel, it still represents a radical expansion of the experience of God’s Spirit. . .

What would it mean for Israel that God’s Spirit would be poured out on each person? Three specific manifestations of the Spirit are given: People will prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions. These are not really three unrelated phenomena but are related manifestations of an immediate and close relationship with the Lord where He communicates His word and understanding to individuals, who then communicate it to others. Throughout the Old Testament we find God communicating His word through

dreams: from Jacob (**Gen. 28:12–15**), Joseph and Pharaoh (**Gen. 37:5–10; 40:1–41:40**), Solomon (**1 Kin. 3:5–15**), to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar (**Dan. 2**). The prophets of the Old Testament sometimes experienced visions (**Dan. 8:1; Hos. 12:10**) as vehicles of God's revelation, which then found their way into their speaking and writing to the people. Vision and prophecy are so closely linked that the writings of the prophets can be introduced as visions: "*The vision of Isaiah*" (**Is. 1:1**); "*The vision of Obadiah*" (**Obad. 1:1**); "*The words of Amos. . . which he saw*" (**Amos 1:1**, where the verb *saw*, *hāzâ*, has the same root as the word *vision*, *hāzôn*).

Time reference – **Acts 2** at Pentecost = partial fulfillment

"*this is that*" – not referring to entire paragraph from Joel

Complete fulfillment right before Second Coming

Look at **Is. 61** as quoted by Christ in **Lk. 4:21**

Promise of the Spirit associated with New Covenant

James Nogalski: Most see **Joel 2:28–29 (3:1–2)** as referring to the **gift of prophetic knowledge**, which helps to interpret the signs mentioned in **2:30–31 (3:3–4)**. Those following this perspective often reckon less with **Joel 2:28–32 (3:1–5)** as the extension of **Joel 2:1–27** than with **Joel 2:28–32 (3:1–5)** as a text reflecting a Jewish perspective from the late postexilic period. According to this logic, a single inspired person will no longer play the prophetic role of Joel in **chapters 1–2**, but this role will include all those who belong to Yahweh's people. The spirit will enable all who follow Yahweh to discern the signs of the coming day of Yahweh. For these scholars, the day of Yahweh—and one's ability to endure it—is thus a question for every individual believer. For the writer of **Joel 2:28–32 (3:1–5)**, then, the role of the prophet will cease as an appointed office or an official group because Yahweh's salvific intention will be revealed to each person of the community.

B. (:30-31) Promise of Cosmic Signs before the Second Coming

*"I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.
The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood
Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."*

Has not happened yet; cf. **2:10**

C. (:32) Promise of Deliverance to Those Who Repent and Call on the Lord

*"And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Will be delivered;
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape,
As the Lord has said,
Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls."*

Robert Chisholm: On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter quoted **Joel 2:28-32** in conjunction with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. **Acts 2:17-21**). His introductory

words (cf. **Acts 2:16**, “*this is what was spoken by the Prophet Joel*”) may seem to indicate that he considered Joel’s prophecy as being completely fulfilled on that occasion. However, it is apparent that the events of that day, though extraordinary, did not fully correspond to those predicted by Joel.

In attempting to solve this problem one must recognize that in the early chapters of Acts the kingdom was being offered to Israel once more. Peter admonished the people to repent so that they might receive the promised Spirit (cf. **Acts 2:38-39** where he alludes to **Joel 2:32**). Shortly thereafter Peter anticipated “*times of refreshing*” and the return of Christ in response to national repentance (cf. **Acts 10:19-21**). Not until later did Peter come to understand more fully God’s program for the Gentiles in the present age (cf. **Acts 10:44-48**). When he observed the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost he rightly viewed it as the first stage in the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. Apparently he believed that the kingdom was then being offered to Israel and that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit signaled the coming of the Millennium. However, the complete fulfillment of the prophecy (with respect to both the extent of the Spirit’s work and the other details) was delayed because of Jewish unbelief

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are invading locusts an appropriate picture of an invading army?
- 2) Are we rejoicing in God’s blessings or still in bondage to fear and shame and guilt?
- 3) What will be surprising about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in end times?
- 4) How do we know that Peter’s quote of this passage from Joel in Acts 2 does not represent the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson (2:18-32) Joel and the Day of Pentecost

Joel is the prophet of the Day of the Lord and of the Day of Pentecost. Three truths committed to prophet Joel to expound in some detail:

- doctrine of **the Day of the Lord** – day of judgment; will not be a happy day for Israel; but for another part of the nation it will be a day of deliverance
- doctrine of **repentance** – **2 Chron. 7:14** – common text often misapplied – conditions for repentance and restoration
- doctrine of the **outpoured Spirit** --

Has the locust plague already come or is it still on the horizon? Day of the Lord described in language that goes beyond the day of Joel to the eschatological Day of the

Lord; a typical passage; language could not be completely fulfilled until the future; (there are some Joel wrote only of things that happened in his day); the plague is a judgment for disobedience; a means of discipline for turning away from the Lord; Joel had called for a national service of repentance for Judah to come and weep publicly before the Lord in the temple area;

I. (:18-27) The Promise of Immediate Blessings – we are intended to assume that Joel's appeals were successful; the people did repent ; past tense in v. 18 preferred;

A. (:18-20) Opening Promises

The land and the people were in covenant relationship with their Lord; given unconditional promises for Israel; the enjoyment of the promises limited by the obedience of the nation – they still have their blessings which will eventually be fulfilled; in the future God will bring His people to obedience

“the northern one” – leave this ambiguous – can apply to both the locust and the army that will come (**Ezek 38-39**) – the Antichrist and his hordes; problem: locusts usually came from the SE into Judah so this seems very strange

B. (:21-23) Song of Encouragement and Exhortation

Breaks into account of these promised blessings; locusts did great things of destruction and havoc; *“the early rain for your vindication”* – *“the teacher for righteousness”* in the Hebrew – interpreted this way by some of the early rabbis (some textual evidence as well) – reference to a personal Messiah in His second advent (Johnson inclined to reject that view)

C. (:24-27) Closing Promises

Locusts ultimately sent by the Lord; things happen to us for a purpose

II. (:28-32) The Promise of Some Last Day Blessings

A. (:28-29) Outpouring of the Spirit

“after this” = immediately preceding context; but gap of intervening time;

Acts 2:17ff – after this in the ultimate sense – looking at the Messianic days just preceding the second coming; part of the Abrahamic blessing fulfillment – Gal. 3:14 – the promise of Abraham – reference to the Holy Spirit;

B. (:30-31) Cosmic Signs

Upheavals in nature anticipate Lord's intrusion into this earthly scene at second advent; shows that some great thing is about to happen; time of judgment (we should speak with tears in our eyes)

C. (:32) Security of the People

III. What use did Peter make of this prophecy of Joel? A miracle had taken place at Pentecost; speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them; people gathered from all over the face of the inhabited earth;

Sermon of Peter was a good model: Plain, pertinent, personal, purposeful, persuasive

