

# JOEL

## INTRODUCTION

Joel, the son of Pethuel,” beyond being the author of this book, we know nothing. The name “Joel” means literally, “Jehovah is God.”

Joel, as is evidenced by his description of how repentance should be done, was a man of deep religious feelings, heartfelt experiences and warm sympathy. He threatens, warns, and penetrates into the very essence of the soul.

There had been a disastrous locust plague throughout the southern kingdom. In addition, a drought came upon the land. So severe were the circumstances there was not even enough grain with which to make a “cereal offering” before the Lord.

Joel lived and prophesied during the reign of Joash.

## CHAPTER 1 THE EXCLAIMER OF REPENTANCE—GOD’S PROPHET

### Verse 1

Joel unequivocally claims his message to have been revealed from God. His interpretation of the locust plague and drought came directly from God.

### Verse 2

This locust plague coupled with the drought, brought such unexampled devastation to the land of Judah that the most ancient man of the nation could not remember any time to equal it for its terribleness.

### Verse 3

This same principal, using historical events for teaching the nature of God, is just as valid today as it was then, inasmuch as we have divine revelation by which we may apply and interpret these events.

## THE EXTENT OF THE PLEA FOR REPENTANCE—VIVID, ARRESTING

### Verse 4

Palmer-worm means “gnawer-shearer,” locust may be defined “the multitudinous one;” canker-worm means “licker, lapper, or hopper;” caterpillar means “devourer, stripper.”

The locusts came upon the land one increment after another in immediate succession until the land was stripped of all vegetation and then the Lord caused a great drought to come upon the land.

### **Verse 5**

The original language indicates those addressed here were in a drunken sleep so sound as to be snoring. It indicates that drunkenness was widespread and stupefying.

The prophet admonishes the wine-bibbers to come to their senses, recognize the warning of God in the devastation and weep and mourn in repentance.

The “sweet wine” or new wine” was spoken of as being found within the grape still in the cluster and there was great rejoicing when it was first pressed from the grape for it was considered a special blessing from the Lord. Now it was cut off—there was no new sweet wine to be found anywhere in all the land!

### **Verse 6**

The prophet portrays the locusts as a “nation,” a “people.” This is a figure well-chosen since locusts give the appearance of being a well-organized army of people.

Their teeth, though tiny, are the weapons of this army. In proportion to their very small bodies, their jaws are even stronger than a lion’s.

### **Verse 7**

Once entering a vineyard, the sprawling vines would in the shortest time be nothing but bark.

God, the Giver and Owner of the vineyards and orchards, speaks through the prophet calling them His vines and His fig trees.

### **Verses 8-9**

Now Joel calls upon the whole nation to mourn. This is a mourning not only because of the loss of wine and grain but because the loss of these material things have disrupted divine worship.

There is not even enough grain or wine to be found to make up an acceptable offering in the Temple. The prophet calls for a “godly sorrow that works repentance.”

This sorrow is to be one of total immersion—like the sorrow of a newly married maiden who has lost her husband by death in the first few days of

marriage. God's bride, the covenant people, has been cut off from communion with her Husband.

She should lament and weep—her attitude should be one of heartfelt mourning.

The cessation of the daily sacrifices and offerings was for all practical purposes a cessation of covenant relation—a sign that God had rejected His people.

### **Verses 10-12**

The destruction of the present grain crop in Joel's day would also mean no harvest for next year since there would be no seed with which to sow another crop. The absence of grain and all other green vegetation would also probably mean the death of many animals.

The drought which accompanied this locust plague would certainly decimate animal life and many people probably starved to death also.

The whole nation had fallen into the hands of a chastening God. There was plague, drought, famine, and as a result the worship of God in the Temple was both physical and spiritual starvation. Truly, joy had withered away from the sons of Men!

### **Verse 13**

Joel takes up that which was so impressive to him in verse 9—the cessation of the offerings due to the complete absence of materials with which to make the offerings.

It would not have been so calamitous that the people had suffered the loss of physical necessities, but when they were forced to stop presenting their intercessory offerings it indicated that their access to God had been interrupted.

It would be as disastrous as telling a Christian he could no longer pray or sing praises or in any manner worship the Lord.

