

A PROPHECY OF JUDGMENT,
REPENTANCE, RESTORATION, AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST

JOEL

The LOCUSTS, *the* LORD, *and the* LAST DAYS

VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY

“Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast...
Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the LORD
your God, for he is
gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding
in love.”

JOEL 2:15, 13

DR. PAUL CRAWFORD

EXPOSITING GOD'S WORD • APPLYING GOD'S TRUTH • ANTICIPATING GOD'S KINGDOM

JOEL: THE LOCUST-THE LORD AND THE LAST DAYS

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Chapter 1 — The Devastation of the Land

1. **The prophet's opening message** — Joel 1:1
2. **An urgent call to listen** — Joel 1:2-3
3. **The locust plague described** — Joel 1:4
4. **The drunkards and careless ones warned** — Joel 1:5-7
5. **The land mourns like a widow** — Joel 1:8-10
6. **The farmers and vine dressers lament** — Joel 1:11-12
7. **A call to fasting, mourning, and repentance** — Joel 1:13-14
8. **The day of the Lord announced as near** — Joel 1:15
9. **Joy and offerings cut off from the house of God** — Joel 1:16-18
10. **The prophet cries out in distress** — Joel 1:19-20

Chapter 2 — The Day of the Lord and Restoration

1. **The alarm sounded in Zion** — Joel 2:1
2. **A dark and terrible day described** — Joel 2:2
3. **The invading army compared to fire and destruction** — Joel 2:3-5
4. **The nations tremble at its approach** — Joel 2:6-11
5. **A call to return to the Lord with all the heart** — Joel 2:12-13
6. **A plea for mercy and forgiveness** — Joel 2:14
7. **The trumpet blown for a sacred assembly** — Joel 2:15-17
8. **The Lord's compassion toward His people** — Joel 2:18-19
9. **The northern army removed** — Joel 2:20
10. **The land, beasts, and people told not to fear** — Joel 2:21-23

11. **Restoration of harvest and abundance** — Joel 2:24-27
12. **The outpouring of the Spirit** — Joel 2:28-29
13. **Signs in heaven and earth before the great day** — Joel 2:30-31
14. **Salvation promised to all who call on the Lord** — Joel 2:32

Chapter 3 — Judgment on the Nations and Blessing for God's People

1. **The restoration of Judah and Jerusalem** — Joel 3:1
2. **The nations gathered for judgment** — Joel 3:2
3. **Charges against the nations for their cruelty** — Joel 3:3-6
4. **God summons the captives and oppressors** — Joel 3:7-8
5. **The nations called to prepare for war** — Joel 3:9-11
6. **The Valley of Jehoshaphat** — Joel 3:12
7. **The harvest of judgment** — Joel 3:13
8. **The day of the Lord's decision** — Joel 3:14
9. **Cosmic signs of judgment** — Joel 3:15-16
10. **The Lord's dwelling with His people in Zion** — Joel 3:17
11. **Blessing flows from the house of the Lord** — Joel 3:18
12. **Judgment on Egypt and Edom** — Joel 3:19
13. **Judah inhabited forever** — Joel 3:20
14. **The Lord avenges the bloodshed of His people** — Joel 3:21

Short summary

The Book of Joel moves from **devastation**, to **repentance**, to **restoration**, and finally to **judgment and blessing**. It is a prophetic book centered on the day of the Lord, God's mercy, and His final triumph over the nations.

Preface

The pages before you contain the inspired message of one of the shortest yet most powerful prophetic books in the Old Testament: the Book of Joel. Though comprised of only three chapters, Joel delivers a message that echoes throughout history and reaches its ultimate fulfillment in the last days. His prophecy speaks of divine judgment, genuine repentance, spiritual renewal, and the glorious hope of

God's coming kingdom. It is a timeless message that is as relevant today as it was when it was first proclaimed.

Joel begins with devastation. A plague of locusts sweeps across the land of Judah, leaving fields barren, vineyards destroyed, and the people in despair. Yet Joel makes it clear that this catastrophe is more than a natural disaster—it is a divine wake-up call. God uses the locust invasion to awaken a spiritually complacent nation and to remind His people that He alone is sovereign over creation, history, and the destiny of mankind.

Throughout this commentary, you will discover that Joel is not merely a book about insects or agricultural ruin. It is a book about the holiness of God confronting the sinfulness of humanity. It is about a gracious God who warns before He judges, calls before He condemns, and restores those who sincerely return to Him. Joel reveals that even in the darkest moments of discipline, the mercy of God remains available to all who seek Him with humble hearts.

One of Joel's greatest themes is "the Day of the Lord." This phrase appears repeatedly throughout the book and serves as the foundation of Joel's prophetic message. It points to historical acts of divine judgment while also looking ahead to future events that will culminate in the return of Jesus Christ. Joel's prophecy stretches from his own generation to the end of the age, providing remarkable insight into God's prophetic timetable. His words remind us that history is not random but unfolds according to the sovereign plan of Almighty God.

Equally significant is Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Joel 2, God promises to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, a promise partially fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and one that anticipates an even greater fulfillment in God's redemptive plan. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 demonstrates that Joel's message extends beyond ancient Judah and speaks directly to the Church while ultimately pointing toward Israel's future restoration and the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

This commentary has been written using a literal, grammatical, and historical approach to Scripture while recognizing the unity of God's redemptive plan from Genesis to Revelation. Every verse has been examined carefully within its immediate context and in harmony with the whole counsel of God. Hebrew word studies, historical background, theological observations, practical applications, and cross-references have been included to help readers understand not only what Joel said but why it matters today.

My desire has never been simply to provide information. Countless books can fill the mind with facts while leaving the heart untouched. My prayer is that this commentary will lead readers into a deeper understanding of God's Word, a greater appreciation for His sovereign grace, and a stronger commitment to live faithfully in anticipation of Christ's return.

Joel's message challenges every generation. We live in a world marked by moral decline, spiritual indifference, political uncertainty, natural disasters, and growing hostility toward biblical truth. These realities should not drive believers to fear but to faithfulness. Joel reminds us that God is still on His throne. He governs the nations, fulfills every promise, judges evil with perfect justice, and extends mercy to all who call upon His name.

As you journey through this commentary, I encourage you to read the biblical text carefully before considering my observations. Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Approach God's Word with humility, expecting Him to teach, convict, encourage, and transform your life.

If this volume helps pastors preach with greater clarity, teachers instruct with greater confidence, students study with greater diligence, and believers love Christ more deeply, then my purpose has been fulfilled. Above all, may every page direct your attention not to the commentator but to the Author of Scripture—the living God who speaks through His eternal Word.

May the Lord use this study of Joel to deepen your faith, strengthen your hope, and prepare your heart for the glorious Day of the Lord, when every promise of God will be fulfilled in the reign of our Savior and King, Jesus Christ.

To God be the Glory,

Dr. Paul Crawford

Prologue

There are books in the Bible that tell stories of kings, prophets, battles, miracles, and nations. There are books that comfort the brokenhearted, instruct the believer, and proclaim the coming Messiah. Then there is the Book of Joel—a brief prophecy that captures all of these themes in only a few chapters. Though concise in length, Joel speaks with thunderous authority. His message transcends his own generation and reaches across the centuries to every person who longs to understand God's purposes in history.

Imagine standing in the fields of ancient Judah. The vineyards that once flourished have become lifeless. The grain has vanished. The fig trees stand stripped and barren. A relentless army of locusts has consumed everything in its path. Families wonder how they will survive. Priests mourn because there are no offerings to bring before the Lord. The nation is stunned by a disaster unlike any it has ever experienced.

To many, it appears to be a natural catastrophe.

Joel declares it to be something far greater.

He sees the invisible hand of God at work behind the visible devastation. The prophet understands that the locust plague is not merely an ecological disaster but a divine summons. It is God's call for His covenant people to awaken from spiritual complacency, to repent of their sins, and to return wholeheartedly to the One who alone can heal, restore, and save.

Yet Joel's vision does not end with ruined fields.

His prophetic gaze stretches beyond the immediate crisis into the distant future. The devastation caused by locusts becomes a picture of an even greater day—a day when the Lord Himself will intervene in human history with power, justice, and glory. Again and again, Joel points to what he calls "the Day of the Lord," a phrase that carries profound theological significance. It speaks of God's righteous

judgment upon sin, His sovereign rule over the nations, His faithfulness to His covenant promises, and His ultimate victory through the reign of the Messiah.

For this reason, Joel belongs not only to ancient Judah but also to every generation of believers. His words speak to nations that have forgotten God, churches tempted by complacency, and individuals who need the hope that only divine grace can provide. Joel reminds us that God's warnings are acts of mercy, His discipline is motivated by love, and His invitation to repent remains open until the day His final judgment arrives.

One of the most remarkable features of Joel's prophecy is its connection to the New Testament. On the Day of Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers gathered in Jerusalem, the Apostle Peter quoted Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit. What Joel foresaw centuries earlier began to unfold before the eyes of the early church, demonstrating that God's Word never fails. Yet Joel's prophecy extends even further, anticipating events that await their ultimate fulfillment in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His everlasting kingdom.

This commentary approaches Joel with the conviction that every word of Scripture is inspired by God, without error in its original writings, and profitable for doctrine, correction, instruction, and righteous living. The goal is not merely to explain the text but to understand its historical setting, uncover its theological depth, appreciate its prophetic significance, and apply its timeless truths to the Christian life.

Throughout these pages, we will examine Joel verse by verse. We will consider the historical context of the prophet's ministry, the meaning of key Hebrew words, the structure of his message, and the rich doctrinal themes woven throughout the book. We will explore the devastation of the locust plague, the call to national repentance, the promise of divine restoration, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gathering of the nations for judgment, and the glorious hope of God's eternal kingdom.

Joel ultimately directs our attention to the character of God Himself. He reveals a God who is holy enough to judge sin, compassionate enough to forgive the repentant, faithful enough to keep every promise, and sovereign enough to govern every event in history. The same Lord who sent the warning also promised restoration. The same God who judges the wicked offers abundant mercy to those who call upon His name.

As you begin this study, approach the Scriptures with reverence and expectation. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your understanding. Read slowly. Reflect carefully. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Above all, allow the message of Joel to search your heart. The prophet's call is not merely for ancient Judah—it is for every generation that desires to walk faithfully before the Lord.

The locusts have long since disappeared.

The Lord still reigns.

And the last days draw ever nearer.

May this journey through the Book of Joel deepen your love for God's Word, strengthen your confidence in His sovereign plan, and increase your anticipation of the glorious return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Introduction to Joel Chapter 1

The Locust Invasion: A Disaster Without Precedent and the Call to National Lamentation

The book of Joel opens without a single word of biographical context beyond the prophet's name and his father's name. We are given no king's reign to anchor the chronology, no city where Joel lived, no specific occupation or social position. This deliberate absence of historical mooring is not careless but theologically intentional: the message Joel is about to deliver is addressed to every generation of God's people that encounters the devastating visitation of the divine judgment, and it resists being safely enclosed in a single historical moment that later readers might regard as safely in the past.

The occasion of the book is a catastrophic locust invasion unlike anything in living memory — a plague so total and so devastating that Joel calls on the elders to confirm that nothing like it has ever been seen in their lifetimes or in the lifetimes of the generation before them. What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten. What the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. The four-fold description of the devastation is the poetry of total loss: not merely a bad harvest season but the systematic stripping of everything that sustains the agricultural community's life.

The chapter moves through three interconnected movements. The first (verses 1–4) is the summons to attention: hear this, elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land. Has this happened in your days? The unprecedented nature of the disaster is the first pastoral claim Joel makes upon his audience — this is not routine; this demands notice. The second movement (verses 5–12) is the call to lamentation: wake up, drunkards, and weep; wail, all drinkers of wine; lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. Successive groups are addressed — the drunkards, the nation, the priests, the farmers — each called to mourn what the locust has taken from them. The third movement (verses 13–20) is the call to corporate religious response: gird on sackcloth and lament, O priests; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the elders; cry out to the LORD.

The theological significance of the chapter extends far beyond the historical crisis of a locust plague. Joel sees the locust invasion as the instrument of the day of the LORD — the first introduction of that vast eschatological concept into the book, which will come to dominate chapters 2 and 3. The devastation of the locusts is not merely an agricultural catastrophe but a theological sign: the day of the LORD is near; it comes as destruction from the Almighty. The physical stripping of the land — the vine, the fig tree, the grain, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple tree — is the visible expression of a spiritual condition that has left the house of the LORD without offering and the priests without the means of their sacred service. What the locust has done to the land, the day of the LORD will do — and is already beginning to do — to the covenant community that has lost the vitality of its relationship with the God whose house stands desolate.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Joel chapter 1 as people who need to learn to weep before we learn to hope. We live in a culture that has largely lost the capacity for the kind of corporate lamentation that this chapter calls for — the sackcloth, the assembly, the crying out, the honest naming of the devastation that the judgment has produced. We are more comfortable with the managed grief of the therapeutic session than with the raw, public, community-wide mourning that Joel demands of the elders, the priests, the farmers, and the drunkards alike.

Lord, let the locust invasion of this chapter be the mirror that shows us what devastation looks like when it is named honestly rather than managed carefully. Let the what has the vine done, the fig tree withered, the pomegranate, the palm, and the apple tree dried up be the honest inventory of what we have lost — not merely agricultural but spiritual, not merely material but covenantal. Where the house of our God has been deprived of grain offering and drink offering, where the priests mourn because the ministry has been stripped of the substance that gives it meaning, let us see that condition clearly rather than maintaining the appearance of a flourishing that the locust has already consumed.

And let the call to solemn assembly be received as the invitation it is — not the punishment of the God who enjoys the mourning of His people but the provision of the God who knows that the community which refuses to lament what it has lost cannot receive the restoration that the rest of the book will promise. Form in us the capacity to cry out to the LORD before we ask what the LORD will do for us. Let the lamentation precede the expectation.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joel 1:1–4

The Unprecedented Disaster: Hear This, Elders — Has This Ever Been in Your Days?

(1) The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.

*(2) Hear this, ye old men,
and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land.*

*Hath this been in your days,
or even in the days of your fathers?*

*(3) Tell ye your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children another generation.*

*(4) That which the palmerworm hath left
hath the locust eaten;
and that which the locust hath left
hath the cankerworm eaten;
and that which the cankerworm hath left
hath the caterpillar eaten.*

The Context

The word of the LORD that came to Joel is the standard formula for prophetic authority — the message is not Joel's opinion about a national crisis but the divine word that has been given to him to deliver. The Pethuel whose son Joel is unknown outside this verse, and the deliberate minimalism of the introduction has led to centuries of scholarly debate about the date and historical context of the book, without any consensus being reached. What is clear is that the divine word has come, and the prophet's primary task is to make that word heard by those who most need to hear it.

The summons of verse 2 is addressed first to the elders — the bearers of the community's collective memory — and then to all the inhabitants of the land. The question Has this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers? is a challenge to the communal memory: search as far back as living recollection can reach, search the stored memory of the previous generation, and tell me if anything like what is happening now has ever happened before. The implied answer is no. The disaster is unprecedented within living or transmitted memory, which makes it impossible to manage by applying the lessons of previous experience. This is something new, something worse, something that demands a different kind of response.

