

## The Prophecy of Joel

### Introduction

#### Author

The Prophet Joel is one of thirteen men by that name in the pages of the Old Testament. He is mentioned only in the book which he wrote and in Peter's Day of Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. Though there are extra-biblical legends about Joel, none of them provide any reliable information about him. His name means "The LORD is God." His frequent mention of Judah and Jerusalem (1:14; 2:1,15,32; 3:1,6,8,16-20) has led many Bible students to believe that he probably lived in that part of the nation of Israel.

#### Date

The prophecy of Joel contains no references to historical people or events which enable us to date his book. Some interpreters have dated Joel's writing as late as the sixth century, following Israel's return from exile in Babylon. More likely, however, it was written in the ninth century B.C. - though the message of the book is not affected by either a late or early date.

#### Message

The message of the book of Joel centers around the Lord's judgment of human sin as evidenced by a locust plague which took place in his day. Viewing the plague as the Lord's judgment on His sinning people, Israel, Joel calls on his people to repent.

Describing the plague of locusts as the Lord's army, Joel sees in the locusts of his day a warning concerning the "Day of

the Lord.” Using the locust plague to launch his thoughts, Joel looks forward to anticipate his people’s repentance, the Lord’s judgment against the nations, and the Lord’s response of blessing on His people in the sending of His Spirit and the establishment of His Kingdom.

## Outline of Joel

### I. A Foretaste of the Day of the Lord in Joel’s Time 1:1-2:27

- A. The Desolation of a Locust Plague 1:1-20
- B. The Prediction of Foreign Armies 2:1-11
- C. The Call to Repentance and Promise of Response  
2:12-27

### II. A Forecast of the Day of the Lord in the End Times 2:28-3:21

- A. A Prediction of End Time Wonders 2:28-32
- B. The Promise of End Time Judgment Against the Nations 3:1-17
- C. The Promise of End Time Blessings on Israel 3:18-21

Think About It: The prophecy of Joel anticipates (from centuries before Christ) the awesome judgments which are yet to come in “The Day of the Lord”!

## “Call to Attention”

Joel 1:1-7

Q - Can you recall a time when the Lord has ever used the forces of nature to get your attention?

The Lord has at His disposal many tools He can use to call people to attention. How many times, for example, have people cried out to the Lord for rain during times of drought, or for relief from rain in times of flooding. He certainly got the attention of the people of Israel in the days of the prophet Joel of Judah by means of an insect plague!

### I. The Introduction to Joel 1:1

Q - What makes the writings of the little-known Prophet Joel, the son of Pethuel, important enough to merit our attention many centuries later? The prophecy of Joel is the “word of the Lord that came to Joel.”

### II. Joel’s Challenge to His People 1:2-3

#### A. His Question for Israel 1:2

Q - What made the events of Joel’s day worthy of note for even the “elders” of Israel? The events which were taking place in Joel’s day were unparalleled - not only in his day but in all of Israel’s history.

Q - Who, besides the elders of Israel, was the Lord challenging to pay attention to what was happening in their day? Besides the elders of Israel, the Lord was calling on all the inhabitants of the land to pay attention to what was taking place.

#### B. His Instruction for Israel 1:3

Q - Why do you think the Lord wanted the people of Israel to repeat the account of their experience to succeeding generations? He wanted every generation of His people to know of His objection to sin and His ability to use even the forces of nature to judge His people's sin.

### III. Joel's Description of the Locust Plague 1:4-7

#### A. His Description of the Waves of Locust 1:4

Q - What impact were the locusts of Joel's day having on the land of Israel? Coming in successive waves as they were, they were decimating the foliage of the land of Israel.

#### B. His Challenge to the Drunkards 1:5

Q - Why do you think Joel addressed his message to "drunkards" and "wine drinkers"? Drunkards and wine drinkers were emblematic of the sinful excesses of many of the people of Israel in Joel's day.

Q - What was Joel's message to the "drunkards" and "wine drinkers" to whom he wrote? Joel called on drunkards and wine drinkers to wake up and weep and wail because the destruction of Israel's crops was going to result in the end of the drinks they were so fond of.

#### C. His Description of the Locusts 1:6

Q - Why were such little creatures as locusts such a threat to the land and the people of Israel? Though they were small, the locusts were invading the land of Israel in such large num-

bers with such destructive force that they were “mighty” in their impact on the land and the nation.

D. His Description of the Damage 1:7

Q - What might the damage done by the locusts of Joel’s day have been intended to say to the people of Israel? The Lord has great power to marshal the forces of nature in judgment against people who are not living according to the guidelines He has given them.

Think About It: The Lord used a plague of locusts in Joel’s day to get His people’s attention in view of their spiritual condition.

Apply it: What does this tell us about the Lord? What does it tell us about His people Israel in Joel’s day? What does it say to modern American Christians?

## “Time for Repentance”

Joel 1:8-14

Q - What is the saddest experience, as an individual or as part of a group, you can ever recall going through?

While no one would be likely to choose to experience a sad time in their life, the Lord has often demonstrated His ability to make use of times of sadness and sorrow to accomplish His purposes in the lives of His people. The prophecy of Joel records a time of unparalleled sadness in the life of the people of Israel - a sadness which affected the entire nation!

### I. Joel's Call to His Grieving Nation 1:8-10

#### A. The Call to Wailing 1:8

Q - What feelings is the illustration of Joel 8 designed to bring about in the mind of the reader of his prophecy? It is designed to illicit a sense of sadness because a young bride-to-be should never need to grieve the death of her intended groom.