So, the priests are instructed to put on the customary clothing for mourning and penitence called "sackcloth" in our translation. It was a coarse material woven from goats' and camel's hair and thus of dark color.

Sacks were also made from this coarse material and thus it is called "sackcloth." It was not a full garment but more probably a cloth just large enough to wrap around the loins and tie in the front in a knot.

The text indicates they should, in some way, prostrate themselves before the great altar in the temple. They are to pray with loud crying (“wailing—lamenting”) unto God.

#### **Verse 14**

Joel now instructs the priests to officially consecrate a specific period of fasting. A fast was a time dedicated to “afflicting the soul—appetites.” A solemn assembly is also to be gathered. There was no occasion for festive mood now! All the people are instructed to make supplication to the Lord.

#### **Verse 15**

The Day of Jehovah generally denotes any great manifestation of God’s power in judgment or redemption and had the purpose of calling the covenant people to repentance and purity.

This was **THE DAY OF JEHOVAH** when God brought all men under judgment and at the same time provided for all men redemption. This day of judgment and redemption though was primarily a day of judgment. Not only upon the heathen nations, but, due to the absolute righteousness of God, includes judgment upon all sin.

His judgment is a purifying, refining instrument in order that a remnant might be saved.

What Joel here wants the people of Judah to understand is that the Day of Jehovah is a day of destruction from the Almighty. The Jews were persuaded because of their special relationship to God.

The Day of Judgement was intended to be judgment and destruction upon the Gentiles but victory and conquest and world dominion for the Israelites.

#### **Verse 16**

Joel, in asking these questions, is actually interpreting for the people the meaning of the calamities that have come upon them.

He asks rhetorically, “Can you not see, even from the fact that contact with God has been cut off, that God is visiting us with judgment?”

#### **Verse 17**

The grain seed shrivels up and crumbles into dust for lack of rain. The granaries, storehouses where the people stored their grain stood deserted and

unused. The barns, another type of storage place, also used to house animals sometimes, were actually falling apart from disuse.

### **Verses 18-28**

The cattle and sheep are dumbfounded (perplexed) and bewildered. They are dying of starvation and thirst. Hunger and fear grips them but being dumb animals they can only groan. Joel implores the Lord on behalf of these suffering beasts.

But as terrible as this plague and drought is and as devastating upon the material means of subsistence as it is, Joel's main concern is that it has caused a cessation of all sacrifices and offerings in the Temple of God.

These services and the Temple were visible signs and pledges of God's dwelling in the midst of Israel as His people.

When these services ceased it was a sign that God had withdrawn His covenant pledge and presence.

## **CHAPTER 2 THE EXECUTOR—GOD USING NATURAL AGENTS**

### **Verse 1**

The trumpet to be blown here is the *shophar*, which is probably a ram's horn called the "far sounding horn." Trumpets have always been associated literally and symbolically with warning.

These trumpets of judgment indicate series of happenings, that is, calamities that will occur again and again throughout this dispensation (the Christian dispensation).

They do not symbolize single and separate events, but they refer to woes that may be seen any day of the year in any part of the globe.

Terrible calamities befall the wicked in order to punish them for their opposition to the cause of Christ and for their persecution of the saints. Yet even by means of these judgments God is constantly calling the ungodly unto repentance. These woes do not symbolize God's final and complete displeasure.

They are charged with serious warning, not with final doom. The very function of the trumpet is to warn. (Ezekiel 33:3)

"Notice also that these trumpets of judgment affect the various parts of the universe: the land, the sea, etc."

Joel is making the same interpretation of the locust plague and drought which has come upon the land. These calamities are God's "trumpet" warnings to call the sinful people to repentance. God uses natural agents in every age to turn impenitent people from their rebellious ways back to dependence upon Him. If they will not turn back to Him, He sends judgments of wrath upon them.

Whenever in history the wicked fail to repent in answer to the initial and partial manifestation of God's anger in judgment, then the final effusion of wrath follows. The wrath is final, though not complete, until the judgment day.

These plagues are the last. They leave no more opportunity for repentance. When the wicked, often warned by the trumpets of judgment, continue to harden their hearts, death finally plunges them into the hands of an angry God.