The instruction of verse 3 — tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation — establishes the event as something that must be transmitted through the generational memory rather than allowed to fade with the passing of the generation that witnessed it. This is the same pattern as the Passover — the command to tell the story to the next generation so that the memory of the formative event shapes the identity of those who did not witness it. The locust invasion is to be remembered not as a historical curiosity but as a defining moment of encounter with the judgments of God.

The four-fold description of verse 4 — what the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten; what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten — is the poetry of total consumption. Whether the four terms refer to four different species of locust or to four different stages of the same insect's life cycle has been debated, but the poetic effect is clear: wave after wave of destruction, each consuming what the previous wave left, until nothing remains. The completeness of the devastation is the subject of the verse, and the fourfold structure enacts it — there is no remainder, no remnant of the harvest that has escaped the successive waves of the plague.

Plain American English

This is the message the LORD gave to Joel son of Pethuel. Listen to this, you elders! Pay attention, everyone who lives in this land! Has anything like this ever happened before in your lifetime, or in your parents' lifetime? Tell your children about it. Let them tell their grandchildren, and their grandchildren the next generation. What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust ate. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust ate. What the hopping locust left, the destroying locust ate.

Key Observations

“Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?”: This signifies **The Appeal to Communal Memory Is the Pastoral Claim That the Present Disaster Is Genuinely Unprecedented and Therefore Cannot Be Managed by the Lessons of Previous Experience — It Requires a Different Kind of Response.**

The challenge to the elders' collective memory is not rhetorical posturing but a genuine pastoral strategy. The elders are the community's archive of experienced wisdom — they have seen droughts, they have seen poor harvests, they have seen the ordinary cycles of agricultural difficulty that every farming community navigates. What Joel is insisting is that what is happening now exceeds all of that accumulated experience: no one in living memory, and no one in transmitted memory, has seen anything like this. This claim of unprecedented-ness is the pastoral device that prevents the community from defaulting to the managed coping strategies that have worked before, and forces them to look for a response adequate to the actual scale of what is happening.

“Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation”: This signifies **The Generational Transmission Command Establishes the Locust Invasion as a Defining Moment of Encounter with the Divine Judgment That Must Be Carried Through the Community's Memory Rather Than Allowed to Fade.**

The command to tell the children what the present generation has seen is one of the most theologically significant instructions in the opening section, because it establishes the purpose of the recording of the disaster: not to preserve a historical memory for its own sake, but to ensure that the theological significance of the encounter with the divine judgment — what the disaster reveals about who God is and how He relates to His people — is not lost when the generation that witnessed it has passed. This is the Passover pattern applied to a prophetic crisis: the formative experience must be transmitted so that the community's theological identity is shaped by it. The locust invasion, like the Exodus, is meant to be remembered by those who were not there.

“That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten”: This signifies **The Fourfold Description of the Progressive Devastation Is the Poetry of Total Consumption — Wave After Wave Until Nothing Remains.**

The four-fold pattern of verse 4 is among the most carefully crafted lines in the book for its enactment of the content it describes. Each clause begins with what the previous actor left — establishing that there was something remaining — and ends with the next actor's consumption of that remainder. The cumulative effect is the sense of the relentless, sequential elimination of every surviving portion of the harvest. The four actors are not four simultaneous destroyers but four successive ones, each one

arriving to finish what the previous one started. The pattern is both agricultural description and theological statement: when the divine judgment comes in this form, it is thorough. There is no remnant that escapes the successive waves.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Challenge to Communal Memory as the Pastoral Invitation to Name the Present Crisis Honestly Rather Than Assimilating It to the Precedents That Make It Manageable: Joel's question to the elders is the question that every community of faith needs to ask in every season of genuine crisis: has this happened before, within living or transmitted memory? The honest answer sometimes is yes — the present difficulty fits the pattern of previous difficulties and can be navigated with the wisdom accumulated from them. But sometimes the honest answer is no — the present crisis genuinely exceeds the precedents, and the community that manages it with the coping strategies of previous experience has misread the scale of what is happening. The capacity to say has this happened before? honestly is the precondition for the appropriate response.

2. Practice the Generational Transmission of the Formative Encounters with the Divine Judgment as Well as the Formative Encounters with the Divine Grace: The tell your children is typically associated with the Passover and other stories of divine deliverance — the generational transmission of the great acts of God on behalf of His people. Joel applies the same command to the experience of divine judgment. The community that transmits only the stories of grace and deliverance, without transmitting the stories of the disasters that the covenant violations produced, has given the next generation an incomplete theological education. The locust invasion is as much a part of the testimony of God's dealings with His people as the Exodus, and the community that remembers only the Exodus has lost half of the story.

3. Take the Totality of the Four-Fold Devastation as the Reminder That When the Divine Judgment Comes in a Particular Season, It Is Designed to Be Total Rather Than Partial — and That the Totality Is the Measure of the Seriousness of the Condition Being Addressed: The four waves of locusts that leave nothing remind the community that the divine judgment is not a polite correction. When the locust descends in wave after wave, consuming what each previous wave has left, the theological message is that the condition being addressed is serious enough to require the complete stripping of the prosperity that has been misused or the abundance that has been misattributed. The total loss is the inverse of the total provision that the covenant had promised: the community that has treated the covenant's abundance as its own possession has had the abundance fully consumed by the judgment that demonstrates its true character as gift rather than entitlement.

How This Relates to Today

The refusal to provide Joel with a specific historical context is one of the most pastorally significant features of the book's opening. Every generation of the covenant community is invited to read itself into the situation of verse 2: is there something in your own experience or in the experience of the generation before you that resembles the unprecedented disaster Joel is describing? The book's generational application — tell your children, and their children, and their children after them — establishes from the first verses that the locust invasion is not a crisis safely confined to the eighth

century BC (or whenever Joel wrote) but the paradigmatic encounter with the divine judgment that every generation is called to recognize when it encounters it in its own form.

The fourfold description of verse 4 has also been read typologically in the history of Christian interpretation — most notably in the use Joel 1:4 and 2:25 (I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten) share as a pair. The four locusts of the devastation become, in the promise of restoration, the four locusts whose years will be restored. The total consumption of verse 4 is the measure of the restoration of verse 25 — and the completeness of both the devastation and the restoration is the theological point that the fourfold pattern establishes from the beginning.

Key Lesson: **The opening of Joel establishes that the locust invasion is unprecedented within living or transmitted memory, demands the generational transmission of what the present generation witnesses, and enacts in the fourfold poetry of verse 4 the completeness of a consumption that leaves nothing — the pastoral strategy of naming the disaster accurately and in its full severity as the precondition for the lamentation that the rest of the chapter will call for and the restoration that the rest of the book will promise.**

Joel 1:5–12

Wake Up and Weep: The Call to Lamentation for Every Group the Disaster Has Stripped

*(5) Awake, ye drunkards, and weep;
and howl, all ye drinkers of wine,
because of the new wine;
for it is cut off from your mouth.*

*(6) For a nation is come up upon my land,
strong, and without number,
whose teeth are as the teeth of a lion,
and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion.*

*(7) He hath laid my vine waste,
and barked my fig tree:
he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away;
the branches thereof are made white.*

*(8) Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth
for the husband of her youth.*

*(9) The meat offering and the drink offering
is cut off from the house of the LORD;
the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn.*

(10) The field is wasted, the land mourneth;

*for the corn is wasted:
the new wine is dried up,
the oil languisheth.
(11) Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen;
howl, O ye vinedressers,
for the wheat and for the barley;
because the harvest of the field is perished.
(12) The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth;
the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree,
even all the trees of the field, are withered:
because joy is withered away from the sons of men.*

The Context

The successive calls to lamentation in verses 5–12 address four groups in turn, each identified by their relationship to what the locust has destroyed. The drunkards and wine drinkers of verse 5 are addressed first — not to mock their addiction but because the destruction of the vine has hit them where they are most immediately affected: the new wine is cut off from your mouth. The call to weep is the pastoral strategy of starting where each group is most viscerally aware of the loss. For those who have been living for the wine, the cutting off of the wine is the most immediate path to the lamentation that Joel needs to produce in the whole community.

The locust army itself is described in verses 6–7 with military imagery: a nation, strong and without number, with the teeth of a lion and the fangs of a great lion. The vine laid waste, the fig tree stripped bare, the branches made white — these are the images of a military conquest in agricultural form. Joel will develop this military imagery much more fully in chapter 2, but already in chapter 1 the locust invasion is being interpreted through the lens of covenant judgment: the land is described as my land, which is the LORD's possessive claim on the territory that the invasion has stripped.

Verse 8 introduces the most emotionally resonant comparison in the section: lament like a young woman wearing sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The virgin betrothed and then bereaved before the marriage is consummated — mourning for a relationship whose fullness she never experienced — is the image of the most complete form of grief available in the ancient Near Eastern emotional imagination. The lamentation Joel is calling for is this intense, this personal, this devastating. It is not the polite mourning of a community that has suffered an inconvenience; it is the grief of the one whose entire future has been taken from them at the moment of its beginning.

The theological center of this section is verse 9: the grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD. The physical devastation of the agricultural crisis has become a liturgical crisis: the temple worship requires grain and wine for the offerings, and the locust has consumed the grain and dried up the vine. The priests can no longer

offer what the covenant worship requires. The house of the LORD is not merely impoverished in a material sense; it is liturgically disabled. And Joel makes this the explicit theological significance of the disaster: the locust has not merely taken the harvest; it has interrupted the covenant worship that the harvest was meant to sustain.

Plain American English

Wake up, you drunkards — weep! Wail, all you wine drinkers, because the new wine has been taken right out of your mouths. A powerful nation without number has invaded my land. Its teeth are like the teeth of a lion, its fangs like those of a great lion. It has stripped my grapevines bare and splintered my fig trees — it has peeled the bark and thrown the branches aside, leaving them white. Weep like a young woman dressed in burlap who is grieving for the husband she married in her youth. There is no grain or wine for the offerings in the LORD's house. The priests — the LORD's ministers — are in mourning. The fields are ruined, the land dries up; the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up, and the olive oil fails. Farmers are devastated, vine growers are wailing — weeping over the wheat and the barley because the harvest of the field is ruined. The grapevines have dried up and fig trees have shriveled — the pomegranates, palms, and apple trees, every tree in the field is withered. And joy has shriveled up from the human heart.

Key Observations

“Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth”: This signifies **The Pastoral Strategy of Starting Where Each Group Feels the Loss Most Immediately Is the Model for the Call to Lamentation That Meets People in the Specific Form of Their Grief Rather Than in an Abstract General Mourning.**

Joel begins the call to corporate lamentation not with the priests or the elders but with the drunkards and the wine drinkers — the people who will feel the loss of the new wine most acutely and most immediately. This is deliberate pastoral strategy, not social commentary. The path to genuine communal lamentation runs through the specific, concrete, felt losses of each group in the community. The drunkard who has been cut off from the wine can be brought to the genuine grief that Joel is calling for more readily than the person who is being called to grieve abstractly on behalf of the community's agricultural loss. Starting with the most viscerally felt impact of each group is the pastoral wisdom of the chapter: lamentation is mobilized through the specific, not the general.

“For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are as the teeth of a lion”: This signifies **The Military Imagery Applied to the Locust Invasion Interprets the Agricultural Disaster as a Covenant Judgment — the Nation Without Number Is the Instrument of the Divine Claim on the Land That the My Establishes.**

The description of the locust as a nation, strong and without number, with the teeth of a lion is the first move in the theological interpretation of the disaster that will become explicit when Joel introduces the day of the LORD in verse 15. The locusts are not merely an unfortunate natural phenomenon; they are the instrument of a military-scale judgment, arriving on my land — the possessive claiming of the land for the LORD whose covenant gave it to the people on specific conditions. The military imagery establishes that what is happening is a matter of covenant consequence, not merely natural calamity,

and the intensity of the devastation — the lion's teeth, the bare white branches — is the measure of the severity of the covenant condition being addressed.

“Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth”: This signifies **The Most Emotionally Resonant Comparison in the Section Establishes the Depth of Grief That Joel Is Calling For — Not the Polite Mourning of Inconvenience but the Devastating Loss of the One Whose Future Has Been Taken at the Moment of Its Beginning.**

The comparison of the required lamentation to the grief of the young woman mourning the husband of her youth is the most emotionally demanding image in the passage. The betrothed virgin who has lost her husband before the marriage has been consummated mourns not merely a relationship but an entire future — the whole anticipated life with the person who was to be the center of it. Her grief is disproportionate to what she has actually experienced together with the lost husband, because what she is mourning is not past shared experience but lost anticipated future. Joel is calling the community to a grief of this quality: not the manageable sadness of a difficult season, but the devastating grief of a future that has been taken before it could be fully experienced.

“The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn”: This signifies **The Liturgical Significance of the Agricultural Disaster Is the Theological Center of the Section — the Locust Has Not Merely Taken the Harvest but Has Disabled the Covenant Worship That the Harvest Was Meant to Sustain.**

Verse 9 is the verse that most clearly establishes the theological frame for the entire disaster: the locust has not merely impoverished the farmers; it has interrupted the house of the LORD. The grain offering and the drink offering that the covenant worship required have been consumed before they could be offered, leaving the priests without the means of their sacred service. This is the theological escalation that the rest of the chapter will develop: the locust invasion is not a natural disaster with spiritual implications; it is a spiritual crisis with natural manifestations. The house of the LORD mourning because the offering is cut off is the most explicit statement in the chapter that the agricultural and the liturgical, the physical and the covenantal, are inseparable in Joel's theological vision.

“Because joy is withered away from the sons of men”: This signifies **The Final Line of the Lamentation Section Identifies the Deepest Loss — Not the Specific Agricultural Products That Have Dried Up but the Joy That the Abundance Was Meant to Express and Sustain.**

The closing line of verse 12 — joy is withered away from the sons of men — is the most theologically concentrated statement of loss in the section. Joel has listed the specific agricultural losses one by one: the vine, the fig tree, the grain, the new wine, the oil, the wheat, the barley, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple, all the trees of the field. But the culminating loss is not another item on the list; it is the joy that the entire list of abundance was meant to express and sustain. The harvest was not merely the source of physical nourishment but the occasion of the communal celebration that the feast calendar organized — and when the harvest is consumed by the locusts, the joy that the harvest was meant to generate has withered along with it. The ultimate loss is the affective one: the community has been stripped not just of its food but of its capacity for celebration.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Practice the Pastoral Wisdom of Starting Where People Feel the Loss Most Concretely When Calling Them to Genuine Lamentation: Joel's strategy of addressing the drunkards before the priests, the vinedressers before the elders, is the pastoral wisdom of meeting people in the specific, concrete, felt dimension of their loss before calling them to the general communal mourning. Contemporary pastoral care and preaching that calls communities to abstract corporate lament without first attending to where each person or group is specifically feeling the loss has skipped the step that Joel models: the path to genuine communal grief runs through the honest, specific acknowledgment of each person's actual experience of the disaster. Meet people where the loss is concrete before calling them to where the loss is theological.

2. Read Natural and National Disasters Through the Theological Lens That Joel Applies — as Instruments of the Divine Claim on the Created Order Rather Than as Random Natural Events with No Theological Meaning: Joel's identification of the locusts as a nation and his use of the my land claim establish the pattern for the theological reading of natural disasters that the prophetic tradition consistently applies. The covenant community that reads its crises exclusively through the lens of natural cause and effect, without asking the theological question of what the divine claim on the created order means in the context of this specific disaster, has lost the interpretive framework that Joel models. This does not mean that every flood or drought is a specific judgment for a specific sin; it means that the covenant community should always be asking the theological question that Joel makes explicit: what is the LORD saying through this, and what response does it call for?