#### B. The Reason for Wailing 1:9-10

Q - How serious were the results of the locust plague which was afflicting the people of Israel in Joel's day? The absence of grain and drink offerings are indicative of the destruction of grains and fruits as a result of the locust plague in Joel's day.

Q - Why was the mourning of Israel's priests and ministers also a reason for national mourning? The absence of grain and drink offerings meant a shortage of provision for the priests and ministers and a disruption of some of the worship rituals

which were normally supposed to take place at the temple.

## II. Joel's Call to Israel's Farmers and Vinedressers 1:11-12

### A. The Call to Wailing 1:11a

Q - Why was Israel's distress a cause for shame and sadness to her farmers and vinedressers? Healthy crops on the nation's farms and vineyards were normally the reason for satisfaction and celebration for farmers and vine growers.

### B. The Reason for Wailing 1:11b-12

Q - What do verses 11 and 12 add to our understanding of the extent of Israel's problems? The devastation of the locust plague had not only affected farm produce but also the crops of the orchards of fruit growers.

Q - Who was likely to be affected as a result of the extent of Israel's problems? Everyone in the nation was likely to be adversely affected as a result of a shortage of supplies of both food and drink.

## III. Joel's Call to Israel's Priests and Ministers 1:13-14

### A. The Call to Wailing and Sackcloth 1:13a

Q - Why do you think the priests and ministers of Israel were specifically called to join in Israel's mourning? Not only were priests and ministers short of supplies due to the locust plague, but they were largely to blame for the spiritual condition of the nation because of their failure to provide effective spiritual leadership.

### B. The Reason for Wailing 1:13b

Q - What would the withholding of grain offerings and libations mean in practical terms to Israel's priests? It would mean a decline in the worship rituals which occurred at the temple and it would mean a shortage of supply for the needs of the priests who derived some of their income from the worship of the people.

#### C. The Call to Fasting and Assembly 1:14

Q - What is the spiritual implication of the Lord's call to His priests and His people to wear sackcloth and to lament and wail? His call to priests and people to put on sackcloth and to lament and wail implied a serious failure in the spiritual life of the nation and its spiritual leaders.

Q - What might be some of the practical benefits for the people of Israel to participate in fasting and assembling as Joel called them to do? Their participation in fasting and gathering for worship could lead to a spiritual revival in the nation and the restoration of the Lord's blessings on His people.

Think About It: Israel's problems as a result of the locust plague of Joel's day came about because there were underlying spiritual problems in the land.

Apply It: Spiritual problems have a way of becoming everybody's problems and touching every area of our lives with pain!



## “Joel’s Cry for Help”

Joel 1:15-20

Q - When have you ever felt or witnessed the heavy hand of the Lord in judgment?

The Lord is an awesome judge because He is “Almighty” (*shad*) and therefore capable of “destruction” (*shod*) - 1:15. So the Prophet Joel cried out to the Lord to come to the aid of His beleaguered nation as they reeled under the devastation brought about as a result of the plague of locusts which the Lord used to judge His sinful people in Joel’s day.

### I. Joel’s Anxiety Over the Day of the Lord 1:15

#### A. The Nearness of the Day of the Lord 1:15a

Q - In what sense was the “day of the Lord” particularly near in Joel’s day? The nation of Israel was reeling from the impact of the locust plague which Joel has described earlier in the chapter.

#### B. The Nature of the Day of the Lord 1:15b

Q - What happens when the Lord “Almighty” works in judgment against sinful people? The Lord can easily bring serious destruction upon people who are rejecting His word and will because He is the Lord “Almighty.”

### II. Joel’s Account of the Day of the Lord 1:16-18

#### A. The Absence of Food and Gladness 1:16

Q - What is the relationship between the two halves of

verse sixteen? The fact that the destructive force of the locust plague had diminished the supply of necessary food meant that offerings at the house of the Lord, which contributed to the support of the priests and Levites, were diminished as well, so the gladness and joy of the normal worship rituals of Israel were missing as the people felt the heavy hand of the “Almighty.”

#### B. The Destruction of Seeds and Grain 1:17

Q - Is there any way to account for the destruction of verse seventeen on the basis of a locust plague? One wouldn't expect locusts to dig beneath the soil (clods) for seeds - if the words “seeds,” “shrivel,” and “clods” (used only in this verse in the Hebrew Bible) are accurate translations. Desolate store-houses would be expected from the locust plague, but locusts wouldn't tear down barns even if the grain normally stored in them was missing.

#### C. The Agony of Cattle and Flocks 1:18

Q - What was the impact of the locust plague on beasts and cattle? They wandered aimlessly in search of feed and groaned in its absence because their pastures were stripped of feed by the locusts.

Q - Why does Joel write that “**even** the flocks of sheep suffer”? Sheep are better able to survive on meager forage than larger animals like cattle are because they pull up even roots buried beneath the soil as they graze in the fields.

### III. Joel's Anticipation in the Day of the Lord 1:19-20

#### A. The Address to the Lord 1:19a

Q - What is the point of crying to the Lord when He is working in judgment? Because the Lord is the “Almighty” and is merciful to those who trust in Him, He was able to improve the difficult conditions the people of Israel were experiencing because of the locust plague (Isaiah 55:7; Micah 7:18).