Whoever refuses to be warned by the trumpets of judgment is destroyed by the bowls of wrath. For one individual a certain calamity may be a trumpet of judgment, while for someone else that same event may be a bowl of wrath.

So it was true in the days of Joel. The locust plague and the drought became a warning trumpet of God's wrath upon rebellion and sin and called those who were humble and penitent enough to listen to God's word and do His will. Those who heard and heeded became part of the faithful remnant.

They would be the people through whom God would carry out His covenant promises and bring from them the Messiah.

Some undoubtedly perished during the plague and drought. Those who died in sin and rebellion against God died under the judgments of God. In the wisdom of God, they had had their last opportunity to repent. They rejected it. God's wrath fell upon them.

Perhaps some who believed in God and were following His ways died also, but death did not harm them. Those who died in the Lord were blessed.

## **Verse 2**

The "darkness" here may be either literal or symbolic or both. When this "great people" (the locusts) came down upon them, myriads upon myriads, their coming would make the sky black. Darkness is also used to symbolize judgment or times of foreboding. The term "people" is a figurative way of describing the locusts.

They will behave like an "army" and will go about their destruction with what seems to be a methodical intelligence beyond the native capacity of an insect.

This would be one of the most unique disasters to happen to Judah so much so that it might be said, “Nothing like it has ever been or ever shall be!”

### **Verse 3**

Compared to what the land looked like after the locusts finished with it, it was like before the garden of Eden. The “fire” before and after them probably is a poetical description of the utter devastation that sweeps over the land at their coming, overwhelming everything before it and leaving nothing behind.

### **Verse 4**

Joel is concerned with the locust’s behavior which is like that of Calvary horses.

There is an old Arabian proverb which goes, “The locust has the form of ten of the giants of the animal world, weak as he is—face of a mare, eyes of an elephant, neck of a bull, horns of a deer, chest of a lion, stomach of a scorpion, wings of an eagle, thighs of a camel, legs of an ostrich, and tail of a serpent.

### **Verse 5**

John, the apostle, wrote in Revelation 9:9ff, “The sound of their wings was as the sound of many horses rushing to battle.” They are a loud noise, produced by the flapping of myriads of locust wings, resembling the distant rumble of waves.”

One who has heard them says, “The locust’s noise may be heard six miles away.” The noise of their foraging upon the vegetation crackles like a fire as it licks up the dry stubble of a wheat field.

### **Verse 6**

One man who witnessed just such a plague wrote of the people, “the people become as dead, saying we are lost, for the Ambadas (so they call them) are coming. There were men, women, children sitting among the locusts stupefied, they answered that they had no courage to resist a plague which God gave them for their sins.”

Their anxiety causes the color to drain from their faces and they grow pale as the dead.

### **Verse 7**

Once started on their course, nothing could stop them; walls were scaled, they rolled on like a mighty, unconquerable flood. Their ranks remain

unbroken by obstacles. Man can mount a wall a few at a time, but locusts pour over a wall in a literal flood. (From (National Geographic))

### **Verse 8**

They travel like a well-disciplined, regimented army in close-order-drill without jostling one another.

They move in one body, giving the appearance of being organized and directed by one leader. Nothing checks or retards their attack. Nothing makes any impression upon them.

Men have tried to kill them with canon fire, water-filled trenches, fire filled trenches, insecticides—sprayed from airplanes, with clubs—beating them to death by the millions—but still they come, impervious to any weapon.

Like waves they roll over one another on and on, and let themselves be stopped by nothing.

### **Verse 9**

“Disastrous as they are in the country, equally obnoxious they become about the homes, crawling up thick upon the walls and squeezing in through cracks of closed doors or windows, entering the very dwelling rooms.

### **Verse 10**

“When anything neared their thickened masses, it seemed as if the entire surface of the ground moved, producing a most curious effect upon one’s vision and causing dizziness, which in some was so severe as to produce a sensation not unlike sea-sickness. (National Geographic)

### **Verse 11**

To this day the nations of the Near East speak of the locusts as *Yaish Allah*, Allah’s army. God does use natural phenomena to execute His warnings and judgments. He uses natural elements of weather (laws of nature), wild beasts and insects, and heathen nations and leaders to execute His vengeance upon the ungodly, even now.