3. Take the Liturgical Disability of the Disaster as the Most Serious Form of Loss — When the Community's Capacity for the Covenant Worship Is Compromised, the Agricultural and the Spiritual Have Converged in a Crisis That Requires the Full Pastoral Response Joel Models: The cutting off of the grain offering and the drink offering is the specific form of the disaster that moves Joel from agricultural observation to prophetic proclamation. When the physical impoverishment of the community has reached the point where the community's capacity to maintain the covenantal relationship through the prescribed worship has been compromised, the crisis has moved from the material to the spiritual in the most direct possible way. Communities today that find their financial crises, their cultural marginalization, or their institutional decline compromising their capacity for the forms of worship and community that sustain their covenant life should read their situation through this lens: the liturgical disability is the theological signal that the crisis has reached its deepest dimension.

How This Relates to Today

The because joy is withered away from the sons of men of verse 12 is one of the most widely applicable lines in the chapter to contemporary experience, because it names what all the specific losses of the chapter ultimately produce: the loss of the capacity for joy. The community that has been stripped of the abundance that organized its celebration — not merely the material abundance but the relational, institutional, spiritual, and cultural abundance that made the celebration possible — is the community that has experienced the withering of joy. Contemporary churches, denominations, and Christian communities that are navigating institutional decline, cultural marginalization, theological confusion, and relational fracture are experiencing the contemporary form of what verse 12 describes: the specific losses have accumulated into the general loss of the capacity for the celebration that the community was meant to practice.

The image of the young woman mourning the husband of her youth is also one of the most emotionally resonant images in the chapter for communities that have experienced what might be called anticipatory grief — the loss not of what was experienced together but of what was hoped for and expected and was taken before it could be fully realized. Churches that have seen their communities fragment before they fully formed, relationships that ended before they could deepen, ministries that were shut down before they could bear their intended fruit — these are the contemporary experiences of the grief that verse 8 describes. Joel is giving the community permission to mourn what was lost before it could be fully possessed, not only what was taken from a mature and fully experienced life.

Key Lesson: **The call to lamentation in verses 5–12 moves through four groups — the drunkards, the nation, the priests, the farmers — each addressed in the specific dimension of their loss, with the theological center of the section being the liturgical disability of verse 9 — the grain offering and drink offering cut off from the house of the LORD — and the most concentrated statement of the ultimate loss being the final line: because joy is withered away from the sons of men; the community that has been stripped of its abundance has been stripped of its capacity for the celebration that the covenant life was designed to produce.**

Joel 1:13–20

The Day of the LORD Is Near: The Call to Solemn Assembly, the Theological Interpretation of the Disaster, and the Cry to God

(13) Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests:

howl, ye ministers of the altar:

come, lie all night in sackcloth,

ye ministers of my God:

for the meat offering and the drink offering

is withholden from the house of your God.

(14) Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly,

gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land

into the house of the LORD your God,

and cry unto the LORD.

(15) Alas for the day!

for the day of the LORD is at hand,

and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

(16) Is not the meat cut off before our eyes,

yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

(17) The seed is rotten under their clods,

the garners are laid desolate,

the barns are broken down;

for the corn is withered.

*(18) How do the beasts groan!
the herds of cattle are perplexed,
because they have no pasture;
yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.*

*(19) O LORD, to thee will I cry:
for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness,
and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field.*

*(20) The beasts of the field cry also unto thee:
for the rivers of waters are dried up,
and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

The Context

The call to the priests in verse 13 is the most urgent directive in the chapter. The priests have been mourning since verse 9 — the passive mourning of people who have lost the means of their service. Now Joel directs them to an active response: gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, pass the night in sackcloth, call the solemn assembly. The passive grief of the mourning priests is insufficient for what the situation requires; they need to be the active leaders of the community's response, calling the people to the fast and the assembly rather than simply lamenting their own disabled service.

The call to the solemn assembly in verse 14 is one of the most important pastoral instructions in the chapter. Sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God and cry out to the LORD. The fast, the assembly, the gathering of both the elders (the leadership) and all the inhabitants (the whole community), and the crying out — these are the specific, public, corporate religious acts that the situation requires. This is not private spiritual reflection or individual repentance, though those are appropriate responses. It is the full communal gathering of the covenant people in the house of their God, engaging together in the public mourning that the covenant relationship makes available as a resource for exactly this kind of crisis.

Verse 15 introduces the most theologically significant element of the chapter: alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it comes. The day of the LORD (yom Yahweh) is the great eschatological concept of the prophetic tradition — the day of the LORD's decisive intervention in history, which the earlier prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah) had announced as a day of judgment that Israel should dread rather than anticipate. Joel introduces this concept by rooting it in the present crisis: the locust invasion is not merely itself but a manifestation of the day of the LORD, a foretaste of the more comprehensive divine intervention that is coming. The disaster that has already happened is the beginning of something larger.

The description of verses 16–18 widens the scope of the devastation: is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed rots in the clods, the storehouses are

desolate, the barns are broken down; the herds of cattle are bewildered because there is no pasture, the flocks of sheep are impoverished. The disaster has not confined itself to the agricultural sector; it has extended to the animals that depend on the same agricultural abundance. The whole living community — human and animal — is caught in the failure of the land.

The chapter closes with one of the most moving moments in the prophetic literature: the prophet himself crying out (verse 19) and the animals of the field crying out alongside him (verse 20). O LORD, to you I cry, for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. Even the beasts of the field pant for you; the water brooks have dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. The cosmic scope of the disaster — extending from the human community to the animal creation, from the agricultural fields to the wilderness pastures, from the rivers to the trees — is the backdrop against which the cry to the LORD ascends. The entirety of the created order is caught in the disaster, and the entirety of the created order joins the cry.

Plain American English

Dress in burlap and weep, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night wearing burlap, you ministers of my God, because the grain and wine offerings are withheld from the temple of your God. Announce a time of fasting; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the people of the land to the house of the LORD your God and cry out to him. What a terrible day! The day of the LORD is near, coming like destruction sent from the Almighty. Our food is taken away right in front of our eyes — joy and gladness are gone from the house of our God. The seeds are shriveled under their husks; the grain storage buildings are empty; the barns are torn down because the grain has dried up. How the animals moan! The herds of cattle wander confused because there is no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer. To you, LORD, I call! The fire has burned up the pastures in the wilderness, and flames have scorched all the trees in the field. Even the wild animals pant and look to you, because the water sources have dried up and fire has burned up the pastures in the wilderness.

Key Observations

“Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD”: This signifies **The Corporate Religious Response Is Specific, Public, and Communally Comprehensive — It Is Not Private Spiritual Reflection but the Full Gathering of the Covenant People in Their Corporate Assembly Before Their God.**

The call to the solemn assembly is the most important pastoral instruction in the closing section and one of the most practically applicable verses in the chapter. The four specific acts — sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the leaders and all the people, cry out to the LORD — constitute the full corporate response that the disaster requires. Each element is significant: the fast marks the seriousness of the occasion and the community’s willingness to interrupt the ordinary rhythms of life; the solemn assembly gathers the people in a specific public event; the gathering of both the elders (leadership) and all the inhabitants (the whole community) ensures that the response is comprehensive rather than restricted to the religious professionals; and the crying out to the LORD is the specific, directed,

purposeful prayer that brings the communal gathering to its proper conclusion. This is the template for the corporate response to national and communal crisis that the covenant tradition makes available.

“For the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come”: This signifies **The Theological Interpretation of the Locust Invasion as the Nearness of the Day of the LORD Is the Most Significant Conceptual Move in the Chapter — the Present Disaster Is Not Merely Itself but the Foretaste and Beginning of Something Larger.**

The introduction of the day of the LORD in verse 15 is the moment at which Joel transforms the chapter from a pastoral response to an agricultural crisis into a theological proclamation about the character of the God who is speaking through the crisis. The day of the LORD in the prophetic tradition is the day of the divine intervention in history — the day when the God who is LORD over all things makes His lordship unmistakably visible in the affairs of nations and peoples. Joel’s claim that the locust invasion is the nearness of that day establishes the agricultural disaster as eschatological sign: what is happening in the fields and vineyards and storehouses of Judah is the beginning of what the day of the LORD means. The disaster is not the day of the LORD itself but its harbinger, its foretaste, the form in which its approach is being made visible.

“O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field”: This signifies **The Prophet’s Own Cry Is the Model of the Corporate Lamentation He Has Been Calling the Community to — He Does Not Call Others to Cry Without Crying Himself.**

The O LORD, to you I cry of verse 19 is the moment when the prophet steps out from behind the prophetic commission and cries out in his own voice. Joel has been calling the drunkards, the nation, the priests, the farmers to lament, and now he himself laments. The pastoral model is the one who calls others to the grief that he himself is practicing — not the detached professional who prescribes mourning for others while maintaining a clinical distance from it himself. The prophet’s own cry is the first instance of what he is calling the community to produce: the direct, first-person, urgent address to the LORD that names the specific disaster and brings it into the presence of the God who alone can address it.

“The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness”: This signifies **The Extension of the Lamentation to the Animal Creation Is the Most Striking Statement of the Cosmic Scope of the Disaster — the Entirety of the Created Order Caught in the Failure of the Land Joins the Cry That Ascends to the LORD.**

The panting of the beasts of the field toward the LORD, the crying out of the animal creation alongside the human prophet, is one of the most unusual images in the chapter and one of the most theologically rich. The animals do not understand the theological significance of what is happening; they simply experience the failing of the water and the burning of the pasture, and in their distress they do the only thing available to the creature in extremis: they cry out. Joel uses this image to extend the scope of the lamentation from the human community to the animal creation, establishing that the disaster is truly cosmic — not confined to the agricultural economy of the human community but affecting the whole living world of the land. And the animals’ cry is, in Joel’s rendering, a form of prayer: the creature in extremis cries to its Creator, even without theological understanding of what it is doing.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Respond to Community and National Crisis with the Full Corporate Religious Response That the Solemn Assembly Models Rather Than with Purely Private or Individualistic Spirituality:

The call to sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants, and cry out to the LORD is the template for the communal religious response to communal disaster. Contemporary Christian communities that respond to national or communal crisis exclusively through private prayer, individual spiritual reflection, or the therapeutic management of anxiety have not yet reached the full corporate response that Joel models. The gathering of the whole community — leadership and people together — in a specific public act of communal prayer and fasting, with the specific purpose of crying out to the LORD in the house of God, is the response that the covenant tradition makes available and that the scale of genuine communal crisis requires.

2. Interpret the Nearness of the Day of the LORD in Every Season of Genuine Crisis as the Theological Frame That Makes the Crisis Intelligible and the Call to Corporate Repentance Urgent:

The introduction of the day of the LORD in verse 15 is the hermeneutical move that transforms a local agricultural disaster into a theological proclamation about the character of the God who is Lord over history. Contemporary communities of faith that read their crises — ecological, social, institutional, relational — exclusively through the lens of natural cause and effect have not yet applied the interpretive frame that Joel applies to the locust invasion. Every genuine crisis in the experience of the covenant community is, in some sense, the nearness of the day of the LORD — the moment when the divine claim on the created order and on the covenant people is being made visible in a way that demands the response of solemn assembly and crying out to the LORD.

3. Lead the Community's Lamentation from Within It Rather Than from Above It — the Prophet Who Calls Others to Cry Cries Himself:

Joel's O LORD, to you I cry of verse 19 is the model of pastoral leadership in lamentation: the leader who calls the community to the grief that the situation requires must be found practicing that grief himself. The pastoral leader who prescribes communal mourning from a position of emotional detachment has not understood what Joel models. The prophet who called the drunkards and the priests and the farmers to weep is himself weeping. The community that observes its leaders genuinely entering the lamentation that the situation requires is more likely to follow them into it than the community that is being called to emotions that the leaders are not themselves exhibiting.

How This Relates to Today

The day of the LORD introduced in verse 15 is one of the most significant theological concepts in the prophetic tradition, and its introduction in the context of an agricultural disaster that had already happened establishes the interpretive pattern for reading every subsequent disaster: the judgment that has already begun points toward the more comprehensive judgment that is coming. The New Testament reading of Joel is dominated by Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, where he identifies the outpouring of the Spirit with the prophecy of Joel 2 — but the first chapter's theology of the day of the LORD provides the context in which the Spirit's outpouring in chapter 2 makes sense as the divine response to the crisis that chapter 1 describes.

The beasts crying out to the LORD in verse 20 also anticipates Paul's image of the whole creation groaning in Romans 8 — the created order waiting with eager longing for the redemption that the day

of the LORD will bring. Joel's animals panting for the dried-up water are the Old Testament version of the groaning creation, and the connection between the two passages establishes that the biblical theology of creation includes the non-human created order as a participant in the experience of the disaster and in the cry for the restoration.

Key Lesson: **The closing section of the chapter calls the priests to active leadership of the community's response through the solemn assembly, introduces the day of the LORD as the theological frame that makes the locust invasion eschatologically significant rather than merely historically catastrophic, and closes with the prophet's own cry and the animals' panting cry together establishing the cosmic scope of the disaster and the full-creation scope of the lamentation that ascends from it toward the LORD who alone can address it.**

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Joel chapter 1 having been called to the lamentation that this chapter makes available as the proper response to the unprecedented disaster that Joel is addressing. We have heard the call to the drunkards and the priests and the farmers and the whole community. We have been confronted with the theological center of the chapter: the grain offering and the drink offering cut off from the house of the LORD, the liturgical disability that is the deepest form of the agricultural disaster. We have received the introduction of the day of the LORD as the eschatological frame that makes the locust invasion not merely a local crisis but a sign of something larger. And we have heard the prophet cry out and the beasts pant and the whole creation groan toward the God who is the only possible source of the restoration that the second and third chapters will promise.

Lord, form in us the capacity for honest lamentation that this chapter models. Not the managed grief that maintains the appearance of composure while the disaster continues, but the sackcloth and the all-night vigil and the solemn assembly and the crying out that acknowledges the full severity of what has happened and brings it into Your presence without the diplomatic softening that would make the lamentation more comfortable but less honest. Let us gird on sackcloth. Let us lie all night in the posture of mourning. Let us sanctify the fast and call the assembly and gather the elders and all the inhabitants and cry unto the LORD.

And let the day of the LORD be the theological frame within which we read the disasters of our own time — not with the anxiety of those who have no hope, but with the sobriety of those who understand that the crises of the present age are the nearness of the day that You have appointed for the decisive vindication of Your purposes. Hear the cry of Your people. Hear the cry of the creation that groans with us. And prepare us for the restoration that the second chapter will promise when the lamentation of the first chapter has been honestly and fully expressed.

Introduction to Joel Chapter 2

The Army of the LORD, the Return with the Whole Heart, and the Promise of the Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh

Joel chapter 2 is the theological and literary summit of the book. Chapter 1 called the community to lamentation over an agricultural disaster of unprecedented scope; chapter 2 opens by vastly escalating that disaster into a cosmic, eschatological vision of the army of the LORD advancing on Zion, before pivoting in the middle of the chapter to the most urgent call to genuine repentance in the prophetic literature, and then unfolding into the most comprehensive promises of restoration in the book. The chapter covers, in thirty-two verses, the full arc from the most terrifying vision of divine judgment to the most generous promise of divine renewal.