B. The Destruction of Pastures and Forests 1:19b

Q - What kind of “fire” was apparently in view in the second half of verse 19? It was apparently the fire-like damage done by the locusts - unless the Lord had also judged the land with devastating wild fires (which seems unlikely).

C. The Absence of Water and Pastures 1:20

Q - What does this verse describe which a plague of locusts couldn't explain? The drying up of water brooks sounds much more like a result of drought (which may well have occurred to further complicate the destruction brought about by the locust plague).

Think About It: When the Lord touches the earth in judgment everything and everybody is in trouble, and He is the only one who can do anything to bring relief.

Apply It: Israel should have been more careful to honor Him before He acted in judgment - and the same applies to us!

Are we as careful to “fear the Lord” (see I Peter 1:17-19) as we should be?

## “An Awesome Invasion”

Joel 2:1-11

Q - What is the closest you have ever been to an advancing army?

As fearsome as an approaching army of human soldiers is for those who experience it, being under attack by an army headed up by the Lord would be more frightening by far - even when the army is an army of insects rather than an army of human soldiers!

### I. The Approach of the Day of the Lord 2:1

Q - In what sense was the “day of the Lord” near in Joel’s day? Israel was being devastated by a plague of locusts - and God’s judgment was looming on the horizon.

### II. The Description of the Day of the Lord 2:2-5

#### A. The Army’s Arrival 2:2

Q - Which parts of verse two sound like and unlike the description of a locust plague? Like - clouds of “people” covering the land; unlike - thick darkness, people.

#### B. The Army’s Destruction 2:3

Q - How is the description of verse three both appropriate and inappropriate as a description of a locust plague? Appropriate - Land being turned from green garden to wilderness - but a fire before and behind them seems inappropriate!

#### C. The Army’s Appearance 2:4-5

Q - What, besides a locust plague, could verses four and five be describing? The advance of an ancient army - or (in figures) a modern or future army.

### III. The Destruction of the Day of the Lord 2:6-10

#### A. The Anguish of the People 2:6

Q - Why would a locust plague result in anguish and pale faces? For an agricultural people they would mean ruin.

#### B. The Approach of the Army 2:7-8

Q - What single word would you use to describe the army Joel describes in verses seven and eight? Overwhelming.

#### C. The Attack of the Army 2:9

Q - Why is the rush of the army Joel is describing so devastating? They move ahead without anything to stop them.

#### D. The Accompanying Effects 2:10

Q - How would you account for the unusual side effects Joel describes in this verse? Either God was accentuating the judgment of Joel's day, or this passage anticipates more than Joel's day (e.g. the tribulation).

### IV. The Author of the Day of the Lord 2:11

#### A. The Greatness of the Lord 2:11a

Q - What impression do you get of the Lord as a result of these verses? He is very powerful - too powerful to oppose.

B. The Greatness of the Day of the Lord 2:11b

Q - Who can endure the “day of the Lord”? Only those who become the objects of His mercy and grace.

Think About It: The Lord has at His disposal forces far too great for anyone to think he can stand up to Him!

Apply It: We need to weigh very carefully any activity on our part which might result in the Lord’s judgment in our lives.

## “Hope for All”

Joel 2:12-17

Q - What is the most amazing example of the Lord's forgiveness and restoration to blessing that you have ever seen in any person's life?

Israel in Joel's day was walking far from the Lord, but Joel believed that their return to fellowship would result in the restoration of God's blessing.

### I. The Invitation to Return 2:12-14

#### A. The Condition for Returning 2:12

Q - What are some of the signs of a whole-hearted repentance from sin Joel recommended to his nation? Joel recommended returning to the Lord with all their hearts - with fasting, weeping and mourning.

#### B. The Reason for Returning 2:13

Q - What basis does Joel give us for the hope that a sinner may find forgiveness from the Lord? Joel observed that the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and willing to relent of evil intent toward sinful people.

#### C. The Reward for Returning 2:14

Q - What evidence was Joel hoping to see as an indication that the Lord had forgiven His people? Joel was hoping that, having turned from His intent to judge, the Lord would leave a blessing behind Him - providing once again the

resources to offer grain and drink offerings to Him (at His temple).

## II. The Proclamation of a Fast 2:15-17

### A. The Call for a Fast 2:15

Q - Where did Joel propose that his people begin in the process of returning to the Lord? Joel proposed that His people blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrating a fast, and calling a solemn assembly.

### B. The Participants in the Fast 2:16-17

#### 1. The Call to the People 2:16

Q - What would be required in order to fulfill Joel's challenge to "sanctify the congregation"? Sanctifying the people of Israel would require that they assemble at the temple for the offering up of sin offerings on their behalf - based of course, on the assumption that their assembling was done in genuine repentance for their sins.

Q - Why do you think Joel included even children and nursing infants in his invitation to a solemn assembly? Even nursing infants were being adversely affected by the Lord's judgment on His people in the form of the locust plague, with more devastating judgment to come in future "day of the Lord" experiences due to foreign invasions.

Q - Why does Joel address his invitation at this assembly to the bridegroom and his bride? Bridegrooms and their brides needed to be aware that success in their marriages was going to be dependent on the restoration of the Lord's blessing on His people.



## 2. The Call to the Priests 2:17

Q - What was to be the role of the priests and ministers in Israel's restoration to fellowship? Priests and ministers of Israel needed to lead the people in genuine repentance and intercessory prayer that the Lord spare His people from reproach among the nations.