They describe the entire universe from the aspect of heaven. The purpose of this vision is to show us, in beautiful symbolism that all things are governed by the Throne-Occupant.

All things; hence, also trials and tribulations, that is the point. Hence the description of the Throne precedes the symbolic prediction of the trials and



tribulations which the church must experience here on earth. Behold, a Throne! The Throne is the very center of the universe.

The locusts are God's mighty army. When He commands that they go forth to destroy, none can stop them. If man cannot stop an army of locusts when God sends them, who can be saved from any of God's judgments?

Joel will take up this question in the next section when he presents *God's Plan for Repentance*.

## **PLAN FOR REPENTANCE-VERSES 12-17**

### **Verse 12**

This is one of the clearest statements of the Bible on the meaning of repentance.

Repentance means a complete turn-about, and not only so, but a turning toward the Lord. Reformation is not repentance! One must not only change by giving up former habits and sinful ways but one must in a positive way turn unto the Lord and to His will and walk in His way!

It is all the heart that God demands. The heart, of course, means the dwelling place of the personality—the intellect, the will, the emotions.

All of man's mind, all of man's will, and all of man's desires are to be turned toward God's will. None of it is to be reserved for self.

The prophet points out that this "turning" unto the Lord involves self-denial ("fasting") and self-abnegation ("weeping and mourning").

The people of Joel's day needed to cease concentrating upon themselves and concentrate upon God and His will, and this they could best do by fasting.

They had need of self-examination and self-abhorrence for singing against a gracious and merciful Father—they needed to weep and mourn for their sins.

### **Verse 13**

"Rend and tear your hearts," Joel said. Their hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. They had become calloused. They were impervious to God's goodness because in their material abundance they had forgotten from whence their abundance came and said, "Mine own hand hath gotten me this." They needed to have their hearts broken in contrition.

The repentance of which Joel speaks implies a “conscious, moral separation, and a personal decision to forsake sin and to enter into fellowship with God.” It means turning away from sin and turning unto righteousness.

Repentance is always conjoined with faith. Where there is true faith there will always be true repentance. And this is exactly the appeal Joel makes as to the motive for people’s repentance.

They must have true, unreserved faith in the grace and mercy of God. They must trust in His lovingkindness. They must also believe that He will punish sin.

Prophets were sent to preach the call of God for repentance. Prophets were sent to prove the existence of God and declare His nature. Preaching is still the only means by which men may be called to repentance.

The existence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the infallible authority of the Bible is the call to repentance. (Acts 17:22-31) The nature of God must also be preached to lead men to repentance. (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9)

#### **Verse 14**

God does not change. He does not even change His mind. He has spoken His will once for all. His word is immutable. His covenant is irrevocable. Man may change—man must change. God’s immutable Word has said: "For sin a curse and judgment, for repentance a blessing and salvation." Only because we know that this is the immutable Word of God may we have hope! If God changed, how could we repent in hope of blessing?

“If you persevere in your repentance you may hope for acceptance in the Lord’s eyes and hope for withholding judgment and hope for blessing instead.”

#### **Verses 15-16**

The trumpet was customarily used to call together the people for holy meetings, to usher in the beginnings of their months and their feasts with festive gladness. Now in the Holy city the trumpet is to be used for the sounding of alarm.

They were to be called to rigorous self-denial. They were to fast in order that their minds might be directed away from the earthly and concentrated on the heavenly. This was a time for seriousness, for solemnity. No one was to be absent—there were no exceptions to be made.

Even the infant children nursing at the breasts of their mothers were beckoned. The bride and bridegroom must forego their honeymoon to assemble for penitent worship. When the Lord of the earth beckons nothing is so important that it cannot be left in favor of listening to Him.

### **Verse 17**

A priest is a mediator between man and God. He is a “bridge,” a “go-between.” He receives his appointment by the grace and mercy of God.

In this serious and solemn hour when God was calling man to repentance and when man was seeking the favor of God the priests of God were bidden by God to perform their ministry of intercession.