The chapter moves through four distinct but interconnected movements. The first (verses 1–11) is the vision of the eschatological army — the locust army of chapter 1 described now in cosmic and military terms, advancing in irresistible order, darkening the heavens, causing the earth to quake and the sky to tremble, with the LORD at its head. This is among the most vivid and most terrifying passages in the Old Testament prophetic literature: the day of the LORD rendered in the specific imagery of an unstoppable military advance in which the earth itself participates in the trembling. The second movement (verses 12–17) is the sudden and urgent pivot to the invitation of return: yet even now, declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. The third movement (verses 18–27) is the divine response to the return — the jealous love of the LORD for His land and people expressed in the promise of the grain, wine, oil, rain, restored years, and the declaration that He is in the midst of Israel. The fourth movement (verses 28–32) is the most far-reaching promise of all: the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, the signs in the heavens and earth, and the salvation of all who call on the name of the LORD.

The most theologically significant passage in the chapter — and arguably in the entire book — is the promise of verses 28–32, which Peter quotes in full at Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21) as the interpretive key for the outpouring of the Spirit: And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. The pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh — without distinction of gender, age, or social status — is the eschatological reversal of every limitation that had characterized the Spirit's work in the Old Testament period, when the Spirit came upon specific individuals for specific purposes. At Pentecost, Peter declares that what has happened in the upper room is the beginning of Joel's prophecy — that the last days have arrived, and the Spirit's universal outpouring has begun.

The chapter's central section — the call to return in verses 12–17 — is the pastoral heart of the book. The yet even now of verse 12 is the most important phrase in the chapter: even now, in the face of the eschatological army of verses 1–11, the return is still possible. The window of repentance has not closed. The invitation to return with the whole heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning, with the rending of the heart rather than the garments, is the most direct and the most urgent call to genuine repentance in Joel. The appeal to the character of God — he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger,

and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster — is the ground on which the call to repentance rests: not human worthiness but divine character.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Joel chapter 2 as people who need both the terror and the tenderness that this chapter holds together. We need the vision of the eschatological army advancing in irresistible order — not because we enjoy terror but because the chapter's invitation to return only has its proper urgency against the backdrop of the judgment that is advancing. The yet even now only means what it means when we have received the terrifying vision that precedes it.

Lord, let the call to return with the whole heart — not merely the garments, but the heart itself — be the word that pierces through the managed, exterior religion that performs the gestures of repentance without the inner transformation that genuine repentance requires. Rend the heart. Not the garments. The garments are the visible, performable, social evidence of the religious sentiment; the heart is the actual seat of the will, the affections, and the allegiance that You are calling for. Let the rending happen where it must happen.

And let the promise of the Spirit poured out on all flesh be received in all its eschatological fullness — not as a theological proposition about a distant future, but as the present reality that Pentecost inaugurated and that every generation of the Spirit-filled community participates in. The sons and daughters prophesying, the old men dreaming, the young men seeing visions, the servants of both sexes receiving the Spirit — this is the community You are forming. Form us toward it.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joel 2:1–11

The Army of the LORD: The Eschatological Vision of the Day Advancing in Irresistible Order

*(1) Blow ye the trumpet in Zion,
and sound an alarm in my holy mountain:
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble:
for the day of the LORD cometh,*

for it is nigh at hand;

*(2) A day of darkness and of gloominess,
a day of clouds and of thick darkness,
as the morning spread upon the mountains:
a great people and a strong;
there hath not been ever the like,
neither shall be any more after it,
even to the years of many generations.*

*(3) A fire devoureth before them;
and behind them a flame burneth:
the land is as the garden of Eden before them,
and behind them a desolate wilderness;
yea, and nothing shall escape them.*

*(4) The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses;
and as horsemen, so shall they run.*

*(5) Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap,
like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble,
as a strong people set in battle array.*

*(6) Before their face the people shall be much pained:
all faces shall gather blackness.*

*(7) They shall run like mighty men;
they shall climb the wall like men of war;
and they shall march every one on his ways,
and they shall not break their ranks:*

*(8) Neither shall one thrust another;
they shall walk every one in his path:
and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded.*

*(9) They shall run to and fro in the city;
they shall run upon the wall,
they shall climb up upon the houses;
they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.*

*(10) The earth shall quake before them;
the heavens shall tremble:
the sun and the moon shall be dark,
and the stars shall withdraw their shining:*

*(11) And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army:
for his camp is very great:
for he is strong that executeth his word:*

*and the day of the LORD is great and very terrible;
and who can abide it?*

The Context

The chapter opens with the alarm trumpet — the shofar blast that signals military danger from the walls of the city. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain. The trumpet in Zion would have been recognizable to every Israelite as the signal of approaching military threat, and Joel deploys it to announce the advancing day of the LORD, which he has already introduced at the end of chapter 1. The alarm summons the community to the awareness of what is coming; the let all the inhabitants of the land tremble is the appropriate response to what the alarm announces.

The description of the day in verse 2 piles darkness on darkness — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like blackness spread upon the mountains. The darkness is not mere meteorological description but theological symbol: the day of the LORD approaches in obscurity that mirrors the obscurity of judgment itself, the opaque darkness of the divine intervention that cannot be anticipated or managed. And the army advancing in the darkness — great and powerful, like nothing that has been or will be again — is described in verse 3 with the most dramatic of the chapter's contrasts: the land before them is like the garden of Eden, and behind them is a desolate wilderness; nothing escapes them.

The military descriptions of verses 4–9 are among the most vivid in prophetic literature. The locusts move with the appearance of horses, run like horsemen, leap like the noise of chariots on the mountaintops, sound like the crackling of fire consuming stubble. They run like warriors, climb walls like soldiers, march without breaking ranks, do not jostle one another, cannot be wounded by the sword, run through the city and climb the walls and enter the houses through the windows. The disciplined, unstoppable, irresistible advance of the army is the central image of the passage: this is not a disorganized mob but a coordinated force whose order is itself part of its terror.

The cosmic dimension of verse 10 — the earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, the stars withdraw their shining — lifts the description from the merely military to the eschatological. The locust army is not simply an overwhelming military force; it is a cosmic event, a disruption of the created order that accompanies the advance of the day of the LORD. And verse 11 gives the most important statement of the entire passage: the LORD utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly large; he who executes his word is powerful. The day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it? The army is the LORD's army. The judgment is the LORD's judgment. The question who can endure it? is the rhetorical preparation for the answer that verses 12–17 will provide: the one who returns to the LORD can endure, because the LORD relents over disaster for those who return.

Plain American English

Sound the alarm! Blow the ram's horn on Mount Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let everyone in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming — it is near! It is a day of darkness and gloom, of black clouds and deep shadow. Like the dawn spreading over the mountains, a great and powerful army comes. Nothing like it has ever been seen before, and nothing like it will be seen again for many generations. Fire goes ahead of them, and flames follow behind them. The land ahead of them is like the Garden of Eden, but behind them it is a desolate wasteland; nothing escapes them. They look like horses; they run like warhorses. They leap over mountaintops, rattling like chariots, roaring like fire as it consumes stubble, like a mighty army ready for battle. The people tremble before them; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They march in line without breaking formation. They don't push each other aside; every one marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without stopping. They rush into the city and run along the walls. They break into every house and climb through the windows like thieves. The earth quakes before them and the sky trembles. The sun and moon go dark, and the stars stop shining. The LORD thunders at the head of his army. His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great and dreadful. Who can possibly survive?

Key Observations

“A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains”: This signifies **The Fourfold Darkness Is the Theological Symbol of the Day of the LORD as the Opaque, Unmanageable Divine Intervention That Approaches Like the Dawn Itself — Unstoppable and All-Encompassing.**

The accumulation of darkness terms — darkness, gloom, clouds, thick darkness — is the prophetic tradition's way of describing the day of the LORD as the reversal of the created order that began with light. The day that approaches in such darkness is not a day that the community can see clearly or prepare for adequately; it arrives in the obscurity that the divine judgment always carries with it. And the like the dawn spreading over the mountains is the most paradoxical element: the darkness arrives with the inevitability and the comprehensiveness of the dawn. The advance of the judgment cannot be stopped any more than the dawn can be stopped, and it covers the mountains with the same thoroughness. Joel is using the familiar to describe the unfamiliar: the dawn everyone knows becomes the image of the darkness that everyone must fear.

“The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them”: This signifies **The Garden-to-Wilderness Contrast Is the Most Comprehensive Available Statement of the Army's Total Consumption — the Created Order in Its Most Abundant Form Is Reduced to Its Most Desolate Form, and Nothing Survives the Passage.**

The garden of Eden before them and the desolate wilderness behind them is the most concentrated available image of total consumption in the chapter. The garden of Eden is the pinnacle of the created order's abundance — the fullest expression of the land's productive capacity. The desolate wilderness is its polar opposite. The army of the LORD's day passes through the garden and leaves the wilderness: the complete transformation of abundance into desolation is the measure of the judgment's comprehensiveness. And nothing shall escape them — the same completeness that the four-fold locust description of chapter 1:4 enacted in successive waves is here stated as a single absolute: there is no remnant of the garden left behind.

“They shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path”: This signifies **The Irresistible Military Order of the Advancing Army Is the Most Terrifying Feature of the Vision — the Judgment That Cannot Be Disrupted, Diverted, or Resisted Because Its Order Is the Order of the LORD Who Commands It.**

The disciplined order of the advancing army — each soldier marching without breaking ranks, without jostling the one next to him, without being wounded even by the sword — is the feature of the vision that most directly expresses the irresistibility of the divine judgment. A disorganized army can be disrupted; flanks can be turned, formations broken, advances halted. But an army that cannot be jostled out of its ranks, cannot be wounded, cannot be stopped by the walls or the houses of the city, cannot be diverted from its ordered advance — this army cannot be resisted. The order is itself the terror. And the order is the LORD’s: he who executes his word is powerful; the army executes the LORD’s word with the precision and the irresistibility of the divine command.

“And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: and the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”: This signifies **The Closing Question Is the Rhetorical Hinge of the Chapter — Who Can Endure? Is Not the Question of Despair but the Question That Prepares the Pivot to the Answer of Verses 12–17.**

The who can endure it? of verse 11 is one of the most important rhetorical questions in the prophetic literature, and its function is entirely determined by what follows it. In isolation, it would be the question of despair: the day is so terrible that no one can survive. But it is not in isolation; it is the hinge on which the chapter turns from the vision of the advancing army (verses 1–11) to the urgent invitation to return (verses 12–17). The answer to who can endure it? is: the one who returns to the LORD. The terrifying vision is not the final word; it is the context that gives the invitation its urgency. The question is the pastoral preparation for the answer.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Vision of the Day of the LORD in Its Full Terrifying Scope as the Necessary Context for the Urgency of the Invitation to Return That Follows It: The temptation of contemporary preaching is to soften or skip the terrifying vision of verses 1–11 and move directly to the gracious invitation of verses 12–17. But the invitation has its urgency precisely because of the vision that precedes it. The yet even now of verse 12 only carries its proper weight when the hearer has been confronted with the advancing army and the darkened heavens and the earth quaking and the question who can endure? The pastoral wisdom of Joel’s structure is the pastoral wisdom of not softening the diagnosis before offering the cure: the cure is only received with the seriousness it requires when the diagnosis has been received with the seriousness it demands.

2. Read the Irresistible Order of the Advancing Army as the Theological Declaration That the Day of the LORD Cannot Be Managed, Negotiated, or Resisted — Only Responded to with the Response That the LORD Himself Provides: The army that cannot be jostled out of its ranks, cannot be wounded by the sword, cannot be stopped by the walls of the city is the image of the divine judgment as something that exceeds every human capacity for management or resistance. Contemporary communities of faith that approach the judgment of God with the confidence that their theological sophistication, their institutional resources, or their strategic positioning will protect them

from the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness have not yet understood the irresistible army of verses 7–9. The only response that works is the response that verses 12–17 will provide: the return to the LORD who relents over disaster.

How This Relates to Today

The cosmic dimension of verses 10–11 — the earth quaking, the heavens trembling, the sun and moon darkened, the stars withdrawing their light — is the language that the New Testament uses to describe the events surrounding the crucifixion (Matthew 27:45, the sun darkened) and the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:29, quoting the Isaiah background). Joel's cosmic language is taken up and fulfilled in the New Testament's description of the eschatological events that the cross and the return inaugurate and complete. The locust army advancing before the darkened heavens is the Old Testament's anticipation of the comprehensive divine intervention that the crucifixion and the return of Christ represent: the day that darkness covers the earth at noon and the stars withdraw their light.

The garden-to-wilderness contrast of verse 3 also anticipates the Revelation's vision of the destroying angels passing through the earth — the systematic removal of the created order's abundance before the new creation that Revelation 21–22 describes. Joel's army leaving a desolate wilderness where Eden was is the precursor to the eschatological clearing that must precede the new creation. The wilderness is not the final state; but it is the necessary passage through which the day of the LORD moves before the restoration of chapters 2 and 3 can be accomplished.

Key Lesson: **The vision of the eschatological army in verses 1–11 is the most terrifying passage in the book — the day of the LORD advancing in irresistible military order, darkening the heavens, transforming Eden into wilderness, leaving nothing in its wake — and its function is entirely pastoral: the who can endure it? of verse 11 is the rhetorical hinge that prepares the pivot to the yet even now of verse 12, establishing that the urgency of the invitation to return is inseparable from the terrifying vision of what advances if the return is not made.**

Joel 2:12–17

Return to Me with All Your Heart: The Urgent Invitation, the Character of God, and the Priestly Intercession

*(12) Therefore also now, saith the LORD,
turn ye even to me with all your heart,
and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:
(13) And rend your heart, and not your garments,
and turn unto the LORD your God:
for he is gracious and merciful,*

*slow to anger, and of great kindness,
and repenteth him of the evil.
(14) Who knoweth if he will return and repent,
and leave a blessing behind him;
even a meat offering and a drink offering
unto the LORD your God?
(15) Blow the trumpet in Zion,
sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:
(16) Gather the people, sanctify the congregation,
assemble the elders,
gather the children, and those that suck the breasts:
let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber,
and the bride out of her closet.
(17) Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD,
weep between the porch and the altar,
and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD,
and give not thine heritage to reproach,
that the heathen should rule over them:
wherefore should they say among the people,
Where is their God?*

The Context

The yet even now of verse 12 is the most important phrase in the chapter and among the most important in the book. Even now — even in the face of the advancing army of verses 1–11, even with the day of the LORD near, even with the who can endure? of verse 11 hanging in the air — the invitation to return is still open. The window of repentance has not closed. The return is still possible. And the God who invites the return is named in verse 13 with the four attributes that have grounded the theology of divine mercy since Exodus 34:6: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love (hesed), and relenting over disaster. This is the theological warrant for the invitation: not the worthiness of those being invited but the character of the One who invites.