Various views:

- everything that Joel spoken was fulfilled on day of Pentecost?? But cosmic signs did not happen – so we would have to spiritualize these things
- no real fulfillment here at all – opposite extreme; but Peter said: This is That!
- preferred view: there is something in the way of fulfillment: the Spirit was poured out here; given on the day of Pentecost; the rest of the references are yet to be fulfilled and still will be fulfilled; Israel was in disobedience so the effects of the outpouring of the Spirit do not take place at this point in time; dependent on the belief of nation of Israel

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Like a good story that begins with a dire situation and moves toward a hopeful transformation, Joel begins with the tragic current circumstances of God's people, then shifts to the good news of how God responds to that crisis. The first half of Joel depicts Israel's desperate need as it faces the terrifying day of the Lord, and the second half portrays God's response (**Watts: 32**). Joel announces that God has had compassion on his people and become zealous on their behalf; this marks the major turning point in the book (**2:18-19a**). The day of the Lord no longer poses a threat to Israel but now becomes a promise of deliverance. The portrayal of salvation falls into three sections. God promises to undo all the suffering caused by the locusts and associated disasters (**2:18-27**). In a more distant future, various signs will demonstrate God's intervention on Israel's behalf (**2:28-32**). That same distant future will see God make Zion a base of operations for punishing enemies and blessing Israel with security and agricultural abundance (**3:1-21**).

OUTLINE

Near Future: God Will Reverse Earlier Devastations, **2:18-27**

Distant Future: Signs of God's Future Intervention, **2:28-32**

Distant Future: God Will Protect Judah/Jerusalem, **3:1-21**

- **3:1-15** God Will Judge Enemy Nations
- **3:16-21** Blessings from God's Presence on Zion

Trent Butler: God has poured out his Spirit in revelation. People respond to that revelation in obedience, praise, commitment, and prayer. They experience "*salvation*," God's deliverance from the judgment of the dreadful Day of the Lord. But this deliverance is only for survivors whom the LORD calls. Being on Mount Zion near God's temple is not enough. Being part of the population of Jerusalem, God's holy city, is not enough. A person calls on the name of the Lord, knowing that God took the initiative to make this possible. God brought locusts. God brought an invading army. God left survivors. God poured out his Spirit. After all God has done, now people have the invitation to call on God's name and to be delivered from this dreadful day.

TEXT: Joel 3:1-21

TITLE: *JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH*

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS IS CONTRASTED WITH THE RESTORATION OF JUDAH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

Trent Butler: MAIN IDEA REVIEW: The final Day of the Lord will bring victory and pardon for God's people, but that day of final decision will bring lasting judgment on the enemies of God's people. God will live in Zion among his people.

Kaiser: **Joel 3:1-21** ... became the classic passage for the rest of the OT on God's final judgment on all nations. It also became the classic statement of the blessed result for the people of God. They would possess an exceedingly fertile land enriched with fountains of running water and dripping with wine and milk. And to climax it all, Yahweh would personally dwell in Zion.

Thomas Constable: The prophecy of Joel unfolds in chronological sequence. It begins with reference to a severe locust invasion that had come as a judgment on the Judahites for their covenant unfaithfulness to Yahweh (**1:2-20**). Even though it is impossible to date this plague, it happened in the fairly recent past from Joel's perspective.

The LORD used this severe locust judgment to call His people, through His prophet, to anticipate an even worse devastation coming in the near future, not from insects but from foreign invaders (**2:1-27**). He called on the Jews to repent, and He promised that if they did, He would forgive them and save them from this invasion. This would be a day of deliverance in which they would learn that He was at work for them.

This was what happened when the Assyrians under Sennacherib's leadership attacked Jerusalem unsuccessfully in 701 B.C. (cf. **2 Kings 18-19; Isa. 36-37**). If that was the near invasion that Joel predicted, he must have written in the early pre-exilic period (ninth century B.C.).

Yet another, similar day, would be coming much further in the future (**2:28 - 3:21**), in which the Jews would again experience an invasion by foreigners who hated them (in the Tribulation). Nevertheless, Yahweh promised to deliver them in that day and to restore them to unprecedented blessing (in the Millennium)—because He was, and will always be, their covenant-keeping God.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: This chapter is a miscellaneous collection of promises of deliverance held together by two central themes: God's defeat of enemy peoples and the

benefits that will flow from the fact that God dwells on Mount Zion. The diversity of the material makes it difficult to know how to divide the chapter into smaller units. In my opinion, a significant shift occurs in **3:16**, when God roars from Zion. In **3:1-15** there is not a single reference to God dwelling in Zion, but **3:16-21** features four distinct references to God's presence in Zion/Jerusalem (**3:16, 17, 18b, 21**). The first part of the chapter describes how God will defeat the peoples who have oppressed Israel (**3:1-15**), whereas **3:16-21** focuses on how God will make Zion the base of operations for protecting and blessing Israel.

Duane Garrett: JUDGMENT ON NATIONS: ALL NATIONS DESTROYED (**3:1-21**)

The Valley of Jehoshaphat (**3:1-3**)
 Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia (**3:4-8**)
 Summons to All Nations (**3:9-12**)
 The Winepress of the Lord (**3:13**)
 Signs of the Day of the Lord (**3:14-17**)
 The Final State (**3:18-21**)

James Nogalski: Chiastic Structure

A Restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (**3:1**)
 B Judgment of the Nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (**3:2**)
 C Judgment for the Slavery of Yahweh's People (**3:3**)
 C' Judgment for the Slavery of Yahweh's People (**3:4-8**)
 B' Judgment of the Nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (**3:9-17**)
 A' Restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (**3:18-21**)

I. (:1-12) AWESOME JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

A. (:1-3) Day of Reckoning for the Nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat

1. (:1) Timetable

*"For behold, in those days and at that time,
 When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,"*

Pusey: The Prophet by the word, *for*, shews [sic] that he is about to explain in detail, what he had before spoken of, in sum.

Biblehub: Yes, in those days and at that time --

This phrase indicates a specific future period, often associated with the "*Day of the Lord*," a recurring theme in prophetic literature. It suggests a divinely appointed time when God will intervene in human history. This eschatological language is common in the prophetic books, pointing to a time of judgment and restoration. The phrase "*in those days*" is often used in the Old Testament to denote a significant future event (e.g., **Jeremiah 33:15, Ezekiel 38:18**).

David Baker: Both syntax and semantics indicate this as a **new section**. There is a shift of interest to foreign nations that is also tied to God's promised deliverance of his people. **Verse 1** sets the stage for what follows. There is a **new time indicator** with

several elements. First is an emphatic demonstrative indicator of proximity to the previously mentioned events: “*those days*” and “*that time*.” The most immediate referent of these is the period described in **2:28–32**, that these new things happen right in conjunction with sending the Spirit (**3:2**). Jeremiah uses a similar time indication to describe God’s future restoration of the fortunes of his repentant and forgiven people (**Jer. 33:15; 50:4, 20**). This same repentance of the people is seen in **Joel 2:32**.