They were summoned to the space between the door to the Holy Place and the altar of burnt offering. This seems to have been a place especially consecrated for intercessory prayer.

The prayer is that God might further withhold judgment and at the same time bless the devastated land with new abundance. This prayer assumes, of course, that the people have repented.

Except the Lord restore, upon their repentance and calling upon Him, that which He has taken away by the locust plague and the drought the heathen would scoff and taunt those who claimed to be the Lord’s chosen with, “Where is this God of yours?” “You have repented and called upon Him, but He does not hear you!”

The heathen would sneer at Jehovah, the God of the Jews, and the people pleaded that God should protect His own honor and glory.

We ought always to pray for the Lord’s deliverance not for our sake but that the Lord might be glorified. The Lord does not save us for our own merits but in order to glorify, vindicate and exalt Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ. He saved the penitent elect of the Old Testament for the same purpose—to glorify His name.

## **THE PURPOSE OF REPENTANCE—IMMEDIATE BLESSINGS**

### **Verse 18**

The word translated jealous means literally, “to be red, to glow; hence, be fiery, eager, or zealous.”

The reason God was jealous for His land is due to the fact that it is impossible to separate in any way the covenant God from the covenant land and people.

Whatever is done to the land and the people of the covenant is also done to the covenant God.

Whatever is done for the covenant land and the people is done by the covenant God.

He is jealous for the land and the people because He is jealous of His own name and character.

He had promised centuries before to curse them for rebellious sin and to bless them upon their repentance. They had been judged and punished for their sin, by the locust plague and drought.

He said, "I AM THAT I AM." (Exodus 3:13-15) He would cease to be what His name involves if He did not fulfill His word.

He must, by His very nature, show His absolute sovereignty. He also loves His people as the apple of His eye and He is just as eager to vindicate their name when they are in harmony with His will.

### **Verses 19-20**

The Lord now promises to bless the people with prosperous crops. They will have enough to satisfy the gnawing hunger that came with the destruction of the crops by the locusts and the drought. They will have enough now to eat and plenty left to reinstitute the offerings of grain and wine which had to be stopped earlier.

God also promised to remove the "northern army" from the land. This army is none other than the locusts. Usually those plagues come from the south but they have also been known to blow in on the winds which come from the north.

Facing the rising sun in Palestine, before you is east, behind you is west. God caused some to fall into the Dead Sea, some in the Mediterranean Sea and some in the arid desert of the Negeb.

Stench is all that is left of the great and powerful enemy of God's people.

This enemy had wrecked great destruction—it had done terrible things but Jehovah God not only removed it but He also restored what had been destroyed. Yes, God even holds the creatures responsible for their devastation upon "the apple of His eye."

### **Verses 21-22**

It is not strange that God would call upon nature itself to praise His name. Nature is also represented “groaning and travailing in pain together until now.”

Just as the fields and the beasts were before called upon to mourn and be confounded at the Majestic Power of God in judgment, so now they are called upon to take comfort and security in His Compassion.

### **Verses 23-24**

The term “Zion” is a covenant-relation term. God speaks to them as “children of the covenant” which reaches its fulfillment in Christ, King of Zion, the church of the living God!

For the sake of the Messianic people, because they have become such by faith and repentance, and for the sake of the Messiah, God will graciously send the former rain (falling from October to December) and the latter rain (March to April). God will send them, first of all the material blessings—He will bless the temporal Israel with temporal things—but later He will bless spiritual Israel with spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.

First of all there will be abundant moisture which brings in turn overflowing abundance of agriculture blessings.

### **Verses 25-27**

God promises to repay or recompense the people of Israel for the years which the various stages of the locust plague took away the produce of their fields.

This repayment will be so gracious and abundant that the people will be caused to praise the name of God.

The Lord has constantly appealed to man with evidence directed at the senses of man (eyesight, hearing, touching, etc.). And so here Joel tells the people that when God’s rich blessings of deliverance from the locusts and His miraculous, providential restoration of the grain and wine is seen and experienced they will have evidence that Jehovah is God and that He is among them, and that there is no other god besides Him.