Q - What was Joel's concern with reference to surrounding pagan nations in the matter of Israel's restoration? It was Joel's concern that surrounding nations, seeing Israel's desperation under the judgment of the Lord, would question whether their God was alive and able to come to their rescue.

Think About It: The Lord is willing to forgive sinning people who turn back to Him. Because He is gracious and compassionate, He extends His forgiveness even to those who are far along the path of destruction.

Apply It: Understanding what the Lord is like, we need to be careful not to write anyone off as "hopeless." As long as there is breath there is hope with the Lord!

## “Willing to Restore”

Joel 2:18-20

Q - When someone has done you wrong, and then has admitted that what they did was wrong, how easy do you find it to forgive them? How fully do you suppose the Lord is willing to restore to fellowship those who have fallen in sin before Him?

In spite of the extent of Israel’s sin, and in spite of the suffering Israel experienced because of their sin, it is interesting and encouraging to see how fully the Lord was willing to restore His sinful people in Joel’s day if they would meet the conditions Joel has listed in preceding verses.

### I. The Lord’s Zeal for His Land 2:18

#### A. The Prediction of His Zeal 2:18a

Q - When could Israel expect the Lord to become zealous for His land again? They could expect Him to become zealous for His land again when they repented of their sins and returned to Him as their God and Lord.

Q - What does the prospect of the Lord becoming “zealous for His land” tell us about the Lord? It tells us that the Lord is willing and able to strongly support those who are truly committed to Him in their hearts and by their actions - even if they have failed Him in their past.

#### B. The Effect of His Zeal 2:18b

Q - Why were the people of Israel in need of the Lord’s pity in Joel’s day? Israel was in a “pitiful” condition because

of the damage done by the locust plague and the drought conditions which apparently accompanied the plague.

Q - What might the Lord's decision to extend His pity to His people mean to the people of Israel? It might mean the Lord's restoration of His blessing in terms of favorable weather and restored crops and prosperity.

## II. The Lord's Promises to His People 2:19-20

### A. The Promise of Restored Crops 2:19a

Q - What did the Lord's willingness to send grain, new wine and oil to Israel indicate to the people? It indicated that the Lord was willing to forgive their past sins and once again bless His people with His favor - sustaining their lives and restoring their lives to normalcy and even prosperity.

### B. The Promise of Cancelled Reproach 2:19b

Q - Why would the Lord's willingness to never again make Israel a reproach among the nations be an especially welcome prospect (cf. v. 17)? The Lord's covenant with His people assured the people of Israel reproach and defeat by their neighbors if they failed to observe the terms of the covenant, so never again making Israel a reproach among the nations would require complete and lasting obedience to the Mosaic Law on their part.

### C. The Promise of a Decimated Army 2:20

Q - To what "army" was Joel most likely referring by his mention of "the northern army"? The "army" which has been primarily in focus in Joel's prophecy is the army of locusts which plagued them - though such plagues were most likely to

come from the south - so it is possible Joel was referring to the armies of Assyria and Babylon which would invade Israel from the north.

Q - What “parched and desolate land” was the army going to be driven into with its vangard/face to the eastern sea and its rearguard/back to the western sea? The seas on the eastern side of Israel were the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee - beyond which were the parched and desolate lands of the Arabian desert.

Q - What would be the cause of the stench and foul smell which the prophecy of Joel anticipated? Dead bodies - whether those of insects (in large numbers) or of human beings - create a stench as they deteriorate.

Q - What do the Lord’s comments about the destruction of this army tell us about it and about Him? It tells us that no army, no matter how extensive the “great things” it is able to do, is a match for the Lord. He is able to destroy any army He chooses to destroy.

Think About It: When the Lord’s sinning people return to Him, He is willing to restore them fully to fellowship with Himself.

Apply It: To become godly people and experience the Lord’s fullest blessing we need to turn from sinful ways in our relationship with Him and extend our forgiveness to people who sin against us and want to be restored!

## “Ready to Forgive”

Joel 2:21-27

Q - Can you think of a time when you were especially encouraged by the Lord’s obvious willingness to grant forgiveness and restoration after a “down” time in your life and in your relationship with Him?

Joel 2:21-27 records such a time in the experience of the nation of Israel.

### I. The Lord’s Reassurance to the Land 2:21

Q - Why did the “land” of Israel need to be reassured in Joel’s day that there was nothing to fear? The locust plague described earlier by Joel had left the land in desperate need of food, and a drought had left the land with little water. Furthermore, judgment by foreign enemies was ahead for Israel.

Q - What would it mean for the “land” to “rejoice and be glad”? The land rejoices and is glad when it is receiving moisture and growing plants needed to sustain life.

### II. The Lord’s Reassurance to the Animals 2:22

Q - Why was it so noteworthy for the “beasts” of Israel that the land had turned green again (or would) that the Lord would speak directly to **them**? Without plants and water the beasts of Israel would lack what they needed to remain alive.

Q - What does God’s interest in the “beasts” of the land tell us about Him? As their creator, the Lord takes an interest in seeing animal life thrive as they were designed to do, so His love for all that He has made is evident because of His interest

in all forms of animal life.

### III. The Lord's Reassurance to the People 2:23-27

#### A. The Promise of Restored Rains 2:23

Q - What does the restoration of Israel's normal pattern of rains tell us about the people and their God? Restored patterns of rain would indicate people living in harmony with the Lord and would be a demonstration of His ability and interest in providing for the needs of His people.