The rend your hearts and not your garments of verse 13 is the single most important distinction in the chapter for understanding what the genuine return looks like. The tearing of garments was the visible, public, external expression of grief in the ancient Near East — the performable, observable demonstration that the mourner is in mourning. Joel does not reject this practice; he insists on what must accompany it: the rending of the heart. The heart in Hebrew thought is the center of the will, the affections, and the moral allegiance of the person. The rending of the heart is the breaking of the interior self toward the LORD — the genuine transformation of the inner life rather than the performance of the external gesture. Garment-tearing without heart-tearing is the religious performance of repentance without the repentance itself.

The who knows whether he will turn and relent of verse 14 is one of the most theologically interesting phrases in the chapter. After the confident appeal to the divine character in verse 13 — he is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relents over disaster — the who knows might seem to undercut that confidence. But the who knows is not skepticism about the divine character; it is the pastoral realism about the divine sovereignty. The character of God makes the return worth attempting; the sovereignty of God means that the outcome of the return remains in the divine freedom. The community that returns does so because the divine character makes it worth returning, not because the return is a contractual transaction that guarantees a specific outcome. The who knows is humility before the divine freedom, not doubt about the divine goodness.

Verses 15–17 describe the solemn assembly in its fullest form: the trumpet blown again (cf. the trumpet of verse 1 blown for alarm; now it is blown for assembly), the fast sanctified, the congregation sanctified, the elders assembled, the children gathered, even the nursing infants brought, the bridegroom called from his chamber and the bride from her room. The suspension of the wedding — the most joyful of all human celebrations — for the solemn assembly is the measure of the seriousness of the occasion. Nothing takes precedence over the assembly before the LORD in this moment of national crisis. And the priestly intercession of verse 17 — spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations — is the specific content of the cry: the appeal is not merely for the community’s survival but for the honor of the God whose people the community is. The nations watching the destruction of Israel would draw the conclusion Where is their God? — and the vindication of the LORD’s honor among the nations is the theological urgency behind the priestly appeal.

Plain American English

“But even now,” says the LORD, “turn to me with your whole heart. Fast and weep and mourn for your sins. Tear your heart open, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God. He is gracious and compassionate, patient and overflowing with love. He is always willing to change his plans for disaster. Who knows? He might turn and show pity and leave some blessing for you — enough for grain and drink offerings for the LORD your God.” Blow the trumpet throughout Zion! Announce a sacred fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather all the people. Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders. Gather the children and nursing infants. Call the bridegroom out from his suite and the bride out from her chambers. Let the priests who serve the LORD weep between the entrance hall and the altar. Let them pray: “Spare your people, LORD! Don’t let your people be disgraced. Don’t let other nations mock them and taunt, ‘Where is their God?’”

Key Observations

“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart”: This signifies **The Yet Even Now Is the Most Pastorally Significant Phrase in the Chapter — the Invitation Remains Open in the Face of the Advancing Army, and the Window of Repentance Has Not Closed.**

The yet even now is the phrase that transforms the entire vision of verses 1–11 from a message of pure terror into a pastoral message of urgent invitation. Even now, even at this moment of apparent hopelessness, even with the army advancing and the heavens darkening and the earth quaking — even now, the return is possible. The invitation has not been withdrawn. The LORD who announced the advancing army is the same LORD who now issues the invitation to return. The terrifying vision and the gracious invitation come from the same mouth, and the yet even now is the hinge between them. The pastoral wisdom is: the vision of the judgment makes the invitation urgent; the invitation makes the vision of the judgment something other than despair. Remove either element and both lose their power.

“Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God”: This signifies **The Most Important Distinction in the Chapter Is Between the External Performance of Repentance and the Internal Transformation That Genuine Repentance Requires — Garment-Tearing Without Heart-Tearing Is the Form Without the Substance.**

The rend your hearts and not your garments is the central pastoral instruction of the section and one of the most enduring diagnostic sentences in the prophetic literature. The rending of garments was not a meaningless ritual — it was the authentic expression of grief in the ancient Near Eastern cultural context, and Joel is not dismissing it. What he is insisting on is the interior dimension that the exterior gesture must express and must not substitute for. The danger that this verse addresses is the religious performance of the repentance — the doing of the visible things that repentance looks like without the doing of the inner thing that repentance is. The contemporary equivalent is any form of religious observance that performs the exterior markers of the covenant life without the interior transformation of the will, the affections, and the allegiance toward the LORD that genuine covenant life requires. Rend the heart.

“For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil”: This signifies **The Theological Warrant for the Return Is Not Human Worthiness but the Divine Character — the Appeal to the Exodus 34 Attributes Is the Ground That Makes the Return Worth Attempting.**

The fourfold description of the divine character in verse 13 — gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love — is the direct quotation of the divine self-disclosure at Sinai in Exodus 34:6–7, the theological bedrock of the Old Testament’s understanding of who the LORD is. Every subsequent appeal in the prophetic and wisdom literature to the divine mercy is grounded in this self-disclosure, and Joel deploys it as the explicit warrant for the invitation to return. The community is being invited to return not because it has earned the right to return, not because its repentance will be adequate, but because the character of the God to whom it is returning is such that the returning is worth attempting. The theological warrant is entirely on the divine side: the gracious, merciful, patient, loving, relenting God is the reason to return, not the community’s performance.

“Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet”: This signifies **The Suspension of the Wedding Celebration for the Solemn Assembly Is the Measure of the Occasion’s Seriousness — Nothing, Not Even the Most Joyful Human Celebration, Takes Precedence Over the Corporate Return to the LORD in This Moment of Crisis.**

The calling of the bridegroom from his chamber and the bride from her room is the measure of the comprehensiveness of the assembly that Joel is calling for. The wedding was the most joyful and the most socially significant celebration in the ancient Near Eastern world — the occasion that superseded all other obligations, that justified the temporary suspension of military service (Deuteronomy 24:5),

that organized the community's celebration around the union of two people. That even the wedding is suspended for the solemn assembly is the clearest available statement of what the moment requires: nothing takes precedence over the corporate return to the LORD. The community that makes exceptions for the most joyful occasions has not yet understood the seriousness of the crisis that the assembly is being called to address.

“Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?”: This signifies The Priestly Intercession Appeals to the Honor of the LORD Among the Nations as the Deepest Theological Motivation for the Divine Response — the Community's Survival Is Bound Up with the Vindication of the LORD's Name.

The where is their God? of verse 17 is the most theologically motivated element of the priestly prayer. The appeal for the community's survival is not grounded primarily in the community's desire to survive but in the consequence for the LORD's reputation among the nations if the community is destroyed. The nations watching the destruction of the LORD's people would conclude that the LORD is either absent, indifferent, or powerless — and this conclusion would dishonor the name of the God who has staked His reputation on the covenant with this people. The priestly intercession is the most theologically sophisticated available: it appeals to the divine self-interest in the vindication of His own name among the nations, a motivation that Moses used successfully in the wilderness (Numbers 14:13–16) and that undergirds Ezekiel's theology of the restoration (Ezekiel 36:22–23).

What This Means for Us Today

- 1. Receive the Yet Even Now as the Permanent Pastoral Declaration That the Window of Return Remains Open Regardless of the Severity of the Advancing Judgment:** The yet even now is the phrase that the community of faith most needs to hear in its seasons of deepest crisis. When the advancing army of the divine judgment seems most irresistible, when the damage most comprehensive, when the community's spiritual condition most dire — even now, the invitation to return is open. The character of the God who invites the return has not changed. The gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love character of Exodus 34 is still the ground on which the invitation stands. The worst seasons of spiritual crisis are precisely the seasons in which the yet even now needs to be heard most clearly and most urgently.
- 2. Diagnose the Gap Between Garment-Tearing and Heart-Tearing in Your Own Spiritual Practice and in the Communities You Lead:** The rend your hearts and not your garments is the standing diagnostic for every form of religious practice that performs the exterior markers of covenant life without the interior transformation that genuine covenant life requires. The contemporary equivalents of garment-tearing are the forms of religious observance that are visible, performable, and socially effective as demonstrations of the religious sentiment: church attendance, public prayer, theological correctness, the language of repentance and return. None of these is wrong in itself; each becomes wrong when it substitutes for rather than expresses the inner rending of the heart toward the LORD. The diagnostic question is honest and searching: is the exterior performance expressing the interior reality, or has the exterior performance been allowed to substitute for it?
- 3. Hold Together the Confidence in the Divine Character and the Humility of the Who Knows as the Posture of Genuine Repentance — Confident That the Character of God Makes the Return Worthwhile, Humble That the Outcome Remains in the Divine Freedom:** The confidence of verse 13 (he is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relents over disaster) and

the humility of verse 14 (who knows whether he will turn and relent?) must be held together as the proper posture of repentance. The confidence makes the return worth attempting. The humility prevents the return from becoming a contractual transaction that treats the divine mercy as a guaranteed outcome of the right religious performance. Genuine repentance approaches God because His character makes it worth approaching, while remaining open to whatever response the divine freedom and wisdom determine is appropriate. Neither confidence alone nor humility alone captures the posture that Joel models.

How This Relates to Today

The rend your hearts and not your garments has become one of the most quoted lines in the biblical call to repentance precisely because it names the most universal temptation of the religious life: the substitution of the performable exterior for the transforming interior. Every generation of the covenant community has its version of the garments that can be torn without the heart being touched — the religious practices that can be performed without the inner allegiance and affection and will being directed toward the LORD. The verse is not a call to abandon the exterior forms but to ensure that they are expressing rather than substituting for the interior reality.

The priestly prayer of verse 17 — where is their God? — also anticipates the theological motivation that Jesus will use when he teaches his disciples to pray that the Father’s name be hallowed and the Father’s kingdom come. The community’s welfare and the LORD’s reputation are bound up together in the covenant relationship, and the most theologically sophisticated prayer is the prayer that appeals to the divine self-interest in the vindication of His own name. This is not manipulation but the proper alignment of human petition with the deepest divine motivation: the glory of the LORD among the nations is the frame within which every other petition finds its proper place.

Key Lesson: **The call to return in verses 12–17 is the pastoral heart of the book: the yet even now that keeps the window of repentance open in the face of the advancing army, the rend your hearts and not your garments that distinguishes the interior transformation from the exterior performance, the appeal to the gracious, merciful, slow-to-anger character of God as the warrant for the return, and the priestly intercession that grounds the appeal for the community’s survival in the vindication of the LORD’s name among the nations.**

Joel 2:18–27

The Divine Response: Jealous Love, Restored Years, and God in the Midst of Israel

*(18) Then will the LORD be jealous for his land,
and pity his people.*

*(19) Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people,
Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil,*

*and ye shall be satisfied therewith:
and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen:
(20) But I will remove far off from you the northern army,
and will drive him into a land barren and desolate,
with his face toward the east sea,
and his hinder part toward the utmost sea,
and his stink shall come up,
and his ill savour shall come up,
because he hath done great things.
(21) Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice:
for the LORD will do great things.
(22) Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field:
for the pastures of the wilderness do spring,
for the tree beareth her fruit,
the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.
(23) Be glad then, ye children of Zion,
and rejoice in the LORD your God:
for he hath given you the former rain moderately,
and he will cause to come down for you the rain,
the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.
(24) And the floors shall be full of wheat,
and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil.
(25) And I will restore to you the years
that the locust hath eaten,
the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm,
my great army which I sent among you.
(26) And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
that hath dealt wondrously with you:
and my people shall never be ashamed.
(27) And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the LORD your God, and none else:
and my people shall never be ashamed.*

The Context

The then will the LORD be jealous for his land of verse 18 is the divine response to the corporate repentance that verses 12–17 called for. The divine jealousy is not the jealousy of insecurity but the

jealousy of covenant love — the passionate, exclusive, protective love that the covenant relationship generates in the God who has bound Himself to this people and this land. The pity for His people is the compassionate response of the God whose character verse 13 has just declared: the gracious, merciful, loving God relents over disaster when the people return to Him with their whole heart. The divine response is not reluctant; it is the outpouring of the character that was appealed to in the invitation.

The promises of verses 19–24 are the restoration of exactly what the locust invasion has consumed: grain, wine, and oil (the three staples that the locust destroyed), the removal of the northern army, the revival of the wilderness pastures and the fruit trees and the vines, the former and latter rain, the threshing floors full of grain, the vats overflowing with wine and oil. The restoration is item by item and category by category: everything that the locusts consumed, the LORD promises to restore. The four locusts of chapter 1:4 are matched by the four-fold restoration of chapter 2:25, and the completeness of the restoration corresponds to the completeness of the destruction.

The most famous verse in the section — and one of the most famous in the entire book — is verse 25: I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. The four locusts of the destruction become the four locusts of the restoration: the years that each wave consumed will be given back. The restoration is not merely of the present year's harvest but of the years — the accumulated time of the devastation, the seasons of loss that have piled up under the successive waves. And my great army, which I sent among you is the acknowledgment that the locust army of judgment was the LORD's own instrument — the same LORD who sent the army now promises to restore what the army consumed.

The climax of the section is verses 26–27: you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. The double declaration of never again be ashamed, bracketing the central theological statement I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else, is the restoration of the covenant relationship in its fullest form: the divine presence, the exclusive divine claim (and there is none else), and the community's permanent deliverance from the shame that the disaster had produced.

Plain American English

Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. The LORD replied to his people: "Look, I am going to send you grain, new wine, and olive oil — enough to fully satisfy you. I will no longer let other nations mock you. I will drive the northern army far away from you. I will push it into a dry, desolate land, with part of it going into the Dead Sea in the east and part into the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The stench of the army's rotting bodies will rise and spread across the land, because they have done monstrous things." Don't be afraid, land — be glad and rejoice, because the LORD has done great things! Don't be afraid, animals! The wilderness pastures are turning green again. The trees are bearing fruit. The fig trees and grapevines are yielding their harvest. Be glad, people of Jerusalem! Rejoice in the LORD your God! For the rains he sends demonstrate his faithfulness. He sends the spring rain and the autumn rain as before. The threshing floors will again be

piled with grain, and the presses will overflow with new wine and olive oil. I will give you back what you lost in the years the locusts ate your crops — that great army of locusts I sent against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the LORD your God, who does these miracles for you. Never again will my people be disgraced. Then you will know that I am among my people Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other. Never again will my people be disgraced.

Key Observations

“Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people”: This signifies **The Divine Jealousy Is the Passionate Protective Covenant Love That the Return Has Activated — Not the Jealousy of Insecurity but the Exclusive Devotion of the Faithful Covenant Partner.**

The divine jealousy (qin‘ah) for the land is one of the most striking expressions of the divine emotional life in the Old Testament. The jealousy is not the petty insecurity of a deity who fears competition; it is the fierce, exclusive, protective love of the covenant God who has bound Himself to this land and these people and who will not allow them to be permanently destroyed or permanently shamed. The jealousy is the passionate dimension of the hesed that verse 13 named as the divine character — the love that has a heat to it, a fierceness, a willingness to intervene on behalf of the beloved. When the people return with the whole heart that verse 12 called for, they activate this jealous love, and its expression is the promise of restoration that verses 19–27 contain.