### **FUTURE BLESSINGS—(GOD PREPARING A NEW PEOPLE)**

### **Verses 28-29**

The inspired pronouncement as to the fulfillment of this prophecy is the final authority. There can be no question that Joel’s prophecy began to have its

fulfillment on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2, for the inspired apostle declares it to be so.

In the Old Dispensation particular members of the covenant people received special dispensations of the Spirit, but in the New Messianic Dispensation, the Spirit would be poured out on people of all races, as many as would call upon the name of the Lord.

Calling on the name of the Lord is, of course, synonymous with believing, repenting, and obeying in baptism as shown in Acts 22:16 when Paul was exhorted to call on His name by being baptized!

In other words, Joel says that all who become Christians (who call upon the name of God) will receive the Spirit of God.

That this general giving of the Spirit to all believers was not to be accomplished until the establishment of the church is at once evident from the words in John 7:38. Peter's words in Acts 2 also confirm the fact that this outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh was to continue even to those "afar off" (the Gentiles), even as many as God would call.

Joel specifically states that the Spirit will come without limitation as to age, sex, or race. The only limitation is that those who expect to receive it must call upon the name of the Lord, verse 32.

The outpouring of God's Spirit upon slaves (servants and handmaids) is something extraordinary for not a single case occurs in the entire Old Testament of a slave receiving the Spirit or gift of prophecy.

But we believe the word "prophecy" is also used in a general sense to mean that all in the Messianic age who receive the gift of the Spirit will go everywhere preaching and teaching the revealed will of God. (Acts 8:4)

Christians will be given direct dream or vision revelations from God. All who become Christians will receive the Spirit, but only some of the sons and daughters would receive the special, miraculous gifts of prophecy, visions, dreams, etc.

If we let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament, we will know what Joel means.

## Verses 30-32

In highly figurative language Joel tells both the people of his day and all generations that during this entire Messianic Age God will be showing “wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire, pillars of smoke.

It is without question that these “wonders” are to transpire before that “great and terrible day,” so they must be before the second and final coming of Jesus Christ who comes on that terrible day to judge all who have not called upon the name of God. These “wonders” are both natural disasters and human holocausts. God certainly sent a warning upon an impenitent Jewish nation which had rejected the Messiah when He destroyed their city and their nation in 70 A.D. (Matthew 24:1-28).

God has also permitted nation after nation to be destroyed in blood, fire, and smoke, because of ungodliness.

Then at the end of the ages, the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, verse 31. God will call during the entire Christian age through Spirit filled men proclaiming His word and by sending terrifying wonders in the heavens and on the earth; and then suddenly, without warning the consummation of the ages.

For those who call upon the name of the Lord (verse 32), this day of the Lord will be one of deliverance. Their faith and their works will be vindicated.

They shall receive an eternal weight of glory when they are recognized and glorified by God Himself. But for those who do not call upon His name in faith and obedience shall be His perfect, divine wrath.

So, Joel blending the events of the Messianic Age into one picture with the near and the distant painted like mountain peaks and ranges seen from a distance, does not portray for us the valleys of centuries of time between the mountain-top-events.

In the Messianic Age God intended to bless all who would answer His call in Christ Jesus with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” For it was in the New Testament dispensation that He “set forth in Christ... a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things one earth.”

It is in Christ that all men of all races “have heard the word of truth, the gospel of ...salvation, and have believed in Him, and were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...” Yes, Ephesians, chapter one, is the completed revelation of that which Joel wrote in long ages past!

## **GOD'S VICTORY OVER THE ENEMIES OF HIS PEOPLE— FUTURE BLESSINGS**

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Verses 1-3**

The words “in those days and in that time” most definitely refer back to the preceding Messianic prophecy of the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh and the great and terrible day of God. (2:28-32)

Therefore, whatever gathering together into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and judging to be done will be done in the Messianic Age. Furthermore, we must also interpret the “bringing back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” as an event to be within the same Messianic Age. The phrase translated “bring back their captivity” could be translated “make an end of their oppression.” The RSV translates it, “When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.”

The conclusion of chapter three shows that God in “restoring their fortunes” is going to bring on something more glorious than the literal return from the Persian captivity.