#### B. The Promise of Restored Crops 2:24-26

Q - How could the Lord "make up" to Israel for the years the locusts destroyed? When the Lord restores His favor and His blessings on people who have failed to honor Him in their past He can not only sustain them but make them flourish by the generosity of His supply.

Q - What does the Lord's promise of plenty and satisfaction tell us about Him? It tells us that the Lord desires to provide for the needs of people and to generously provide even more than they need out of His loving nature.

About Israel? The Lord's promise of plenty and satisfaction for Israel reveals the special interest He takes in the well-being of the people He chose to favor as His own people.

#### C. The Promise of Restored Favor 2:27

Q - What does the Lord's promise never again to put His people to shame assume? It assumes that they have once again committed themselves to Him in obedience and devotion - as they will during the coming kingdom age.

Think about It: The Lord is obviously eager to grant forgiveness and restoration to His people when they sin. He does require genuine repentance, but He wants to un-complicate life for those who will repent and return to Him for His restored blessing.

Apply It: If your life has been complicated by sin, you can be encouraged that, as you turn fully to the Lord, He is willing to pour out His blessing on you.

## “Wonders Ahead”

Joel 2:28-32

Q - What is the most awe-inspiring “act of God” or “natural disaster” you have ever experienced?

Do you think you have ever had any experience in life which might help you understand what life will be like on earth during the days anticipated in the Scriptures during the end times? The Prophet Joel received some revelation concerning both the bad and the good times on the way ahead for the peoples of the earth.

### I. The Promise to Send the Holy Spirit 2:28-29

#### A. The Coming of the Spirit 2:28a

Q - Do you think the promise of the sending of God’s Holy Spirit in this verse is a fulfilled promise or still a future event? While Peter quoted this passage on the day of Pentecost to explain the coming of God’s Spirit on His people at that time, there has been no day yet when God has poured out His Spirit on all mankind as He will during the Millennium (cf. Isaiah 32:15-18; Zechariah 12:10).

#### B. The Impact of the Spirit 2:28b-29

Q - Can you think of a time when anything comparable to what Joel describes in verses 28b-29 ever happened on the face of the earth? While such things have happened in isolated cases down through the ages, they have never happened to “all people” or even all of Israel as described in this passage.

### II. The Prediction of End Time Wonders 2:30-31



#### A. The Realm of End Time Wonders 2:30

Q - What will be the extent of the wonders Joel is describing? The wonders described will occur both in the sky above and on the surface of the earth - apparently to be experienced by “all mankind” (cf. v. 28).

Q - What do you think the impact of such wonders will be on those living on the earth at the time? Passages like Isaiah 2:19 and Revelation 6:16 speak of great fear on the part of people who realize that the Lord is judging the earth as they seek to hide themselves in caves and call on the rocks to fall on them to hide them from the presence of the Lord.

#### B. Examples of End Time Wonders 2:31

Q - Can you think of a time when anything comparable to what Joel describes in verse 31 has ever happened on the face of the earth? The ten plagues which occurred in Egypt were perhaps the closest, but even they were not the same thing which Joel describes in verse 31.

Q - What day is Joel anticipating by his reference to the “great and awesome day of the Lord”? Joel is anticipating the time of the tribulation as the “great and awesome day of the Lord.”

### III. The Promise of End-Time Salvation 2:32

#### A. The Means of Deliverance 2:32a

Q - What do you think Joel means by “calling on the name of the Lord”? The name of the Lord, Yahweh, reveals that “He IS,” so calling on His name involves trusting Him for salvation in a time of great need.

Q - How would you explain the deliverance that will come to those who call on the name of the Lord? Those who call on the name of the Lord will be blessed with salvation from the problem of sin and admission to the kingdom of God and His heavenly home.

B. The Meaning of Deliverance 2:32b

Q - Why do you think Mount Zion and Jerusalem are specifically mentioned as places from which some people will escape as survivors? Mount Zion and Jerusalem are specifically mentioned in Joel's prophecy because, as a Jewish prophet who was addressing a time of God's judgment on His people Israel, he was providing assurance that there will be Jewish people saved from a greater time of God's judgment - the "great and awesome day of the Lord."

Think About It: The Lord has promised to perform wonders and to send His Spirit on the earth in the last days.

Apply It: Have we met the conditions described for deliverance from the catastrophic events predicted for the end of this age? And if you have experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit into your life, how do you think your experience with the Holy Spirit compares with what will happen in those days?

## “Vindication Coming”

Joel 3:1-3

Q - Do you suppose an adoptive parent would feel any different from a natural parent at seeing his child mistreated by bullies?

It is a well-established fact in Scripture that the Lord has an “only begotten Son” in the person of Jesus, Who is identified in Scripture as His eternal Son (cf. Psalm 2:2,6,7; Micah 5:2). But the Lord has also become an adoptive parent more than once because of His choice of the people of Israel and the people of the church to be His own people. So it should be no surprise that He has some very strong feelings about the treatment they receive from the world around them.

### I. The Lord’s Judgment Against the Nations 3:1-2a

#### A. The Time of the Lord’s Judgment 3:1

Q - When do the events predicted by Joel in this passage take place? “Those days” and “at that time” refer back to the last verses in Joel chapter 2 which described the “day of the Lord.”