“I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you”: This signifies **The Most Famous Promise of the Section Matches the Fourfold Destruction of Chapter 1 with the Fourfold Restoration — the Years of the Consuming Are Given Back, and the Completeness of the Restoration Corresponds to the Completeness of the Devastation.**

The I will restore to you the years is the most comprehensive promise of restoration available in the book. Not the harvest, but the years — the accumulated time of the devastation, the seasons that have been lost to the successive waves of the consuming army. The four locusts of chapter 1:4 — the swarming, hopping, destroying, cutting — are now named again in the promise of restoration: everything they consumed over the years of the devastation will be restored. And the my great army which I sent among you is the divine acknowledgment that the locust invasion was the LORD’s own instrument of judgment — the same divine sovereignty that sent the army now exercises itself in the restoration of what the army consumed. The God who brought the judgment is the God who brings the restoration.

“And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed”: This signifies **The Climax of the Restoration Promise Is the Renewed Presence and the Renewed Exclusive Covenant Claim — the Double Never Again Be Ashamed Bracketing the Theological Center Is the Covenant Restored in Its Fullest Form.**

The I am in the midst of Israel is the covenant presence formula in its most direct form — the declaration that the LORD who appeared to have withdrawn (implicitly, in the disaster) is now declaring His renewed indwelling of His people. And the I am the LORD your God and there is none else is the exclusive covenant claim that the return has re-established: the people who have returned

with the whole heart and been restored by the jealous love of the LORD now stand again in the exclusive covenant relationship that the monotheistic declaration embodies. The double never again be ashamed — appearing once in verse 26 and once in verse 27, bracketing the theological center of verse 27 — is the most comprehensive available statement of the restoration's outcome: not merely the return of the agricultural abundance, but the permanent removal of the shame that the disaster had produced and the nations had exploited.

What This Means for Us Today

- 1. Receive the Promise of Restored Years as the Most Comprehensive Available Statement of What the Divine Restoration Offers — Not Merely the Present Harvest but the Accumulated Time of the Loss:** The I will restore to you the years is one of the most personally applicable promises in the prophetic literature for individuals and communities who have experienced extended seasons of loss, desolation, or spiritual poverty. The promise is not limited to the restoration of the next season's harvest; it addresses the accumulated years of the devastation. The community or the individual that has been through years of the successive locusts — one wave of loss after another, consuming what the previous wave left — is addressed by a promise of restoration that matches the scope of the loss. The years given back are the measure of the years consumed.
- 2. Read the I Am in the Midst of Israel as the Covenant Presence Restored to Its Fullest Form — and Measure the Health of the Community's Covenant Life by Whether the Presence Is Experienced as Real Rather Than Formal:** The I am in the midst of Israel is the theological destination of the entire restoration section: not merely the restored grain, wine, and oil, but the renewed awareness of the divine presence at the center of the community's life. The community whose restoration has produced only the material abundance without the renewed experience of the divine presence dwelling in the midst has received the lesser part of the promise. The full restoration is the agricultural abundance as the sign of the presence, and the presence as the ultimate ground of the never again be ashamed.
- 3. Recognize That the God Who Sent the Locust Army Is the God Who Promises the Restoration — the Same Divine Sovereignty That Administered the Judgment Administers the Recovery:** The my great army which I sent among you of verse 25 is the divine acknowledgment of the sovereignty over the judgment that the promise of restoration now exercises over the recovery. The community that has understood that the judgment was the LORD's instrument and not a random natural event has the theological framework for understanding the restoration as the LORD's act and not a natural improvement in agricultural conditions. The same sovereignty that sent the locusts restores the years the locusts consumed. This is the theological framework that makes the promise of verse 25 coherent: only the One who sent the army can restore what the army consumed.

How This Relates to Today

The I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten is one of the most widely applied promises in contemporary Christian devotional life, often used as a promise of restoration after personal loss, addiction, broken relationships, or wasted years. The pastoral wisdom of this application is sound: the promise of the God who restores what the locust has consumed is genuinely applicable beyond the original agricultural context. The caution is the same that applies to all such applications: the promise is

addressed to the community that has genuinely returned with the whole heart (verse 12), whose return has been the interior transformation of verse 13 rather than the performance of the exterior gesture. The years are restored to the community that has genuinely returned, not to the community that has performed the return without the heart-rending that genuine return requires.

The never again be ashamed that appears twice in verses 26–27, bracketing the theological center, is the Old Testament form of the promise that Paul makes in Romans 10:11 (quoting Isaiah 28:16): everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. The shame that the covenant people experience when the disaster makes the nations ask Where is their God? is the shame that the divine presence in the midst and the divine exclusivity (I am the LORD your God and there is none else) permanently removes. The community that knows the LORD is in its midst and that He is the LORD its God and there is none else has no basis for shame, regardless of what the surrounding nations say.

Key Lesson: **The divine response in verses 18–27 is the jealous covenant love activated by the return, expressed in the restoration of everything the locust consumed — grain, wine, oil, years — and reaching its climax in the covenant presence restored and the covenant exclusivity re-established: I am in the midst of Israel, I am the LORD your God and none else, my people shall never again be ashamed; the completeness of the restoration matches the completeness of the devastation, and the theological center is not the agricultural abundance but the renewed presence of the God who sent the army and now gives back the years it consumed.**

Joel 2:28–32

I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All Flesh: The Eschatological Promise of the Universal Outpouring

*(28) And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh;
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
your young men shall see visions:
(29) And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids
in those days will I pour out my spirit.
(30) And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth,
blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.
(31) The sun shall be turned into darkness,
and the moon into blood,
before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.
(32) And it shall come to pass,
that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered:
for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance,*

*as the LORD hath said,
and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.*

The Context

The and it shall come to pass afterward of verse 28 signals the eschatological extension of the promises just made. The restoration of the agricultural abundance and the renewal of the covenant presence in verses 18–27 are the immediate, historical dimension of the divine response to the return. But the afterward points beyond the immediate restoration to the eschatological fulfillment that the immediate restoration anticipates. The Spirit’s universal outpouring — on all flesh, without distinction of gender (sons and daughters), age (old men, young men), or social status (servants and servant women) — is the eschatological reversal of the Spirit’s selective, temporary work in the Old Testament period.

The promise of verse 28–29 is the most far-reaching prophetic declaration about the Spirit in the entire Old Testament, and its significance cannot be overstated. In the Old Testament, the Spirit comes upon specific individuals — judges, prophets, kings — for specific purposes and often for specific periods. The democratization of the Spirit’s work — its extension to all flesh, to sons and daughters, to old and young, to servants of both genders — is the vision of a community in which the Spirit’s direct access is universal rather than mediated through a specific prophetic or priestly class. Moses’ wish (Numbers 11:29: Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!) is the Old Testament anticipation of what Joel promises will actually happen.

The signs in the heavens and earth of verses 30–31 — blood and fire and columns of smoke, the sun darkened, the moon turned to blood — are the cosmic accompaniments of the great and awesome day of the LORD. These are the same cosmic disturbances that appeared in verses 10–11 as the accompaniment of the advancing army, now appearing again as the signs that precede the final day. The eschatological signs are not new in themselves — they are the cosmic language of the divine intervention that the prophetic tradition had developed to describe the day of the LORD. What is new is their placement in the context of the Spirit’s outpouring: the signs occur in the same temporal frame as the Spirit’s work, establishing that the Spirit’s outpouring is itself an eschatological event.

Verse 32 is the most universally applicable promise of salvation in the Old Testament: and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. The Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:13 as the basis for the universal scope of the gospel: there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The everyone who calls is the salvific counterpart to the all flesh of verse 28: the Spirit poured out on all flesh produces the community of everyone who calls, and everyone who calls is saved. The eschatological universalism of the passage is not the universalism of guaranteed salvation for all, but the universalism of the offer: the call is open to all, and all who call are saved.

Plain American English

“Then, after all of this, I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, both men and women. And I will cause wonders in the sky and on the earth — blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before the great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. There will be people on Mount Zion in Jerusalem who escape, just as the LORD has promised. These will be among the survivors whom the LORD has called.”

Key Observations

“I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions”: This signifies **The Universal Outpouring of the Spirit Is the Eschatological Democratization of What Had Been Selective in the Old Testament Period — the Spirit Poured on All Without Distinction of Gender or Age.**

The I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh is the most radical prophetic statement about the Spirit in the Old Testament precisely because of the on all flesh. In the Old Testament period, the Spirit came selectively — on judges to deliver Israel from oppressors, on prophets to speak the word of the LORD, on kings to govern the covenant community. The selectivity was the theological structure of the Spirit’s work: the Spirit mediated through specific Spirit-filled individuals to the community that did not directly share the Spirit’s presence. Joel’s prophecy reverses this structure: the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, so that the sons and daughters will prophesy (a function previously restricted to prophets), the old men will dream (a mode of divine communication previously restricted to those who received divine visions), and the young men will see visions. The democratization of the Spirit’s work is the eschatological fulfillment of Moses’ wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets.

“And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit”: This signifies **The Extension of the Spirit’s Outpouring to the Servants and Servant Women Is the Demolition of the Social Barrier That in the Ancient World Most Completely Excluded People from the Religious Privileges of the Community — the Spirit Poured Out Without Social Distinction.**

The servants and servant women of verse 29 are the social category most completely excluded from the religious privileges and the prophetic functions of the ancient Near Eastern world. If the democratization of prophecy across gender lines (sons and daughters) and age lines (old and young) was radical, the extension to servants is even more so: the people who had no social standing, no legal rights, no access to the mechanisms of religious privilege are included in the universal outpouring. Peter’s emphasis on this element of the prophecy in Acts 2:18 — even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit — reflects the social significance of the inclusion: the Pentecost community that is the first fulfillment of this prophecy includes the most socially marginalized as recipients of the Spirit’s direct and equal work.

“Whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered”: This signifies **The Universal Offer of Salvation Is the Salvific Counterpart to the Universal Outpouring of the Spirit — All Who Call Are Saved, and the Scope of the Offer Matches the Scope of the Spirit’s Work.**

The whosoever calls is the salvific universalism of verse 32, and its quotation by both Peter (Acts 2:21) and Paul (Romans 10:13) as the basis for the universal gospel offer establishes it as one of the most

theologically significant verses in the Old Testament for the New Testament's self-understanding. The universal offer is not the guarantee of universal salvation; it is the removal of every barrier — ethnic, social, gender, age — that might limit the scope of the invitation. The Spirit poured out on all flesh creates the possibility of the call; the everyone who calls is saved receives the one who has called. The eschatological community is defined by the call, not by the prior social category of the caller.

“And in the remnant whom the LORD shall call”: This signifies **The Final Phrase Establishes That the Universal Offer and the Sovereign Election Are Both Present in the Promise — Everyone Who Calls Is Saved, and the Ones Who Call Are the Remnant Whom the LORD Has Called.**

The and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call at the end of verse 32 is the most theologically compressed statement of the divine sovereignty underlying the universal offer. The everyone who calls is saved (the breadth of the offer) and the whom the LORD has called (the depth of the election) are both present in the final verse, and they are not in tension but in the Pauline-theological relationship that Romans 10 will unfold: the universal offer is the means by which the sovereign call reaches all who are being called. The remnant whom the LORD calls are the people who, precisely because they have been called, call on the name of the LORD and are saved. The sovereignty and the universal offer are the inner and outer dimensions of the same eschatological event.

What This Means for Us Today

- 1. Receive the Universal Outpouring of the Spirit as the Present Eschatological Reality That Pentecost Inaugurated Rather Than as a Future Promise Still Awaited:** Peter's declaration at Pentecost — this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel — establishes that the outpouring of Joel 2:28–29 has begun. The last days have arrived. The Spirit has been poured out on all flesh. The community that reads Joel 2:28–29 as a future promise still awaiting its first fulfillment has not yet received the interpretation that Acts 2 provides: Pentecost is the beginning of the fulfillment, and every generation of the Spirit-filled community participates in the ongoing reality that Pentecost inaugurated. The sons and daughters prophesying, the old men dreaming, the young men seeing visions, the servants and servant women receiving the Spirit — this is the description of the community that Pentecost created and that continues in every community that has received the Pentecostal outpouring.
- 2. Examine Whether the Community's Practice of the Spirit's Gifts Reflects the Radical Inclusivity of the Promise — Gender, Age, and Social Status Have All Been Explicitly Demolished as Barriers to the Spirit's Work:** The explicit inclusion of sons and daughters, old and young, servants of both genders is the most specific available statement of the Spirit's work as radically inclusive of those whom the religious structures of the Old Testament period had largely excluded from direct prophetic access. The community that restricts the Spirit's manifestations to a specific gender, a specific age range, or a specific social class has not yet received the fullness of the Joel promise that Pentecost inaugurated. The pastoral question is not merely about formal church polity but about whether the community's actual practice of the Spirit's gifts reflects the radical democratization that Joel announces and Acts 2 begins.
- 3. Preach and Practice the Everyone Who Calls on the Name of the LORD Will Be Saved as the Basis of the Universal Gospel Offer — and Hold It Together with the Sovereign Election of the Remnant Whom the LORD Has Called:** The everyone of verse 32 is the warrant for the universal missionary offer of the gospel: there is no person to whom the gospel cannot be legitimately offered,

because the scope of the offer is everyone who calls. And the whom the LORD has called is the theological depth beneath the offer that prevents it from becoming a mere marketing campaign for human response: the call that the gospel extends is the vehicle of the sovereign call that produces the calling. Hold both together, as Paul does in Romans 10–11, and the evangelical urgency of the everyone who calls and the theological security of the whom the LORD has called are the twin supports of the missionary community's confidence.

How This Relates to Today

The outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh is one of the most contested and most generative promises in the prophetic literature for contemporary discussions about the Spirit's work in the church. Every major tradition of Christian theology — Pentecostal, charismatic, Reformed, Baptist, Catholic — finds itself engaging with Joel 2:28–29, whether to affirm its continuing direct fulfillment in the present community or to argue for its cessationist interpretation or to claim its fulfillment in the ongoing ministry of the word. The Acts 2 interpretation — this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel — is the New Testament's authoritative starting point for every subsequent engagement with the passage, and the community that reads Joel 2:28–29 must read it through the lens of what Peter declared was beginning to happen at Pentecost.

The everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved of verse 32 is also one of the most important ecumenical verses in Scripture, because it defines the saved community entirely by the act of calling rather than by ethnic origin, social status, theological tradition, or institutional membership. Paul's use of the verse in Romans 10:13 to ground the universal missionary obligation of the church establishes it as one of the primary Old Testament texts for the theology of missions: the everyone who calls is saved is the reason why the church goes to everyone, because everyone who calls is saved, and the call requires the hearing, and the hearing requires the sending.

Key Lesson: **The eschatological promise of verses 28–32 is the most far-reaching promise in the book: the Spirit poured out on all flesh without distinction of gender, age, or social status; the cosmic signs accompanying the great and terrible day of the LORD; and the universal offer of salvation to everyone who calls on the name of the LORD — a promise whose fulfillment Peter declares has begun at Pentecost, whose ongoing reality the Spirit-filled community inhabits, and whose eschatological completion is the horizon toward which the whole book has been moving from the locust invasion of chapter 1 to the great and awesome day that verses 30–32 describe.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Joel chapter 2 having traveled from the most terrifying vision of divine judgment in the book to the most generous promise of divine restoration, and from the restoration of the agricultural abundance to the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. We have heard the advancing army and the darkened heavens and the who can endure it? We have received the yet even now and the rend your hearts and not your garments and the appeal to the gracious, merciful, patient, loving God who relents over disaster. We have heard the jealous love of the LORD for His land and the promise of the restored years and the I am in the midst of Israel and the never again shall My people be ashamed. And we have received the I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and the everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.