The time is described further in a relative clause concerning the restoration of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem (cf. **Jer. 33:15**).

David Guzik: In a lesser and immediate sense this was fulfilled in the return from the Babylonian exile. In the greater and ultimate sense it will be fulfilled in the end-times regathering of Israel, to the point where an expectant Israel welcomes Jesus saying, “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*” (**Matthew 23:39**) and salvation comes to Israel as a whole (**Romans 11:26-27**).

2. (:2a) Triggering Event

*“I will gather all the nations,
And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.”*

Leslie Allen: The gathering of the nations is for the purpose of judgment, in the adverse sense of punishment.

Biblehub: **I will gather all the nations --**

This phrase indicates a divine action where God Himself orchestrates the gathering of nations. It reflects the sovereignty of God over all nations, emphasizing His control over historical events. This gathering is often interpreted as a precursor to a final judgment, aligning with eschatological themes found in other prophetic books such as **Zechariah 14:2** and **Revelation 16:14-16**, where nations are gathered for a climactic confrontation.

Thomas Constable: The valley of Jehoshaphat would mean the place where Yahweh judges, without reference to a specific geographical site. Valleys were often preferred locations for battles in biblical times, so “*valley*” is an appropriate word to use to describe the place where God will defeat Israel’s enemies. Later Joel referred to this place as the valley of decision (**v. 14**). There God would judge the nations for scattering His covenant people, His inheritance, and for dividing up His land (cf. **Lam. 5:2**). They had thought so little of the Hebrews that they gambled for them. They had valued them no higher than the hire of a prostitute or the cost of a drink.

3. (:2b-3) Treachery Punished

*“Then I will enter into judgment with them there
On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel,
Whom they have scattered among the nations;
And they have divided up My land.*

*They have also cast lots for My people,
Traded a boy for a harlot, And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.”*

Biblehub: as they divided up My land --

The division of the land signifies the nations' disregard for God's covenant with Israel. The land of Israel is portrayed as God's possession, entrusted to His people. This division is seen as an affront to God's sovereignty and His promises, echoing the warnings in **Leviticus 25:23** and **Ezekiel 36:5**. The phrase serves as a reminder of the sanctity of the land in God's redemptive history.

They cast lots for My people --

This phrase indicates a practice of dividing spoils by casting lots, a method used in ancient times to make decisions or distribute goods. Casting lots was common in the ancient Near East and is mentioned in other biblical contexts, such as the division of land among the tribes of Israel (**Joshua 18:10**) and the soldiers casting lots for Jesus' garments (**Matthew 27:35**). Here, it underscores the dehumanization and commodification of God's people, treating them as mere objects. This reflects the severity of the judgment against the nations for their mistreatment of Israel, highlighting the divine ownership and protection over His people.

they bartered a boy for a prostitute --

This phrase illustrates the extreme moral degradation and exploitation present during the time. The trading of a boy for a prostitute signifies a complete disregard for human dignity and the sanctity of life. In the ancient world, children were often seen as valuable for labor or as future contributors to the family lineage. The act of exchanging a child for temporary pleasure indicates a society deeply entrenched in sin and corruption. This echoes the warnings found in other prophetic books, such as Amos, where social injustices and exploitation are condemned (**Amos 2:6-7**).

and sold a girl for wine to drink --

The selling of a girl for wine further emphasizes the theme of exploitation and the prioritization of indulgence over human life. Wine, often associated with celebration and abundance, here becomes a symbol of excess and moral decay. This transaction reflects a culture that values material and sensual gratification over the welfare of its most vulnerable members. The prophets frequently denounce such behavior, calling for justice and righteousness (**Isaiah 5:11-12**). This phrase also serves as a stark contrast to the biblical view of children as blessings from God (**Psalms 127:3**), highlighting the depth of the nations' transgressions.

Leslie Allen: Not only was land lost by the Judeans, but their very liberty was forfeited. They were regarded as loot to be apportioned, as slaves in a lottery.

David Baker: What seems condemned by Joel is the disregard for the value of human beings, especially that of the young; something as necessary for the continuation of society as her next generation is squandered on something so fleeting.

Duane Garrett: **Obadiah 11** and **Nah 3:10** both associate casting lots over refugees with the horrors that accompany capture of a city by a foreign army. Perhaps the Bible also associates Jesus with the suffering of the defeated in the casting of lots over his garments (**Ps 22:18; Matt 27:35**). After the capture of a city, victorious soldiers took boys and girls (older people were killed off) and sold them as slaves. The fact that the price of these slaves only bought a night with a prostitute or a little wine shows how cheaply they were regarded (cf. **Amos 2:6**). In contrast to the behavior of these nations, **Exod 21:16** forbids kidnapping people to sell them as slaves, and **Deut 21:14** prohibits the sale of prisoners of war in Israel.

B. (:4-8) Disdain for the Pride and Prosperity of the Nations

1. (:4) Over-Inflated Self-Assessment by the Nations

*“Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon,
and all the regions of Philistia?
Are you rendering Me a recompense?
But if you do recompense Me,
swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head.”*

Trent Butler: Two nations head the list: Tyre and Sidon, the two major Phoenician cities, apparently the home of the original Canaanites (**Isa. 23:11**). Sidon lay twenty-five miles north of Tyre and had a long history of leading coastal coalitions against Egypt. The two cities dominated deep-sea commercial traffic, carrying goods from many nations on their famous ships.

Biblehub: **I will swiftly and speedily return your recompense upon your heads --** Here, God promises a swift and decisive response to any acts of retaliation. The imagery of recompense "upon your heads" indicates personal and direct consequences for their actions. This reflects the biblical theme of divine justice, where God ensures that those who oppose Him and His people face the consequences of their actions. It also echoes the principle found in **Romans 12:19**, where God declares that vengeance belongs to Him. The assurance of swift justice serves as a warning to the nations and a comfort to Israel, affirming God's active role in defending His people.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: God begins by asking Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, *What are you to me?* (**3:4**), a contemptuous question implying that they amount to nothing in God's eyes. In a mocking attempt to discern what could have motivated their atrocities, God then asks whether they are perchance attempting to pay him back for some perceived offense. If so, God assures them, he will speedily ensure that their attempts at payback will recoil upon their own heads. Many of us want to live in a world where evildoers receive a taste of their own medicine and get what we think they deserve. Although life sometimes unfolds this way, we will have to wait for God's final judgment before most of the world's evil and evildoers will be dealt with in appropriate ways.

2. (:5-6) Overreach and Oppression by the Nations

*“Since you have taken My silver and My gold,
brought My precious treasures to your temples,*

*⁶ and sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks
in order to remove them far from their territory,”*

Biblehub: to your temples --

The phrase indicates that the stolen treasures were taken to pagan temples, suggesting a transfer of what was holy to a profane context. This act can be seen as an affront to God, as it implies the subjugation of the God of Israel to the deities of the surrounding nations. It echoes the theme of idolatry and the spiritual adultery that Israel often fell into, as seen in other prophetic books like Hosea. Theologically, this can be viewed as a type of Christ, where the true temple, Jesus, was desecrated and rejected by the world, yet ultimately triumphed over sin and death.