#### B. The Place of the Lord’s Judgment 3:2a

The “valley of Jehoshaphat” may refer to the valley in which the Lord brought about a great victory against Israel’s enemies in the days of King Jehoshaphat as recorded in II Chronicles 20:1-30.

Q - To what time in history does the judgment anticipated in these verses likely refer? The days of the tribulation are

likely in view in these verses.

## II. The Lord's Grievance Against the Nations 3:2b-3

### A. The Objects of His Concern 3:2b

Q - How did the people of Israel become God's people and inheritance (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2)? Israel became God's chosen people when the Lord promised to bless Abraham and His descendants in Genesis 12.

Q - How might this explain the Lord's strong feelings about the treatment of the people of Israel? Because the people of Israel were set apart from other nations as God's own possession, He has always taken a special interest in them, in spite of their failure to faithfully keep their covenant with Him.

### B. The Reasons for His Concern 3:2c-3

#### 1. The Scattering of Israel 3:2c

Q - When have the nations been guilty of scattering the people of Israel? Any time Israel's enemies have exercised control over them the people of Israel have been scattered (as they were when they hid in caves from the Philistines during the days of the judges), but the dispersions of Israel by the Assyrians and Babylonians and Romans were certainly clear illustrations of the scattering of Israel - all over the known world.

Q - When have the nations been guilty of dividing up the land of Israel? The division of Israeli territories in the days of the League of Nations and the United Nations are classic examples of the division of the land by foreign nations - with the danger still lingering over the nation of Israel in our own day.

## 2. The Selling of Israel 3:3

Q - Who did the Lord promise to judge in Obadiah 11 (cf. verse 1) because they participated in the selling of Israel in the manner referenced by Joel? He promised to judge the land of Edom because of their hostilities toward Israel (their “cousins”) - and other hostile nations have mistreated the people of Israel in similar ways.

Think About It: The Lord very obviously cares about the people whom He has chosen as His own. So He is going to vindicate the people of Israel at the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” for the wrongs which have been done to them.

Apply It: The people of Israel and the church deserve our respect because the Lord has chosen both the people of Israel and the church as His own possession.

## “God Will Balance the Books”

Joel 3:4-8

Q - Have you seen the bumper sticker which reads “I don’t get mad, I get even”? Are you the kind of person who gets mad, or are you the kind of person who gets even? Or do you do both?

The Lord is a God who gets angry about unrighteousness and injustice. And He is a God who is going to deal with unrighteousness and injustice with a very firm hand - as the prophecy of Joel clearly explains.

### I. The Lord’s Question for Phoenicia and Philistia 3:4

#### A. The Question of Recompense 3:4a

Q - How would you answer the question which the Lord posed to Phoenicia and Philistia? What were they to Him? Tyre and Sidon (Phoenician cities on the coast north of Israel) and Philistia (five Philistine city-states near the coast southwest of Israel) were pagan peoples who troubled God’s people from time to time, so they were opponents of the Lord who had no connection with Him.

Q - While the hostilities of the Philistines against the people of Israel are clearly recorded in the Scriptures, how might I Kings 16:28-33 help to explain the Lord’s hostility to Phoenician cities like Tyre and Sidon? I Kings 16:28-33 tells of the marriage by King Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of Eth-baal, king of the Sidonians, who led him and many in Israel with him to serve Baal and worship him at the altar for Baal which Ahab built in the house of Baal in Samaria.

## B. The Return of Recompense 3:4b

Q - Why might the Lord have promised to return any recompense payed to Him on the heads of Phoenicia and Philistia? If Phoenicia and Philistia sought to avenge themselves for any perceived wrongs done to them by Israel the Lord was promising to avenge Himself against them in return (cf. Ezekiel 25:15-17).

## II. The Lord's Promise for Phoenicia and Philistia 3:5-7

### A. Phoenicia and Philistia's Crimes 3:5-6

Q - How does II Chronicles 21:16-17 (from the days of Joram of Judah) describe a time when the crimes of Joel 3:5-6 could have been experienced in the life of Israel? II Chronicles 21:16-17 (from the days of Jehoram of Judah) records a time when Phoenicia and Philistia were in a position to sell the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks.

### B. Phoenicia and Philistia's Punishment 3:7

Q - How did the Lord say He was going to recompense the Phoenicians and Philistines who sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem into the hands of the Greeks? He said that He was going to arouse the sons of Judah and Jerusalem from the places where they had been sold and return the recompense of the Phoenicians and Philistines on their own heads. God punished the Phoenicians and Philistines by allowing Sidon to be enslaved by Artaxerxes III in 345 B.C. and by allowing Tyre to be besieged by the Babylonians in 586 and to be captured by the Greeks (under Alexander the Great) in 332.

## III. The Lord's Prediction for Phoenicia and Philistia 3:8

A. The Sale of Phoenicia and Philistia's Sons and Daughters 3:8a

Q - How do II Chronicles 26:6-7 (from the days of Uzziah) and II Kings 18:8 (from the days of Hezekiah) provide historical accounts from the time of Joel in which this prophecy was likely fulfilled? Because they record Jewish victories by Uzziah and Hezekiah over the Philistines (and other enemy nations), they could easily have resulted in the sale of people captured in battle to their enemies, as predicted in verse 8. The days of Alexander the Great and following provide other historical accounts of similar circumstances.