Lord, let the rend your hearts and not your garments be the standing diagnostic of our own spiritual practice. Where we are tearing the garments of the religious performance without the interior rending that genuine repentance requires, expose the gap. Break through the managed exterior to the actual center of the will and the affections and the allegiance. Produce in us the genuine return with the whole heart that the yet even now is still inviting, even in the seasons when the advancing army seems most irresistible.

And let the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh be received in all its Pentecostal fullness as the present eschatological reality that Pentecost inaugurated. Your sons and our daughters are prophesying. The

old among us are dreaming. The young among us are seeing visions. The servants and the servant women have received the Spirit without distinction. This is the community the Spirit is forming. Form us more fully toward it. Let the everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved be the warrant for our missionary urgency and our gospel confidence: the offer is universal, the scope is everyone, and all who call are saved.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction to Joel Chapter 3

The Valley of Decision: The Nations Judged, Zion Vindicated, and the LORD Dwelling in the Midst of His People

Joel chapter 3 is the eschatological conclusion of the book — the final, comprehensive vision of the divine judgment on the nations, the vindication of Zion, and the permanent dwelling of the LORD in the midst of His people. If chapter 1 was the lamentation over an unprecedented agricultural disaster, and chapter 2 was the urgent call to return and the sweeping promise of restoration culminating in the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, chapter 3 is the eschatological horizon that gives the entire book its ultimate frame: the gathering of the nations for judgment, the harvest of divine justice in the valley of Jehoshaphat, and the transformation of Judah and Jerusalem into the eternal dwelling place of the holy LORD.

The chapter moves through three interconnected movements. The first (verses 1–8) is the announcement of the gathering: in those days and at that time, when the LORD restores the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, He will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and He will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of His people and His heritage Israel. The specific charges against the nations are named: they have scattered the people of God, divided the land, cast lots for the people, traded boys for prostitutes and girls for wine. The divine judgment takes the form of commercial irony — the same trafficking with which the nations purchased the cheapest pleasures will be turned on their own children.

The second movement (verses 9–16) is the summons to the nations for war and the divine response in the valley of decision. Proclaim this among the nations: consecrate a war; stir up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near. The swords beaten from plowshares, the pruning hooks from spears — the deliberate reversal of the great Isaianic vision of peace (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3) — establishes that in the valley of judgment, the tools of agriculture must be converted to the tools of war because the nations who come are coming to a war whose outcome is not in question. The multitudes in the valley of decision, the darkened sun and moon, the roaring LORD from Zion — these are the cosmic accompaniments of the eschatological judgment.

The third movement (verses 17–21) is the vision of the transformed Zion and the final state of the covenant community. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it. The mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water,

and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, but Judah shall be inhabited forever and Jerusalem to all generations. The LORD dwells in Zion. This is the book's final word: the covenant presence, promised in chapter 2:27 (I am in the midst of Israel), is here expressed in its most permanent and most comprehensive form.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Joel chapter 3 as people who need the eschatological vision that this chapter provides. We live between the yet even now of chapter 2 and the in those days of chapter 3 — in the time of the Spirit's outpouring that has already begun and the final judgment that has not yet arrived. We need the vision of the valley of Jehoshaphat and the valley of decision and the roaring LORD from Zion not because we delight in the judgment of the nations but because the vision of the final justice of God is the ground of the patience and the faithfulness that the present age requires of Your people.

Lord, let the charges against the nations in this chapter be received as the theological declaration that the injustices perpetrated against Your people and against the vulnerable of every age do not escape the divine account. The scattered people, the divided land, the traded children, the purchased pleasures at the cost of human beings — these are not unnoticed. They are in the record. The valley of Jehoshaphat is coming. The valley of decision is real. Let this knowledge produce in us not the vindictive satisfaction of those who have been wronged, but the patient faithfulness of those who have entrusted the justice to the Judge of all the earth.

And let the vision of the transformed Zion — the mountains dripping with wine, the hills flowing with milk, the fountain from the house of the LORD, the LORD dwelling in the midst of His people forever — be the eschatological anchor that holds the entire covenant life in its proper frame. We are the people who are headed toward this. Let the destination shape the journey.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Joel 3:1–8

The Gathering for Judgment: The Nations Called to Account for What They Have Done to God's Heritage

*(1) For, behold, in those days, and in that time,
when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,
(2) I will also gather all nations,
and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat,
and will plead with them there for my people
and for my heritage Israel,
whom they have scattered among the nations,
and parted my land.
(3) And they have cast lots for my people;
and have given a boy for an harlot,
and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.
(4) Yea, and what have ye to do with me,
O Tyre, and Zidon,
and all the coasts of Philistia?
will ye render me a recompence?
and if ye recompense me,
swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head;
(5) Because ye have taken my silver and my gold,
and have carried into your temples
my goodly pleasant things:
(6) The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem
have ye sold unto the Grecians,
that ye might remove them far from their border.
(7) Behold, I will raise them out of the place
whither ye have sold them,
and will return your recompence upon your own head:
(8) And I will sell your sons and your daughters
into the hand of the children of Judah,
and they shall sell them to the Sabeans,
to a people far off:
for the LORD hath spoken it.*

The Context

The in those days and at that time of verse 1 is the eschatological temporal marker that connects chapter 3 to the afterward of Joel 2:28 — the same future horizon within which the Spirit's outpouring was promised is the horizon within which the gathering for judgment occurs. The two promises belong to the same eschatological moment: the outpouring of the Spirit and the judgment of the nations are not separate events but dimensions of the single great day of the LORD that Joel has been building toward

from the first trumpet blast of chapter 2:1. The restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem is the positive dimension; the gathering of the nations for judgment is the negative dimension; together they constitute the comprehensive eschatological vision of the day.

The valley of Jehoshaphat — whose name means the LORD judges or Yahweh has judged — is the location of the divine courtroom in which the nations are summoned to give account. The name itself is the theological statement: this is the place where the LORD's judging character is most fully displayed. The charges that the LORD brings against the nations in verses 2–3 are the charges of covenant violation committed against the covenant people: they scattered my people among the nations, divided up my land, cast lots for my people, traded a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for wine. The charges are not abstract political grievances but the specific, documented atrocities of the nations that have treated the people of God as commodities for their cheapest transactions.

The specific address to Tyre, Sidon, and the regions of Philistia in verses 4–6 names the specific nations whose specific crimes are most directly in view. These were the Phoenician city-states and the Philistine confederation — the nations that bordered Israel and had most directly participated in the trafficking of Israelite captives to the distant Greeks. The what are you to me? is the divine challenge to the commercial powers that have presumed to reckon the LORD's people as part of their trading inventory: what relationship do you think you have with me that would make this acceptable? The answer is: none, and the consequence is the mirror judgment of verse 7–8 — the LORD will raise up the people who were sold and will return the recompense on the heads of those who sold them, selling their sons and daughters into the hands of Judah.

The mirror judgment of verse 8 — I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away — is one of the most jarring passages in the book for contemporary readers precisely because it seems to perpetuate the cycle of trafficking that it condemns. The theological point is the *lex talionis* — the exact correspondence between the crime and the punishment — applied to the nations that commodified human beings: the divine judgment takes the form of the precise reversal of what was done, visited on those who did it. The jarring quality of the mirror judgment is the measure of the jarring quality of the original crime.

Plain American English

In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. I will judge them there for what they did to my people, my own special possession — they scattered Israel among the nations and divided up my land. They threw dice to decide which of my people they would keep as slaves, and they traded boys to pay for prostitutes and sold girls to buy wine to drink. Tyre, Sidon, and all of you in Philistia — what business do you have with me? Are you trying to get back at me? If you're trying to get revenge, I will very quickly repay you for what you've done. You have taken my silver and gold and carried off my best treasures into your temples. You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks to send them far from their homeland. Watch, because I am going to bring them back from wherever you sold them, and I will pay you back for what you've done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the

people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, who will take them to a distant land. The LORD has spoken!

Key Observations

“I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel”: This signifies **The Gathering of All Nations for Judgment Is the Eschatological Counterpart to the Scattering of the Covenant People — the LORD Who Permitted the Scattering Now Reverses It by Summoning the Scatterers to Account.**

The gather all nations is the comprehensive eschatological reversal of the scattered among the nations that the charges immediately name as the crime being adjudicated. The same LORD who permitted the scattering of His people — who sent the locust and withdrew the agricultural abundance and allowed the nations to exploit the weakened covenant community — now exercises the sovereignty in the other direction: gathering all the nations to the place of judgment where the account will be settled. The will plead with them is the forensic language of the covenant lawsuit — the LORD entering into legal proceedings against the nations on behalf of His people and His heritage. The covenant community that has experienced the scattering is represented in the divine court by the LORD Himself.

“And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink”: This signifies **The Charges of Human Trafficking Against the Nations Are the Most Specific and the Most Morally Serious in the Indictment — the Covenant People Reduced to the Cheapest Available Transaction.**

The casting of lots for the people, the trading of a boy for a prostitute, the selling of a girl for wine — these are the charges that most directly identify the dehumanizing character of what the nations have done to the covenant people. To cast lots for human beings is to treat them as property whose disposition is settled by chance. To trade a boy for a single night with a prostitute is to assign to a human life the value of the cheapest available sexual transaction. To sell a girl for a drink of wine is to value her at the cost of a moment’s pleasure. The accumulation of these charges is the measure of the contempt with which the nations have regarded the people whom the LORD calls His own heritage. The my people of the divine claim is the theological counterweight to the casual trading: these were my people, and you traded them for nothing.

“What have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Philistia? will ye render me a recompence?”: This signifies **The Divine Challenge to the Commercial Powers Is the Most Direct Available Statement That the Exploitation of the Covenant People Is Not a Merely Political Matter but an Offense Against the LORD Himself Whose People Were Exploited.**

The what are you to me? is the divine challenge that converts the political grievance into the theological one. Tyre and Sidon were the great commercial powers of the ancient Near East — the mercantile civilization that traded in everything, including human beings. Their trafficking in Israelite captives was, from their perspective, simply good business: there was a market for slaves, Israel’s captives were available, and the Greeks were buyers. The divine challenge refuses this commercial logic entirely: these were my people, my silver and my gold, my precious things. Whatever commercial logic governed the transaction, the transaction was with my property, and the account will be settled accordingly.

“And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans”: This signifies The Mirror Judgment Is the Most Complete Available Application of the Lex Talionis — the Exact Form of the Crime Becomes the Exact Form of the Punishment, Visited on Those Who Committed It.

The I will sell your sons and daughters is the most direct mirror judgment in the passage: the exact mechanism of the crime — the selling of human beings into distant servitude — is applied in reverse to those who employed it against God’s people. The lex talionis — the correspondence between the crime and the punishment — is the theological principle of the covenant’s moral order: the nations that scattered will be gathered; the nations that sold will be sold; the nations that dispersed will be dispersed. This is not vindictive cruelty but the covenant logic of the divine justice that takes the form of exact correspondence. The moral order that was violated in the trafficking of God’s people is restored by the trafficking of those who violated it.

What This Means for Us Today

- 1. Receive the Valley of Jehoshaphat as the Theological Declaration That the Injustices Perpetrated Against the Vulnerable — Including Human Trafficking and Exploitation — Are in the Divine Record and Will Be Adjudicated:** The specific charges in this section — the casting of lots for human beings, the trading of boys for prostitutes, the selling of girls for wine — are the ancient world’s equivalent of the contemporary global trafficking industry that commodifies human beings for sexual and economic exploitation. The theological claim of this passage is that these crimes against the vulnerable are not merely political or economic problems requiring human solutions; they are offenses against the LORD whose people have been trafficked, and the account will be settled in the valley where the LORD judges. This does not remove the obligation of the present community to address these injustices actively; it grounds that obligation in the character of the God who takes them personally.
- 2. Read the Divine Challenge to the Commercial Powers as the Theological Framework for Assessing Every Economic System That Treats Human Beings as Commodities:** The what are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon? is the divine challenge to the commercial logic that treats human beings as tradeable commodities whose value is determined by market forces. The specific naming of the commercial powers — the mercantile city-states that dominated the ancient Near Eastern economy — establishes that the divine judgment is addressed not merely to individual bad actors but to the systemic commercial practices that enable the exploitation of the vulnerable. The contemporary application is not the condemnation of commerce itself but the theological assessment of the commercial systems and practices that replicate the logic of Tyre and Sidon: the treating of human beings as inventory whose value is whatever the market will bear.
- 3. Hold the Mirror Judgment as the Most Searching Diagnostic Available for Communities That Have Employed Oppressive Mechanisms Against Others:** The I will sell your sons and daughters who sold my people’s sons and daughters is the application of the mirror judgment to the community that has employed a specific oppressive mechanism against others. The covenant moral logic is that the mechanism of the oppression becomes the mechanism of the judgment: those who scattered will be gathered, those who sold will be sold. This is not a comfortable passage for communities that have historically employed mechanisms of oppression, and it is not meant to be. The mirror judgment is the most complete available statement that the moral order has a structure, and that the structure will be enforced.

How This Relates to Today

The specific charges of human trafficking in verses 2–3 give this chapter a peculiar urgency in the contemporary world, where the International Labour Organization estimates tens of millions of people are in conditions of forced labor and sexual exploitation. The theological claim of Joel 3 is that these crimes are not invisible to the divine account, that the valley of Jehoshaphat is coming, and that the nations and systems that have trafficked human beings made in the image of God will give account. This is not a substitute for active engagement with the structural and political dimensions of the problem; it is the theological grounding that makes that engagement something other than mere social activism — it is the participation in the divine concern for the vindication of the people whom God calls His own.

The specific naming of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia also establishes a pattern of accountability that is historically particular rather than abstractly universal: specific nations, with specific practices, engaged in specific acts of injustice against the covenant community, and they are named. The divine judgment is not an impersonal force but the specific response of the specific God to the specific actions of specific historical actors. This particularity is one of the most important features of the biblical theology of divine justice: the judgment is not the impersonal operation of a moral law but the personal response of the LORD who takes personally what was done to His people.

Key Lesson: **The gathering of the nations in verses 1–8 is the eschatological reversal of the scattering of the covenant people, with the specific charges of human trafficking — the casting of lots, the trading of boys for prostitutes, the selling of girls for wine — naming the crimes that the nations will answer for in the valley where the LORD judges, and the mirror judgment applying to those who sold what they trafficked the exact mechanism of the crime as the exact form of the punishment.**

Joel 3:9–16

The Valley of Decision: The Summons to War, the Cosmic Signs, and the LORD Roaring from Zion

(9) Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles;
Prepare war, wake up the mighty men,
let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:
(10) Beat your plowshares into swords,
and your pruninghooks into spears:
let the weak say, I am strong.
(11) Assemble yourselves, and come,
all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about:
thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.