So, the “bringing back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” undoubtedly means that God is going to relieve His covenant people from all oppressions delivering them from all their enemies.

In addition, He is going to execute His judgment upon all the enemies of His people in that same glorious age of the Messiah.

God's judgment, (His victory over the enemies of His people) is given a contemporary setting. Jehoshaphat, by the miraculous help of God, won a great victory over a Gentile army in a valley which was afterward named for him.

So, the prophet's use of the king's name and the Valley of Jehoshaphat would remind the people of this glorious victory over the enemies of God.

Also, the name Jehoshaphat means “Jehovah judges.” That there is going to be a literal gathering of all the nations into this valley near Jerusalem is a geographical impossibility!

There is not going to be a literal war there between the literal forces of all the nations on the earth and the literal forces of a millennial kingdom of God.

The prophet was led by the Holy Spirit to use the valley of Jehoshaphat in a symbolic or figurative way much the same as we say someone has met his Waterloo.



At the end of the Messianic Age (which will be the end of all ages) God is going to demonstrate a complete and final victory over all the forces of evil. Actually, God has already won the complete victory over evil in His Son.

The prince and god of this world has been “judged” and “cast out.”

But at the end of this age He is going to manifest and vindicate that which He has already revealed in the Bible—that those now who are in Christ are “more than conquerors.” And why is God going to judge all nations in a final way if He has already accomplished victory of Satan, sin and death in Christ? “For My people and for My heritage Israel!”

God is jealous for His people. The forces of evil and enmity against God will be shown to be what God said they were all along—eternal death and destruction.

At the same time faith and righteousness and obedience to God will openly be shown to lead to what God said they would all along—eternal life and bliss.

#### **Verses 4-8**

Now Joel turns to a contemporary enemy of God’s people—Tyre and Sidon and the regions of Philistia.

These heathen powers had plundered the precious heritage of God. They had carried away silver and gold from God’s Temple and desecrated it in their idolatrous temples. They had carried away people and sold them as slaves into the far distant lands of Greece. Joel represents God as almost incredulous at the audacity and brazenness of these heathen powers.

We are reminded of those of our own age who seem to be completely and unabashedly disdainful of righteousness, justice or judgment.

There are even those who would speak happily of the “death of God” while they hold requiem for Him. But God promises to return to them what they have sown. God’s promises do not fail!

This prophecy was fulfilled by Alexander the Great and his successors, under whom many Jewish captives were liberated and restored to their own land, while various parts of Philistia and Phoenicia were bought under Jewish rule.

#### **Verses 9-10**

Now Joel on the behalf of God, throws down the challenge. Let all the enemies of God and His people put forth every effort—let them muster every

ally—let them turn every resource into a weapon for war and then let them gather themselves together and come with haste against Jehovah God.

It is interesting to note in verse 10 the reverse figure of speech to that of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 where the swords are beaten into plowshares and the spears into pruning hooks.

The Messianic reign will bring peace into the hearts of men. But here it is used to depict the evil enemy that reigns in the hearts of the unconverted.

### **Verses 11-12**

Verse 11 seems to be a prayer of Joel in the midst of his pronouncements. He prays that God will send His forces to do battle against the forces of heathendom.

In the light of all that the Scripture says of angels carrying out the judgments of God and fighting the battles (even literally at times) of the chosen people it would seem clear that a reference to angels could be the only acceptable meaning. Note: Daniel is told by an angel of the spiritual conflict of angelic beings. (Daniel 10:13, 20- 21)

### **Verses 13-15**

Yes, God answers, I will send my mighty ones to carry out the grim task of reaping a harvest of wrath.

God's angels have carried out such assignments in the past (the death angel in Egypt; the angel of the Lord who slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers), they are carrying out such assignments now as they protect and serve the saints and they will in the future.

Both harvest and winepress are figurative descriptions of the fullness of their wickedness and both terms are also used to symbolize judgment.

The terms "multitudes, multitudes" may be translated "tumult, tumult in the valley of decision." The word literally means "noisy crowds." The repetition of the word signifies a confused, tumultuous multitude.