Leslie Allen: The charges take up three interconnected themes dear to Joel’s heart: **temple, people, and land**. Yahweh’s will was that his people should live in peace in their own country, tilling its soil and bringing to his temple praise for God’s bounty. This divine plan for Israel had been scandalously thwarted. Doubtless Joel was fully aware of the factor of Judah’s sin and in common with Obadiah viewed the exile as divine punishment. But there has never been a truly righteous war: outstanding accounts remained to be settled. It is these moral debts to Yahweh that are now served on the Philistines and Phoenicians.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: Selling people into slavery was common in the ancient world because it was profitable and because certain contemporary understandings of human rights had not yet developed. Amos condemns both Tyre and Philistia for selling entire populations into slavery (**1:6, 9**); Ezekiel accuses Tyre of engaging in the slave trade with different peoples, including the Greeks (**27:13**). In the postexilic period the Jewish governor Nehemiah claims to have bought back as many Jewish slaves as possible from other peoples (**Neh 5:8**). We know little about specific events that may have sparked Joel’s prophecy condemning the slave traders, yet there is considerable evidence that the Babylonian destruction left Judah vulnerable to the predation of neighbors.

Duane Garrett: Notwithstanding the question of the precise historical setting of this verse, we should not miss the main point that the Philistines and Phoenicians followed a deliberate policy of banishing Jews from their homeland. Put in modern terms, they were practicing “ethnic cleansing” in hopes that they could solve their version of the “Jewish problem.” This text, in other words, was an early example of the treatment Jews would have to suffer for centuries to come.

John MacArthur: Although not prominent militarily, the Greeks were active in commerce on the Mediterranean in the 9th century B.C.

3. (:7-8) Overturning of Fortunes by Divine Judgment

- a. (:7) Restoration of God’s People
*“behold, I am going to arouse them
from the place where you have sold them,
and return your recompense on your head.”*

Trent Butler: God's work will run in two directions. He will wake up his enslaved people to lead them home, and he will gain revenge on those who have enslaved them.

Thomas Constable: Probably the fulfillment lies in the future, specifically toward the end of the Tribulation, since this whole section of Joel deals with what God will do in that "*day of the LORD*." Again, Phoenicia and Philistia probably represent all the enemies of Israel (cf. **Isa. 25:10-12; Obad.**) over whom Israel will eventually gain ascendancy.

- b. (:8) Retribution on the Nations
 *"Also I will sell your sons and your daughters
 into the hand of the sons of Judah,
 and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation,
 for the LORD has spoken."*

Biblehub: and they will sell them to the Sabeans—to a distant nation --

The Sabeans were a people known for their trading prowess, likely located in the region of modern-day Yemen. This reference to a "*distant nation*" emphasizes the complete removal and dispersion of those who opposed God's people, symbolizing total defeat and humiliation. The Sabeans' involvement highlights the far-reaching consequences of divine judgment, extending beyond immediate neighbors to distant lands. This also serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of ancient trade routes and the widespread impact of God's actions. The mention of a distant nation can be seen as a fulfillment of God's promise to restore and vindicate His people, as seen in other prophetic books like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Leslie Allen: (:4-8) Yahweh plays the part of a plaintiff in a lawsuit who opens his speech by firing a series of indignant questions at the defendants. Then in the role of judge he announces swift retribution. The pattern of vv. 2, 3 is reproduced in that the announcement of judgment is followed by a recital of the charges. Then in classic prophetic fashion Yahweh's imminent intervention is proclaimed in a punishment that fits the crime. The oracle is rhetorically rounded off by repeating the promise of retribution and by taking up the second of the accusations and reversing it into a retaliatory punishment. The piece closes with a final short line attesting the divine authority of the oracle.

C. (:9-12) Dispensing of Judgment

1. (:9-10) Call to the Nations to Prepare for Conflict
 *"Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men!
 Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up!
 ¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords, And your pruning hooks into spears;
 Let the weak say, 'I am a mighty man.'"*

S. Lewis Johnson: Unusual battle cry issued to the nations of the earth; very ironic; But the wicked nations of the earth discover that they are going to fight Jehovah and be

defeated and judged (cf. beast warring against lamb in Rev.)

Biblehub: Beat your plowshares into swords --

This phrase is a reversal of the imagery found in **Isaiah 2:4** and **Micah 4:3**, where swords are beaten into plowshares, symbolizing peace. Here, the transformation of agricultural tools into weapons signifies a call to war. This reflects a time of divine judgment and preparation for battle, emphasizing the urgency and seriousness of the situation. Historically, this would resonate with the agrarian society of ancient Israel, where tools for farming were common and readily available. The call to convert these tools into weapons underscores the total mobilization required for the impending conflict.

David Baker: There is a juxtaposition of the sedentary, agricultural life, with its implements such as plowshares and pruning hooks, with the life of war, with its swords and spears.

Thomas Constable: The nations will evidently believe that God is calling them to do battle, but, ironically, it is really to hear His sentence of judgment against them.

Duane Garrett: The irony emerges in calling for “warriors” and “fighting men” to come and do their best to attack Jerusalem. In **2:7** these terms described an invincible fighting force that confronted Jerusalem; now these same soldiers are called to a battle they have no hope of winning. Before, they were described as the army of Yahweh (**2:11**); now they are his enemies.

Anthony Petterson: The call for the weakling to say they are strong is **satire**; they only fool themselves since they stand no chance before the army of the Lord.

2. (:11-12) Call to the Nations to Stand before God’s Judgment

*“Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations,
And gather yourselves there. Bring down, O LORD, Thy mighty ones.
¹² Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat,
For there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations.”*

Thomas Constable: [Re :**12-13**] The Lord urged the nations to rouse themselves and to assemble in the valley of Jehoshaphat (cf. v. 2) because it was there that He would sit in judgment on them. He compared this judgment to harvesting grain with a sickle and to treading grapes in a vat (cf. **Isa. 17:5; 63:1-6; Rev. 14:14-20**). As grapes squirt juice when trodden, so the nations will give up the wickedness with which they have been full (cf. **2:24**). This scene of divine warfare must correspond to the battle of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (cf. **Rev. 14:14-20; 16:16; 19:11-21**). The judgment of the nations following Christ's second coming (**Matt. 25:31- 46**) will not involve warfare.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: After the nations are commanded to mobilize, Joel utters a short prayer, asking God to send down his heavenly warriors, presumably to deal with the

enemy armies (3:11b). God immediately responds by briefly repeating the call to battle and then revealing that the neighboring nations are not actually being mobilized for war but are being gathered into the valley of Jehoshaphat so that God can sit in judgment over them (3:12). The expected battle morphs into a trial: God never gives the nations a chance to defend themselves and immediately hands down the sentence (3:13). Even with their total mobilization for war, the nations present no challenge to God's power over them.