B. The Resale of Phoenicia and Philistia's Sons and Daughters 3:8b

Q - What is the significance of the closing statement of verse 8 - "for the LORD has spoken"? The Lord's sovereign control over the affairs of nations guaranteed that Israel's hostilities with the Phoenicians and the Philistines would turn out as Joel predicted - for the benefit of Israel.

Think About It: The Lord is going to balance the books and repay all who have taken advantage of His people.

Apply It: It doesn't pay for any person or nation to challenge the Lord or to mistreat or mislead His people! He is well able to act in favor of His chosen people - even when they are not maintaining fellowship with Him.



## “Hopeless Odds”

Joel 3:9-12

Q - When have you seen someone prepare to do something they couldn't reasonably hope to accomplish?

It was a very risky thing that Saddam Hussein (of Iraq) attempted to do when he confronted the coalition forces of the U.S. and Europe in the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Even though the odds were against him, Saddam lived in the hope that he might somehow succeed. He publicly declared that Allah would rally to his side and allow him to defeat the “infidels” who came to the rescue of Kuwait which Hussein and his armies had attacked.

Joel 3:9-12 tells us that the day is coming when a battle will take place for which the outcome is already a settled fact as the nations go to war against the Lord Himself!

### I. The Call to War 3:9

Q - How might the nations attempt to prepare themselves for a war against the Lord? They might assemble very large armies of “mighty men” in the hope that they might be successful in a military contest against the Lord and His people.

### II. The Preparation for War 3:10

Q - Why does Joel record this reversal of the Lord's promise in Isaiah 2:4? Though the time of the millennial kingdom referred to in Isaiah 2:4 will no longer require implements of war in an age of peace, the tribulation period pictured in Joel 3 will be a time of warfare among the nations - including their futile attempt to prepare implements of war to use against the

## Lord and His people.

Q - What is the Lord's evaluation of men who think they are "mighty" in joining the contest against Him? The Lord is well-aware that even those who imagine that they are "mighty men" in their contest against the Lord are actually weak men.

### III. The Urgency of War 3:11

#### A. The Challenge to the Nations

Q - Who are some of the nations which might be expected to rise up in battle against the Lord at the Valley of Jehoshaphat (called Armageddon in Revelation 16:16)? The nations surrounding Israel, which have been hostile to Israel down through the centuries, will be joined by "the kings of the whole world" (Revelation 16:14) to go to war against the Lord.

#### B. The Call to the Lord

Q - Who are the "mighty ones" the Lord is going to "bring down" in the day of the battle anticipated in this passage? Although there are no "mighty ones" described in this passage, it is significant that the verse reads "Bring **down**, O Lord, Your mighty ones." So they are probably the angelic beings who are referred to in Revelation 14:14-20, where the Lord's judgment upon the earth is described. The description of the judgment taking place at the seventh bowl of God's wrath in Revelation 16:21 also involves "huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each" coming down from heaven upon men.

### IV. The Purpose for War 3:12

Q - Who is summoned to be aroused in preparation for

the battle which is in view in Joel 3:12? The nations are called to be aroused in preparation for the battle.

Q - Where are the nations summoned to appear in preparation for the battle anticipated in Joel 3:12? The nations are summoned to appear at the valley of Jehoshaphat. The name Jehoshaphat means “the Lord judges,” so it is a fitting description of the valley referred to in Revelation 16:16 as Har-Magedon (“the mountain of Megiddo”) - where the “war of the great day of God” (Revelation 16:14) is to occur.

Q - What is the implication of the Lord’s posture in the act of judgment? The fact that He is pictured sitting as He judges all the surrounding nations implies that His judgment on the nations will require very little effort on His part.

Think About It: The Lord is planning for a war against the nations when He will bring judgment against His enemies. There is already no hope that the Lord’s enemies are going to win, but they are going to go to their destruction trying.

Apply It: A spiritually hardened heart is difficult to cure! What is the condition of our hearts toward the Lord?

## “God’s Harvest”

Joel 3:13-17

Q - When have you experienced a memorable harvest event?

The nation of Israel should have vanished from the earth many centuries ago. Like nations around them which did vanish, Israel has always been a small nation - and more than once they have endured the humiliation of national dispersion among the peoples of the earth. But the continuing existence of the nation of Israel is a powerful testimony to the greatness of Israel’s God and of His unfinished purposes for His people.

### I. The Judgment of the Nations 3:13-15

#### A. The Readiness for Judgment 3:13

Q - What does the mention of the sickle and the treading of grapes suggest about the fate of those in view in view in this verse? The use of a sickle on grains and the treading of grapes in a wine press results in the transformation of grain and fruits from their natural condition in the fields to a condition more suited to the needs of the farmer.

Q - What condition among the nations will trigger the Lord’s decision to bring His judgment on them? The great wickedness of the nations will result in the Lord’s decision to judge them.

#### B. The Immanence of Judgment 3:14

Q - What is the significance of the words “multitudes, multitudes” as this verse anticipates the judgment which will

take place in the “valley of decision”? The repetition of the word “multitudes” implies that there will be many people involved in the Lord’s judgment at the Valley of Decision which is described in this passage.

Q - What aspect of the “day of the LORD” must be in view in verse 14? It must be a description of the Lord’s judgments during the tribulation.

#### C. The Awesomeness of Judgment 3:15

Q - What unusual battle forces will the Lord marshal against His enemies in the day of judgment? The Lord’s acts of judgment will involve changes in the conditions of the sun, moon and stars (cf. Luke 21:25-26; Revelation 6:12-13).