The picture Joel draws for us is that of "throng upon throng" of these enemies of God in a blind raging confusion surging headlong and headstrong into a showdown with an Omnipotent Judge.

The Psalmist adds to the picture, "Why do the nations rage, and the people meditate a vain thing. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take

counsel together, against Jehovah, and against His anointed," saying, "Let us break their bonds asunder and cast away their cords from us."

He that sits in the heavens will laugh: The Lord will have them in derision. Then will He speak unto them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure: Yet I have set My king upon My holy hill of Zion." (Psalm 2:1-6)

Joel says the wrath of God will be so terrible that even the heavenly bodies (the whole universe) trembles at it and withdraws from looking upon it!

God's judgment of the nations for injuries done to His people here is the final and ultimate judgment of all the enemies of all the elect, both Old Testament and New Testament.

It is this fundamental truth prophesied by all the prophets, accomplished by Jesus Christ, which brings hope to our hearts.

## **THE PURPOSE OF REPENTANCE— GOD'S PRESENCE AMONG HIS PEOPLE**

### **Verse 16**

The Lord "roaring" from Zion will proclaim judgment. In the "latter days" of the Christian Age the Lord will cause the message to go forth, "The time of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

This message will not only come from His covenant people, whom Joel represents as "Zion and Jerusalem" (where the presence of God abides), but Christ says that the prophets foretold its going forth literally, from "Zion" and "Jerusalem" first.

When God established His kingdom on earth (the church), He shook down all other kingdoms, both those in the heavenly places and those on earth.

Paul, in Hebrews chapter twelve, points out that those who had become Christians had then come to Mount Zion, the kingdom that shall never be broken, but that those who rejected Christ and held on to Judaism belonged to that which was about to be shaken (70 A.D.).

Jehovah, when He should become "Immanuel" (God with us"), would be a refuge to His people.

## **Verse 17**

Zion means the church (Hebrews 12:22). The word “above” does not mean high up in the heavens, that is, he is not referring to heaven, but “above” issued in the sense of preeminence.

It is on “mount Zion” that the Lord was going to make a feast of fat things . . . destroy the covering that is cast over all people . . . and swallow up death forever.” (Isaiah 25:1-12)

And Isaiah is also the one who spoke of the Messianic Age as the “Holy Way” where the “unclean would not pass over it . . . but the redeemed would walk there and the ransomed of the Lord would return and come to Zion with singing . . . (Isaiah 35:1-10). “So it seems to us that Joel is looking at the Messianic age.

He is looking at the future (exactly when even he does not know), the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises.

It may even be that he is compressing the whole Messianic Age (from beginning to end) into a few verses here. But he is not interested in pin-pointing a schedule of “times and season” but in graphically proclaiming the certainty of God’s fulfillment of His promise to the people if they repent.

## **Verse 18**

The prophets used contemporary terms of agricultural prosperity to depict in a figurative way the blessings of God in the Messianic Age.

Jesus depicted the kingdom like a feast again and again. Paul calls the Christian life a feast. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

## **Verse 19**

When God shall make Christ the “yes” of all His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20) He will render His enemies impotent. He has “destroyed him who has the power of death, that is, the devil;” He has destroyed the works of the devil (1 John 3:8); and by His power in us we are able to conquer our enemies (Romans 8:31-59) and protect ourselves.

## **Verses 20-21**

God’s elect shall be justified—they shall not be condemned. If God justifies, who can condemn? (Romans 8:32-39)

The phrase, "I will cleanse their blood, that I have not cleansed" probably means that when God ushers in the consummation of the Messianic Age He will vindicate completely His precious saints.

Justice, which in some cases on earth is left undone, will be carried out by the Just Judge of all the earth. It might, on the other hand, refer to the fact that when the blood Christ is shed all those sins of the Old Testament saints which were purged only potentially (Hebrew 10:1-4) will be once for all cleansed.

Joel's prophecy ends on the same glorious note of triumph and complete victory as Obadiah's. Ezekiel prophesied that the new dwelling place of God, the church. "The habitation of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22), the name of the city henceforth shall be, 'The Lord is there.'" (Ezekiel 48:35).

Yes, Christians form God's holy temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)