II. (:13-16a) ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD

A. (:13) Calendar of God's Judgment Indicates Time for Harvest

"Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

Come, tread, for the wine press is full;

The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great."

Biblehub: The wine vats overflow because their wickedness is great --

The overflowing wine vats represent the excessive wickedness of the nations, which has reached a tipping point. This abundance of sin necessitates divine action. The imagery of overflowing suggests that the iniquity is not only full but excessive, aligning with the biblical principle that God's patience with sin has limits (**Genesis 15:16**). The great wickedness of the people is a recurring theme in prophetic literature, emphasizing the need for repentance and the certainty of divine judgment if repentance is not forthcoming.

Leslie Allen: Two metaphors for judgment, both borrowed from farming. The first is a picture of cereal crops harvested with the sickle, as in **Isa. 17:5**, while the second alludes to the vintage, like **Isa. 63:3**. All is ready: like a field of ripe corn the nations are gathered in the valley, crying out to be cut down. Their armies are packed like so many grapes in the hollowed press, waiting to be trodden. The third line of the verse amplifies the second reason and translates its metaphor into moral terms. Such a mass of grapes was piled in the press that its own weight was forcing the liquid down the channels into the nearby vats, which were spilling over and clamoring for attention. What a harvest! How ripe for judgment were the assembled nations who overflowed the boundaries of the broad valley! Yes, indeed, for it was only the enormity of their own wickedness that had brought them here to receive the annihilating judgment of God. So vital is the connection between the mass guilt of the nations and their massed presence that they can be run together poetically. There is a glance back at the accusations of **vv. 2f.** as the verdict is delivered, and, as it were, the hangman is instructed to do his grisly work.

John Schultz: The image of a harvest also depicts **God's patience with man's rebellion**. God waits till the harvest is ripe, till the measure of iniquity is full before He strikes. He did this with the inhabitants of Canaan and also with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. That will be the world's light night and the end of the universe, as we know it now. The darkening of the sun and moon does not describe a day of heavy overcast, as **The Pulpit Commentary** supposes. We read: "The densely packed masses are already

in the valley of decision, awaiting the judgment about to be executed upon them. But before the judgment actually bursts upon them, and in preparation for it, the sky is overcast; darkness, as a portent of the approaching storm, envelops them; the lights of heaven are put out. The pitchy darkness of a night in which neither moon nor stars appear is sufficiently dismal and awful; still more terrible, if possible, is darkness in the daytime, when the light of the sun is turned into blackness.” The scene is rather the one described in Revelation, where John states: *“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”*

B. (:14) Crisis Time of the Day of the Lord Is Near

*“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”*

John Piper: For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. This does not mean people come there to make a decision; they come to experience God's decision. God is the Decider in the valley of decision. The valley of decision is the same as the valley of Jehoshaphat, and *"decision"* (or verdict) is virtually the same as *"judgment."*

Leslie Allen: The change of name to Verdict Valley in v. 14 suggests that the present name is intended as a theological symbol rather than a topographical identification: *“the place where Yahweh is to judge.”* Jehoshaphat means *“Yahweh judges,”* and it was evidently selected for use here because of this meaning. The place is referred to as a (wide) valley because large numbers of people are involved and the judgment is conceived as a battle which requires for its venue such a wide depression between the hills of Judah.

Trent Butler: Their gathering point establishes an ominous aura—*the valley of decision*. The Hebrew verb *charats* carries the connotation of a guilty verdict with a sentence of destruction that stands beyond appeal (**Job 14:5**).

This is the setting for the final, ultimate day of the LORD. No longer will people experience a foretaste of the final reality. That reality is here. The decision is not something people will make. It is a decision God has already made to condemn and destroy those who are opposed to him.

Dillard: Many preachers have appealed to **verse 14** for an evangelistic thrust; their audiences are addressed as *“multitudes in the Valley of Decision”* who must decide their fate. There is a problem with that use of this passage: in Joel the hordes do not gather to make a decision, but to hear one; they will not be deciding their fate, for God has already decreed it. The time for decisions is now past.

C. (:15-16a) Cosmic Disturbances Signal the Terror of God’s Wrath

“The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars lose their brightness.

¹⁶ *And the LORD roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem,
And the heavens and the earth tremble.”*

Biblehub: The LORD will roar from Zion --

This phrase signifies God's powerful and authoritative presence. Zion, often synonymous with Jerusalem, is the spiritual and political center of Israel. The imagery of a lion roaring is used to convey God's might and the impending judgment. This echoes **Amos 1:2**, where the Lord's voice is described as a roar from Zion, indicating a divine intervention. The roar symbolizes both judgment against the nations and protection for His people.

Robert Chisholm: An innumerable host will be assembled in the *valley of decision* (also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, **vv. 2, 12**). Here the divine Judge's verdict will be executed on the nations. As in earlier passages (cf. **2:10, 31**) the darkening of the heavenly bodies (**3:15**) serves as an ominous sign of the approaching day of the LORD (**v. 14**). The LORD will then emerge from His sanctuary in Jerusalem in theophanic splendor (**v. 16**; cf. **Amos 1:2**). His thunderous battle cry (cf. *will roar ... and thunder*) will produce cosmic disorder (cf. **Joel 2:10-11; Rev. 16:16, 18**). He will then demonstrate that He is Israel's Refuge (cf. **Pss. 46:1; 62:8; Isa. 25:4**) and Stronghold (cf. **Pss. 9:9; 18:2; 27:1; 37:39; 43:2; 144:2**).

III. (:16b-21) ASSURANCE OF FINAL RESTORATION OF JUDAH

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: The final verses of Joel feature four specific references to God's presence on Zion (**3:16, 17, 18, 21**), highlighting eight interrelated benefits that flow from this presence: military security, Israel's recognition of God, sanctification of Jerusalem, freedom from invasion, amazing fertility, abundant rainfall and water, revenge on historic enemies, and perpetual inhabitation.

A. (:16b) Protection for the Jewish Nation

*“But the Lord is a refuge for His people
And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.”*

B. (:17) Purpose of Judah's Restoration = Holy and Majestic Enthronement

*“Then you will know that I am the Lord your God,
Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.
So Jerusalem will be holy,
And strangers will pass through it no more.”*

S Lewis Johnson – Millennial kingdom is not a carnal type of kingdom but a spiritual one.

Leslie Allen: Instead of simply being in their midst, Yahweh “dwells” on Zion, his temple mount. The participle, with its durative function (see **Joel 2:32**), along with the verb itself (*škn*), shows that Yahweh is not a temporary resident, an alien, but one who

is sinking down roots with his people (2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 102:28). Because of God's presence there, Zion can be called his "holy hill." While for Israel Zion is a place of action as she prepares to face her attackers (cf. 2:1), it can also be a prayerful place where destruction and tumult are distant (Isa. 11:9; 55:7; 65:25). Since holiness denotes separation from that which is unclean (Lev. 7:19–21; 12:4), Jerusalem, like Zion within it, is sanctified by separation from "foreigners," those called in Isaiah 52:1 "the uncircumcised and defiled" (cf. Ps. 74:7; Ezek. 7:22; Dan. 11:31).