### II. The Rescue of Israel 3:16-17

#### A. The Lord’s Roar 3:16a

Q - What picture comes to your mind as Joel describes the Lord’s “roar” in this verse? The picture of a powerful animal about to spring into action to frighten and overpower its prey comes to mind.

Q - What is significant about the location from which the Lord’s “roar” is heard? The fact that the lion is pictured roaring from Mount Zion and Jerusalem signifies the Lord’s defense of His own people Israel.

Q - Where will the impact of the Lord’s “roar” be heard and felt? The impact of the Lord’s “roar” will be heard and felt around the earth and even in the heavens.

#### B. The Lord’s Refuge 3:16b

Q - What is the good news for Israel amid all the talk of judgment which is found in this passage? The Lord is described by Joel as “a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the sons of Israel.”

#### C. The Lord's Rescue 3:17

Q - What will the Lord's act of judgment prove to the watching world? The Lord's act of judgment will prove to the watching world that He is the Lord, the God of Israel, dwelling in Zion, His holy mountain.

Q - What will the Lord's act of judgment mean to the people of Israel? The Lord's acts of judgment will set apart the holy city of Jerusalem, protecting it from the passing hostilities of “strangers.”

Think About It? The day is coming when the Lord is going to rescue His ancient people Israel - both physically and spiritually - as He judges the wickedness of the nations. When He does, it will be obvious that He has done it!

Apply It: It will be in every person's best interests to share the Lord's interest in the nation of Israel! Those who do will have a share in Israel's joy rather than the judgment which will come upon the enemies of the people and the God of Israel.

## “Blessing Israel”

Joel 3:18-21

Q - What was the promise the Lord made in the Abrahamic Covenant to the nations who bless the people of Israel (Genesis 12:3)?

While the book of Joel makes it clear that the Lord Himself is not beyond judging His people Israel when they are guilty of sin, it also teaches us that the Lord is anxious to bless the people of Israel - and to see other nations bless them as well. On into the Millennial Kingdom age it will be in any nation's favor to bless the nation of Israel.

### I. The Future Blessing of Israel 3:18

#### A. The Promise of Millennial Blessing

Q - What does the promise of mountains dripping with sweet wine and hills flowing with milk tell us about the future for Israel? A day is coming when Israel will be experiencing very fruitful productivity with vineyards yielding an abundance of grapes and animals yielding an abundance of milk.

Q - What makes Joel's prediction of abundant water, beginning from the house of the Lord, a significant millennial promise for the region east of Jerusalem? Joel is anticipating the fresh water stream described more fully in Ezekiel 47:1-7, with their significant impact on the Dead Sea (as described in Ezekiel 47:8-10) - fresh and abundant water in a region which is known today as a dry land with an extremely salty lake.

#### B. The Focus of Millennial Blessing

Q - How do we know that the promises of this verse apply to Israel? The reference to water flowing from the house of the Lord to the valley of Shittim (Acacias - dry soil trees) is clearly Israeli territory.

## II. The Future Judgment of Egypt and Edom 3:19

### A. The Conditions in Egypt and Edom

Q - What will result from God's judgment of Egypt and Edom? The land of Egypt and the territory once occupied by Edom will become dry and desolate wilderness territory.

Q - How does a comparison of Isaiah's prediction in 9:23-25 regarding Egypt and Ezekiel's prediction in 35:5-9 regarding Edom show that the fates of Egypt and Edom were going to differ? Isaiah 9:23-25 presents Egypt as a nation which will exist in the millennial age, while Isaiah 35:5-9 presents Edom as a nation totally destroyed.

### B. The Crimes of Egypt and Edom

Q - What is the reason given by Joel for the Lord's judgment of Egypt and Edom? Joel reports that the Lord's judgment of Egypt and Edom will take place because they were both guilty of violence in their relationship with the sons of Judah (cf. Obadiah 10).

## III. The Future Blessing of Judah and Jerusalem 3:20

Q - What reason for encouragement did the Lord have for Judah and Jerusalem by comparison with the difficult times of Joel's prophecy? Unlike Edom (and other nations in the region in Joel's day) which experienced total destruction, Joel wrote of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem who will exist forev-



er - “for all generations.”

#### IV. The Future Avenging of Israel 3:21

Q - Why is the Lord so committed to avenging the nation of Israel? Israel became His chosen people from the time of Abraham and onward. Though they have often suffered the consequences the Lord anticipated for their failures to live by the terms of the Mosaic covenant, nations which had shed Jewish blood will be called to account for their violence toward God’s chosen people.

Q - What is the promising and encouraging note on which Joel’s prophecy, which began with news of desolation, comes to its end? Joel’s assurance that the Lord has chosen Zion as His dwelling place among men is a very promising and encouraging ending for the prophecy of Joel.

Think About It: There is coming a day when the nation of Israel will once again be the focus of God’s attention and blessing. In the Millennial age even the geography of earth will apparently reveal who has been supportive or unsupportive of Israel. The Lord’s support will be seen most clearly in the fact that He will **dwelt** in Zion (v. 21) - forever (v. 20)!

Apply It: Are we assured of the Lord’s favor in our lives because of our favor toward His chosen people Israel? Are we assured of the Lord’s support by the fact that He is dwelling in **us** as He will dwell in Israel?