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: For Jerusalem to be holy means that it is set apart from other physical spaces by virtue of God's presence in the temple, from which God's holiness radiates to the entire city. A holy city will be a safe haven for God's people, not profaned by foreign invasion, by the death that conquest brings, or by the unfaithful actions of its inhabitants. The four convictions expressed in Joel 3:16–17—God dwells on Zion, is Israel's God, makes Zion a refuge, and conveys holiness to the city—were all beliefs celebrated in worship at the temple. Much of Joel's eschatology represents "the themes of Judah's worship projected on the screen of Israel's future" (Allen: 121).

John Goldingay: So Israel will have reason to acknowledge Yahweh (3:17) on the basis of both his act of judgment and his protection of his people, with the nuance that Yahweh is the one who dwells on Zion. The claim that it is his sacred mountain is implausible. How can such a claim be made of this little town in the Judahite mountains? But it will be proved by these ultimate events. And the defiling of his sacred mountain by strangers will be terminated. The idea is not that other nations will simply be kept out—at least, that would contrast with the rest of the First Testament. It is rather that the hostile feet of people who despise Yahweh and despise his people will not defile it any more. The strangers are the people who have imposed foreign subjection on Israel. They will not be seen anymore.

Tchavder Hadjiev: God's dwelling in Jerusalem is manifested in two ways: **holiness** and **prosperity**. By taking up his residence on Zion, the Lord will ensure that the holiness of the city is not threatened again by foreign armies. The strangers who pass through it are neither tourists, nor merchants, nor resident aliens. These are the soldiers who defiled Jerusalem by exiling its population (vv. 2–3) and spilling the innocent blood of its inhabitants (v. 19). Joel does not offer a vision of an isolated, 'ethnically pure' place, but of a city no longer subjected to the polluting violence of conquest.

The holy presence of God reaches beyond the confines of Jerusalem to bring supernatural fertility to the land. In this paradisaal bliss three precious commodities associated with life, satiation and jubilation are so abundant that they flow freely through the land: wine, milk and water. The link between the holiness of the city and the fertility of the land is made explicit at the end of **verse 18**.

C. (:18) Prosperity and Fertility for Judah

*"And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine,
And the hills will flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;*

*And a spring will go out from the house of the Lord
To water the valley of Shittim.”*

Warren Wiersbe: Jerusalem is the only city of antiquity that wasn't built near a great river. Rome had the Tiber; Nineveh was built near the Tigris and Babylon on the Euphrates; and the great Egyptian cities were built near the Nile. But in the kingdom, Jerusalem will have a river that proceeds from the temple of God.

Daniel Epp-Tiessen: The temple, which had been a place of sadness and lament (**1:9, 13, 14; 2:15-17**), will feature a fountain providing life-giving water (**3:18**). Since water was in perpetually short supply in most of Canaan, it is hard to overestimate the value that ancient Israelites attached to a reliable source of water. In those times the Gihon spring was the main water source for Jerusalem. The presence of this spring near the temple, plus the belief that divine blessing radiated from the temple because of God's presence there, inspired a vision of the temple as the source of a life-giving river or fountain (**Pss 46:4; 65:1, 9-13; Isa 33:20-22; Zech 13:1; 14:8**). Ezekiel provides the most grandiose version of this image, describing a massive river that will flow from the rebuilt temple eastward to the Dead Sea, transforming the barren desert into a lush, fruitful land alive with animal life and with trees that provide fruit for food and leaves for healing (**47:1-12**). So powerful and persistent was this image of the temple as a source of life-giving water that Revelation's vision of the new Jerusalem features the **river of the water of life**, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, nourishing the trees on its banks, which produce perpetual fruit and leaves for the healing of the nations (**22:1-2**).

John MacArthur: **valley of Shittim** – Known for its acacia trees, the valley was situated on the northern shores of the Dead Sea and served as the final stopover for Israel prior to her entrance into the Promised Land (**Nu 25:1; Jos 2:1; 3:1**). This valley is also the place to which the millennial river will flow (**Eze 47:1-12; Zec 14:8**).

D. (:19) Promised Desolation of Judah's Enemies

*“Egypt will become a waste,
And Edom will become a desolate wilderness,
Because of the violence done to the sons of Judah,
In whose land they have shed innocent blood.”*

Trent Butler: Judah's temple-based fertility will stand in stark contrast to the land of her enemies. Egypt, the enemy from the exodus onward, will be desolate. Edom, the uncooperative neighbor and relative (**Num. 20:14-21**) who joined in Babylon's desecration of the temple (**Obad. 11-14**), would become a desert waste.

Duane Garrett: The prediction of the future humiliation of Egypt and Edom serves a greater theological purpose. For the modern reader it is not too significant to read that Egypt and Edom would revert to desert conditions, but for Joel's audience it implied that their God had triumphed. In the future, the passage hints, no one will look to Egypt or the gods of Egypt for saving power, and no one will have regard for Edom. Egypt

and Edom will suffer the calamity that had temporarily fallen upon Judah (**Joel 2:3**). Israel and Israel's God will be exalted over all the nations as well as over their gods and ideals. Egypt and Edom serve as a sign for all the nations here. This is simply another way of joining Isaiah in claiming that Mount Zion would be exalted above all mountains and all nations would stream to it to learn the true teaching of God (**Isa 2:2–4**). It is more than political dominance over some bygone nations and extinct cultures; it is the triumph of the gospel over every ideal, religion, or cultural identity. It is the bowing of the nations before Israel's God.

Structure:

- A Egypt and Edom will be uninhabited (**v. 19a**)
 - B Egypt and Edom shed innocent blood in Judah (**v. 19b**)
- A' Judah will be inhabited forever (**v. 20**)
 - B' God will avenge innocent blood (**v. 21a**)
- A'' God will inhabit Zion (**v. 21b**)

E. (:20) Possession of Promised Land Guaranteed Forever

*“But Judah will be inhabited forever
And Jerusalem for all generations.”*

F. (:21) Pledge of Final Avenging

*“And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged,
For the Lord dwells in Zion.”*

Biblehub: For the LORD dwells in Zion --

Zion, often synonymous with Jerusalem, is significant as the spiritual and political center of Israel. It represents God's chosen dwelling place among His people (**Psalms 132:13-14**). The presence of the LORD in Zion signifies His protection, favor, and the fulfillment of His covenant promises. This phrase also points to the eschatological hope of God's eternal reign from Zion, as seen in prophetic literature (**Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-2**). The dwelling of the LORD in Zion is a type of Christ, who is the ultimate fulfillment of God's presence with His people, as He is Immanuel, "God with us" (**Matthew 1:23**).

Anthony Petterson: The people of Judah are declared **innocent** presumably because they have called on the name of the Lord and found forgiveness (**2:32**). True to his character, God will not acquit the guilty (**3:21**; cf. **Ex. 34:7**).

Leslie Allen: A grand word for the future, but what of those citizens who were cut off in their prime, whose eyes saw Judah's ruin and would never see her rehabilitation? The minds of Joel's audience cannot help lingering on the rankling acts of foreign injustice. The spilled blood cried out to Yahweh in a lament like that of the Christian martyrs in **Rev. 6:10**:

“How long will it be, Lord holy and true, before you pass sentence and avenge our blood?”

Yahweh breaks in with a final word of assurance to the sorrowing. They receive the glad promise that he will not leave the debt unpaid, but will exact punishment for the last dark drop. The promise is appropriately reinforced by a solemn pledge. The fact of Yahweh's presence in Zion, celebrated in v. 17, is the guarantee of vindication. Yahweh had already heard the cry of lament from their hearts concerning the locusts. Now the book closes with the promise that he would champion anew his chosen people and see that justice was done on this long-standing issue.

*Sing praises to Yahweh, enthroned in Zion....
For he, the avenger of blood, remembers them;
he does not forget the appeal of the afflicted.*
(Ps. 9:11f.[12f.])

God is on the throne: the reminder of his sovereignty is balm for the wounds of injustice and the basis of his people's hope for the future.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is irony effectively used in this passage?
- 2) How does the image of the Lord roaring in **3:16** inform our understanding of the character of God?
- 3) What can you learn about the significance of the location **Shittim** from the following texts: **Num. 25:1; Joshua 2:1; 3:1; Joel 3:18**?
- 4) How can we be confident that God will ultimately right all wrongs and vindicate His people?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

S. Lewis Johnson (3:13-21) The Day of the Lord in Verdict Valley
(valley of decision; valley of Jehoshaphat)

2 great themes:

- Divine judgment – “*Vengeance is mine, I will repay; Our God is a consuming fire*”
eternal, lasting judgment; in moments of indignation no one is a universalist
- Divine covenantal grace – never fails; **Is. 49:14-15** – God will not forget those who are His (:16-20)

I. (:13-14) A New Summons to Battle -- Conditions before the Day of the Lord
Nations of earth pictured as field of wheat ready to be harvested and cut down;

grapes trodden upon in the winepress; world ripe for judgment; vast multitude of people; you cannot flaunt your own will against the will of God; he that sows thorns let him not walk barefoot; Why are these nations here? “*for their wickedness is great*” – their own moral depravity; they are responsible before God; men are not lost because they are non-elect but because of their own moral depravity; very decisive battle; **Rev. 14** – many of the same expressions used

II. (:15-17) Cosmic Disturbances and Judah’s Preservation – Conditions during the Day of the Lord

The moment of truth for all of the nations of the world at that time; reference to Zion as the source of the disaster that will fall on the earth; Amos used same expression: “*the Lord roared from Zion*,” (**2:11**) -- ultimate fulfillment of what was prefigured by locust invasion in former chapter; the stable elements of this universe are convulsed at the day of the Lord – shows it is a tremendous day of judgment; but preservation for the people of God (the one who keeps the covenant);

Refuge rests in this God who made promises to the nation of Israel – important application to Christians today; it is the person of the Lord who is the refuge (not simply the promises); He is the Hope of His people, the Happiness and the Holiness of His people; time is coming when the tares shall be rooted up and no longer mingled with the wheat; bible teaches the perseverance of the saints, not the full holiness of the saints

III. (:18-21) Picture of Fertility (children of Israel) and Desolation (Egypt and Edom)

Conditions after the Day of the Lord --
Won’t be any dry places left in Israel;

Everlasting blessing (vindication of Judah) and vengeance;

The doctrine of the distinguishing grace of God should be pleasant to us – the doors are open; the invitation is offered; God has chosen to dwell in Zion

John Barton: The basis for YHWH’s judgment on the nations is how they have behaved toward Israel, scattering it among the nations, dividing the land and enslaving its people. This had been part of prophetic polemic against foreign nations as long ago as the time of Amos (cf. **Amos 2:6, 9**). “Casting lots” over the people is a sign of contempt—their fate is decided by a mere throw of the dice. (Cf. **Obad. 11**, where the Babylonians are said to have cast lots over Jerusalem, and **Nahum 3:10**, where a similar fate befell even the dignitaries of the Egyptians.)

What is more surprising is the very exact specification of the nations’ offense in **Joel 3:3**. The sale of captives into slavery was normal in the ancient world, but it is interesting that the particular detail of selling boys and girls into slavery, perhaps for trivial sums (the price of a prostitute or of a bottle of wine; cf. Amos’s complaint that

people trade the needy for “*a pair of sandals*,” at **Amos 2:6**), is singled out for comment.

Thomas Constable: Alva McClain organized and expounded the Old Testament revelation concerning this distant day of the LORD fairly concisely. [*The Greatness of the Kingdom*] He divided the events chronologically, according to the four periods of a normal 24-hour day, from the viewpoint of the Israelites—with the day beginning at sunset (darkness followed by light). Some of the predictions describe what will happen before the darkness sets in. Others describe what will happen during the period of darkness. Then there are events that will take place in the twilight period: just before the period of daylight begins. Finally, there are events during the light of that great day. His outline is as follows:

1. Preparatory events—before the day of the LORD
 - a. A court of judgment will be set in heaven.
 - b. The voice of a prophetic messenger will be heard on earth.
 - c. Internecine warfare (destruction on both sides) and chaos will sweep the world.
 - d. A blasphemous political ruler will rise to world power.
 - e. There will be great geological and cosmic disturbances.
2. Penal events—during the darkness of the day of the LORD
 - a. Wrath will fall upon a great northern power.
 - b. Wrath will fall upon the nation of Israel.
 - c. Wrath will fall also on all the Gentile nations.
3. Transitional events—at the dawn of the day of the LORD
 - a. The glorious arrival of the Mediatorial King
 - b. The destruction of the hostile armies
 - c. The doom of the blasphemous "Little Horn" (Dan. 7:8, 20-22)
4. Constitutive events—during the light of the day of the LORD
 - a. There will be a resurrection.
 - b. There will be a repentance of Israelites in the land.
 - c. There will be a regathering of dispersed Israelites.
 - d. There will be a judgment of living Israelites.
 - e. There will also be a judgment of living Gentile nations.

Duane Garrett: Approaches to the Prophetic Method

Interpreting biblical prophecy is no simple matter. Although the prophets do occasionally make straightforward predictions about a single event in the future (e.g., **1 Kgs 13:2–3**), such predictions are rare. More frequently they foresee the distant future in the context of addressing a situation contemporary with them and their audience. This **blurring of present and future** has long baffled Christian readers. Although we affirm with the apostle Matthew that **Isa 7:14** looks ahead to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (**Matt 1:23**), the interpretation of **Isa 7:14** in context is notoriously difficult and

has taxed Christian interpreters for centuries, since it is declared to be a sign to the impious King Ahaz as he makes preparations to fight a war against Syria and Samaria.

In dealing with this problem, Christians have resorted to various hermeneutical methods. One of the oldest techniques is **allegory**, whereby historical context is ignored entirely and accidental verbal parallels form the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. . .

Other interpreters, especially Roman Catholics, have invoked sensus plenior as the key to the interpretation of difficult prophetic texts. In this model the prophet simply wrote better than he knew. Although the prophet himself may have had only his contemporary situation in mind as he spoke or wrote, the Holy Spirit so guided his choice of words that in the distant future his prophecies would be found to have a fuller meaning than he himself intended. . .

Another approach is to claim that the words of the prophets carried a “**double meaning**.” In this view their words addressed the contemporary problems they saw and also addressed the distant future. Thus Isa 7:14 carries a double meaning of both being a sign to Ahaz in his day and also looking ahead to the virgin birth of Christ. Advocates of the double meaning method frequently employ analogies to support their case. The prophets are said to have had a “**telescopic**” view of the future that saw only the immediate situation and the distant fulfillment without seeing the intervening years. They are said to have seen only the “mountaintops” in the plan of God juxtaposed against one another without having seen the miles of valley between the peaks.

This view has merit as well but is terribly short on specifics. On what basis does one determine whether a specific prophecy has one, two, three, or ten fulfillments? . . .

As a **theological theme** the day of the Lord can have **greater and lesser fulfillments**. The locust plague in Judah was terrible, but it is not nearly as traumatic as the last judgment. The pouring of rain on a parched land, moreover, is a promise of a greater manifestation of the day of the Lord, the pouring out of the Spirit. Understanding that the prophets deal more in theological and prophetic themes than in specific predictions allows for an openness to the future in biblical prophecy. Just as the locust plague is the day of the Lord, so many other events (e.g., the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem) can be the day of the Lord as well. This understanding of prophetic language accords well with true typological (not allegorical) interpretation. To put it another way, the **typological interpretation** that the apostles applied to the Old Testament was not the imposition of an alien method on the text but was in agreement with the method by which the prophets themselves addressed the future.

Tchavder Hadjiev: The book of Joel ends with the contrasting pictures of two lands: the desolate wilderness of Edom, and the fertile hills around Jerusalem flowing with wine, milk and water. Human beings are divided into two camps: those destroyed in the valley of judgment and those who inhabit a renewed creation, purified by the holy presence of God himself. In its original historical context, the prophecy sees the

dividing line primarily along ethnic lines. The people of Judah are blessed, and their oppressors are punished. The New Testament, however, redefines this division by placing it in a different theological context. The book of Revelation looks forward to a time when God and the Lamb will be present in the midst of the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, and the river of life will flow through it, bringing healing to the nations (**Rev. 22:1–2**). Those cast outside, into a wilderness of judgment, are not foreigners or members of any particular ethnic group, but “*the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars*” (**Rev. 21:8**). As for those who bow the knee before the Lamb, God will “*wipe every tear from their eyes*” (**Rev. 21:4**) as he ushers them into his holy presence and settles them in a land flowing with wine, milk and water.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Book of Revelation, like Joel, was addressed to God’s people to encourage them to persevere through the difficulties they faced. They both attempt to lift the gaze of God’s people from the immediate circumstances and give them a larger view of God’s grand design, His eventual settling of accounts with those who had treated His people violently, and His eventual restoration of His people to full, abundant, and peaceful life. In this way these books retain their relevance for each generation, encouraging God’s people to trust in the God who holds the past, present, and future in His hands.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

Allen, Leslie C. Allen. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament -- The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976.

Baker, David W. *The NIV Application Commentary – Joel, Obadiah, Malachi*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Barton, John. *The Old Testament Library – Joel and Obadiah*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Baxter, J. Sidlow. *Explore the Book – Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960.

Butler, Trent C. *Holman Old Testament Commentary – Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2005.

Chavalas, Mark W. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary -- Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Chisholm, Robert B. Jr. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Minor Prophets*. Colorado Springs, Co: Cook Communications Ministries, 1983.

Cole, R. Alan. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised – Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970.

Deere, Derward. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary – Joel*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962.

Epp-Tiessen, Daniel. *Believers Bible Commentary – Joel Obadiah Micah*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022.

Feinberg, Charles L. *The Minor Prophets*. Chicago: IL, Moody Press, 1990.

Garrett, Duane A. *The New American Commentary – Hosea / Joel*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1997.

Gelston, Anthony. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible – Joel, Amos, Obadiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

Goldingay, John. *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Prophetic Books – Hosea – Micah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.

Hadjiev, Tchavdar S. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries – Joel and Amos*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

Ingraham, Jeffrey A. *Major Messages from Minor Prophets*. Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, Inc., 2021.

Limburg, James. *Interpretation – A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching – Hosea – Micah*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible – Joel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

Nogalski, James D. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament – The Books of Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023.

Ogilvie, Lloyd J. *The Preacher's Commentary – Hosea/Joel/Amos/Obadiah/Jonah*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004.

Patterson, Richard D. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary -- Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985.

Petterson, Anthony R. *The Grace and Truth Study Bible – Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021.

Seitz, Christopher R. *The International Theological Commentary – Joel*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible – A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible - Joel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1997.

Stuart, Douglas. *Word Biblical Themes – Hosea-Jonah*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary – Old Testament – The Prophets – Isaiah – Malachi*. Colorado Springs, Co: David C. Cook, 2002.

ONLINE ARCHIVES:

Biblehub.com. <https://biblehub.com/study/chapters/joel/>

Busenitz, Irv. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/joel/>

Colonial Hills Baptist Church.

https://www.colonialindy.org/uploads/1/0/9/1/10910125/lesson_4_introduction_to_joel_booklet_.pdf

Constable, Thomas. <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/joel.pdf>

Guzik, David. Enduring Word -- <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/joel-1/>

Heater, Homer Jr. <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-joel>

Hurt, Bruce. Precept Austin -- https://www.preceptaustin.org/joel_commentaries

Johnson, S. Lewis. <https://sljinstitute.net/category/the-prophets/joel/>

Keathley, Hampton IV. <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-joel>

LeBoutillier, Paul. <https://www.calvarychapelontario.com/transcripts/joel/joel.pdf>

MacArthur, John. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/macarthur_john/bible-introductions/joel-intro.cfm

Malick, David.

Introduction to the Book of Hosea -- <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-joel>

Argument of the Book of Hosea -- <https://bible.org/article/argument-book-joel>

Schultz, John. https://www.bible-commentaries.com/source/johnschultz/BC_Joel.pdf

Swindoll, Chuck. Insight for Living -- <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/joel>