*(12) Let the heathen be wakened,
and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat:
for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.*

*(13) Put ye in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe:
come, get you down;
for the press is full, the fats overflow;
for their wickedness is great.*

*(14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision:
for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*

*(15) The sun and the moon shall be darkened,
and the stars shall withdraw their shining.*

*(16) The LORD also shall roar out of Zion,
and utter his voice from Jerusalem;
and the heavens and the earth shall shake:
but the LORD will be the hope of his people,
and the strength of the children of Israel.*

The Context

The summons to the nations in verses 9–10 is one of the most deliberately paradoxical passages in the prophetic literature: proclaim among the nations, consecrate a war, stir up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near. This is the call to arms addressed to the nations — but it is the call to the war whose outcome is not in question. The nations are being summoned to a battle that they will lose, and the ironic reversal of the great Isaianic peace vision in verse 10 — beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears — is the deliberate inversion of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 (they shall beat their swords into plowshares), establishing that the eschatological sequence moves through judgment before it arrives at peace. The nations must come to the valley of Jehoshaphat in their war posture because the judgment comes before the peace that Micah's vision describes.

The let the weak say, I am strong of verse 10 is the darkest element of the summons: even the weakest of the nations should muster whatever strength they have and come, because the LORD is gathering all nations to the valley of judgment. No nation is too weak to be exempt from the accounting; all must appear. And the thither cause your mighty ones to come down, O LORD of verse 11 is the pivot from the summons of the nations to the prayer that the divine warriors descend: the prophet or the covenant community calls for the LORD's own mighty ones to be brought to the valley alongside the summoned nations — establishing that the battle, if battle it is, is entirely asymmetrical from the beginning.

The harvest imagery of verse 13 — put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; go in, tread, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their evil is great — is the agricultural imagery of the

restoration (chapter 2:24, the threshing floors full of grain, the vats overflowing with wine and oil) now applied to the judgment of the nations. The same harvest that was the sign of restoration for the covenant people is the harvest of the nations' wickedness that is ripe for reaping. The full winepress is not the abundance of blessing but the overflowing accumulation of the evil that must now be pressed out. The agricultural imagery links the judgment to the restoration: the same harvest language applies to both, establishing that the divine economy is comprehensive — the harvest of blessing for the covenant people and the harvest of judgment for the nations are the positive and negative dimensions of the same eschatological event.

The multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision of verse 14 is the most famous line in the chapter and one of the most haunting in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for multitude is *hamon* — the noise of the crowd, the tumult of the masses. The doubled *hamon hamon* emphasizes the vast scale of the gathering: the nations, assembled in the valley of decision, are beyond counting. And the valley of decision is not the valley where the nations will decide their own fate but the valley where the LORD's decision — the divine verdict on the nations — will be pronounced. The decision is not theirs but His. The darkened sun and moon of verse 15 and the roaring LORD from Zion of verse 16 are the cosmic and theological accompaniments of the divine verdict: the created order responding to the decision, and the LORD Himself sounding the judgment from the city that is His own.

Plain American English

Shout this to the nations: Get ready for war! Call out your best soldiers! Let every fighting man come to the front! Hammer your plows into swords and your pruning knives into spears. Let even the weak say, "I am a warrior!" Come quickly, all you surrounding nations, and gather there. Bring your warriors down to face you, LORD! Let the nations be roused and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, because I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Swing the sickle — the harvest is ripe! Come, stomp the grapes — the winepress is full. The storage vats are overflowing with the wickedness of these people! Crowds upon crowds in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The LORD's voice will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, shaking both heaven and earth. But he will be a refuge for his people, a strong fortress for the people of Israel.

Key Observations

“Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong”: This signifies **The Deliberate Inversion of the Great Isaianic Peace Vision Establishes That the Eschatological Sequence Moves Through Judgment Before It Arrives at Peace — the Swords Must Come Before the Plowshares.**

The beat your plowshares into swords is the exact reversal of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 (they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks), and the reversal is deliberate and theologically significant. Joel is not contradicting Isaiah and Micah but establishing the sequence: the eschatological peace of the swords-into-plowshares vision comes after the judgment of the nations, not before it. The nations who come to the valley of Jehoshaphat with their plowshares converted to swords are coming to the battle that must be fought before the weapons can be permanently beaten into

agricultural tools. The eschatological peace is the result of the eschatological judgment, not its substitute. The fullness of the biblical vision holds both: the judgment of the nations and the transformation of their weapons, each in its proper sequence.

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision”: This signifies **The Doubled Multitudes Is the Most Haunting Line in the Chapter — the Vast, Uncountable Gathering of the Nations in the Place Where the Divine Verdict Will Be Pronounced.**

The hamon hamon — the doubled noise of the multitudes — is the onomatopoeic rendering of the vast, tumultuous gathering that Joel is describing. The sheer scale of the assembled nations fills the valley with the noise of the crowd, the press of the bodies, the weight of the human mass that has been summoned to the place of the divine decision. And the valley of decision is not named for the choice that the nations will make but for the verdict that will be pronounced: the divine decision, the divine judgment, the divine verdict on the nations whose wickedness has been ripe for the harvest. The day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision — the eschatological day that Joel has been announcing since chapter 1:15 has arrived at its most concentrated and most comprehensive expression in this single verse.

“The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel”: This signifies **The Roaring LORD from Zion Is Both the Most Terrifying and the Most Comforting Image in the Section — the Same Voice That Shakes the Heavens and the Earth Is the Refuge of the People Who Belong to Him.**

The roaring of the LORD from Zion is the lion imagery that Joel has been building toward since chapter 1’s description of the locust’s lion-teeth and the divine military imagery of chapter 2. The roar shakes the heavens and the earth — the same cosmic disruption that accompanied the advancing army in chapter 2:10 now accompanies the divine voice pronouncing the verdict in the valley of decision. And the but the LORD will be a refuge for his people, and a stronghold to the people of Israel is the most important theological qualifier in the verse: the same roar that shakes the creation is the declaration of safety for those who belong to the roaring Lord. The community that has called on the name of the LORD (chapter 2:32) finds in the roaring LORD not the terror of the nations but the refuge of the covenant partner.

“Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great”: This signifies **The Harvest Imagery of the Judgment Mirrors the Harvest Imagery of the Restoration — the Same Agricultural Language That Described the Blessing of the Covenant People Describes the Ripened Wickedness of the Nations That Must Now Be Reaped.**

The ripe harvest of the nations’ wickedness and the overflowing winepress of verse 13 are the deliberate counterpart to the threshing floors full of grain and the vats overflowing with wine and oil of chapter 2:24. The same agricultural abundance that was the sign of restoration for the covenant people is the image of the accumulated wickedness of the nations that is now ripe for judgment. The harvest has two dimensions in Joel: the harvest of blessing for those who have returned to the LORD, and the harvest of judgment for those whose wickedness has been growing and ripening through the chapters of the book. The eschatological moment is the moment when both harvests are reaped simultaneously: the restoration of the covenant community and the judgment of the nations are the positive and negative dimensions of the single divine act of the day of the LORD.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Eschatological Sequence of Judgment Before Peace as the Corrective to Any Vision of the Coming Kingdom That Bypasses the Divine Justice: The plowshares-into-swords reversal of verse 10 is the theological corrective to any eschatological vision that moves directly to the peaceful kingdom without passing through the judgment of the nations. The biblical sequence — established by the relationship between Joel 3:10 and Isaiah 2:4/Micah 4:3 — is that the tools of war will be beaten into agricultural implements after the nations have been judged, not before. The community of faith that prays Come, Lord Jesus while expecting the kingdom to arrive without the preceding judgment has not yet received the full eschatological vision that Joel provides. The peace that Isaiah and Micah describe is real; it comes after, not instead of, the judgment that Joel describes.

2. Read the Valley of Decision as the Theological Declaration That Every Human Life and Every Human Nation Is Moving Toward the Moment of Divine Verdict — and Let That Declaration Shape the Urgency of the Present Witness: The multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision is the eschatological vision of the entire human race assembled before the divine judgment. The day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. This is not merely a vision of a distant future event; it is the theological frame within which the present moment must be understood. Every life is moving toward the valley of decision. The everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved of chapter 2:32 is the gospel in this context: the urgent offer of the salvation that is available now, before the multitudes assemble in the valley where the divine verdict will be pronounced.

3. Hold the Roaring LORD as Both the Terror of the Nations and the Refuge of the Covenant People — the Same Divine Power That Shakes the Creation Is the Stronghold of Those Who Belong to Him: The but the LORD will be a refuge for his people, and a stronghold to the people of Israel is the most important qualifier in the section for the community that might otherwise be overwhelmed by the terrifying vision of the roaring LORD shaking the heavens and the earth. The divine power that is the judgment of the nations is the protection of the covenant people — not a different power but the same power in its different relational expressions. The covenant community that knows itself to belong to the roaring LORD has the deepest available ground of security: the same power that shakes everything is the refuge of the people who are hidden in Him.

How This Relates to Today

The valley of decision has become a metaphor in contemporary culture for the moment of personal choice, but Joel's valley of decision is not primarily about human choosing but about divine deciding. The decision in the valley of Jehoshaphat is the LORD's verdict on the nations — the divine judgment that is pronounced from Zion and announced in the cosmic darkening of the sun and moon. The contemporary recovery of this meaning is not the abandonment of the personal dimension (the everyone who calls of 2:32 establishes the individual response as real and decisive) but the correction of the individualistic reduction that turns the cosmic eschatological judgment into merely a private spiritual experience.

The roaring LORD from Zion in verse 16 is also one of the most important images in the canonical development of the prophetic tradition. Amos 1:2 opens with the same image — the LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the pastures of the shepherds mourn — establishing a canonical connection between Amos and Joel that the tradition of prophetic collection recognized. The roaring LORD from Zion is the shared image of the prophetic tradition's most comprehensive statement of the divine judgment: the specific city, the specific mountain, the specific divine act that encompasses the nations in its scope.

Key Lesson: **The valley of decision in verses 9–16 is the eschatological gathering of the nations for the divine verdict, with the plowshares-into-swords reversal establishing that judgment precedes the peace that Isaiah and Micah describe, the doubled multitudes of verse 14 rendering the vast scale of the assembled nations in the place where the divine decision will be pronounced, and the roaring LORD from Zion being simultaneously the most terrifying image of divine power and the most comforting declaration of covenant refuge: the same voice that shakes the heavens and earth is the stronghold of the people who belong to Him.**

Joel 3:17–21

The LORD Dwells in Zion: The Transformed Land, the Permanent Presence, and the Book's Final Word

*(17) So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God
dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain:
then shall Jerusalem be holy,
and there shall no strangers pass through her any more.
(18) And it shall come to pass in that day,
that the mountains shall drop down new wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters,
and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD,
and shall water the valley of Shittim.
(19) Egypt shall be a desolation,
and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness,
for the violence done to the children of Judah,
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.
(20) But Judah shall dwell for ever,
and Jerusalem from generation to generation.
(21) For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed:
for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.*

The Context

The so you shall know that I am the LORD your God of verse 17 is the covenant recognition formula that has appeared throughout the Old Testament — the declaration that the divine action will produce in the covenant people the knowledge of who the LORD is. This is the da’at Elohim — the knowledge of God — that Hosea named as the absent center of the covenant people’s life, the knowledge that Joel’s entire book has been working toward producing through the lamentation, the call to return, the promise of restoration, and now the eschatological judgment of the nations. The knowledge of the LORD will be fully established when the dwelling in Zion on the holy mountain is established and Jerusalem is holy and strangers pass through it no more.

The vision of the transformed land in verse 18 is the most concentrated expression of the eschatological abundance in the book. The mountains dripping with sweet wine, the hills flowing with milk, all the riverbeds of Judah flowing with water — these are the images of the creation restored to its fullest productive capacity, the abundance that the locust had consumed in chapter 1 now returned not merely to its previous level but to the level of the eschatological fullness. And the most remarkable detail is the fountain that comes from the house of the LORD and waters the valley of Shittim: not merely the natural hydrology of the land restored, but a supernatural source — the house of the LORD itself — producing the water that flows out to the most arid places. This image will be developed by Ezekiel in his vision of the river from the temple (Ezekiel 47) and by the book of Revelation in the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

The contrast between Egypt’s desolation and Edom’s desolate wilderness (verse 19) and Judah’s eternal habitation and Jerusalem’s generational continuity (verse 20) is the clearest available statement of the eschatological reversal in the chapter. Egypt and Edom represent the great historical enemies of the covenant people — Egypt the house of slavery, Edom the perpetual antagonist — and their desolation is the consequence of the violence done to the innocent blood of Judah’s children. The Judah that has been scattered and sold and trafficked will dwell forever; the nations that scattered and sold and trafficked will become desolations. The reversal is complete and permanent.

The book’s final verse — for the LORD dwells in Zion — is the most concentrated theological statement in the book. Everything that the book has been working toward — the lamentation, the call to return, the promise of the Spirit’s outpouring, the gathering of the nations for judgment, the transformation of the land — is grounded in and consummated by this single declaration: the LORD dwells in Zion. The covenant presence, which chapter 2:27 promised (I am in the midst of Israel), is here declared in its most permanent and most specific form. The God who appeared to have withdrawn in the devastation of the locust plague, the God who sent the advancing army in chapter 2, the God who roared from Zion in chapter 3:16 — this God dwells in Zion. This is the book’s final word, and it is enough.

Plain American English

Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, live in Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be holy forever, and foreign armies will never conquer her again. In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk. Water will fill the dry streambeds of Judah, and a fountain will flow out of the LORD's Temple, watering the dry valley where acacia trees grow. But Egypt will become a wasteland and Edom will become a wilderness, because of their violence against the people of Judah — they murdered innocent people in Judah's land. But Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem will endure through all generations. I will pardon the crimes of my people that I have not yet pardoned, and the LORD will make his home in Jerusalem.

Key Observations

“So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more”: This signifies **The Covenant Recognition Formula — You Shall Know That I Am the LORD Your God — Is the Theological Destination of the Entire Book, the Da’at Elohim That Has Been Absent Since the Diagnosis of the Prophets and That the Entire Eschatological Movement Has Been Producing.**

The you shall know that I am the LORD your God is the covenant recognition formula that Ezekiel uses more than sixty times to identify the purpose of the divine acts in history: the LORD acts so that the people will know who He is. Joel uses the formula once, at the book's eschatological climax, to identify the final purpose of the entire sequence of disaster, lamentation, return, restoration, and judgment: the full and permanent knowledge of the LORD as the dwelling God of Zion. The da’at Elohim — the knowledge of God — that Hosea named as absent and that Joel's entire sequence has been working to restore reaches its eschatological fullness when the LORD dwells on the holy mountain and Jerusalem is holy and the nations that formerly desecrated it pass through it no more.

“And a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim”: This signifies **The Fountain from the House of the LORD Is the Most Remarkable Detail of the Vision — the Supernatural Source That Waters the Most Arid Places and Anticipates Ezekiel's River and the Revelation's River of Life.**

The fountain that comes forth from the house of the LORD and waters the valley of Shittim is the single most theologically generative image in the closing vision. Shittim was the arid valley where the acacia trees grew — the valley of the wilderness, the driest of the dry places in the geography of Judah. The fountain from the LORD's house that reaches even to Shittim is the image of the supernatural provision that exceeds what the natural hydrology of the land could produce: not merely the restored riverbeds of verse 18 but the source in the house of the LORD itself, flowing outward to the places that natural water sources cannot reach. Ezekiel's temple river (Ezekiel 47:1–12) develops this image into a full vision of the river that flows from the sanctuary and deepens as it moves outward, bringing life to the Dead Sea and to everything it touches. And Revelation 22:1–2 completes the canonical development with the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the new Jerusalem.

“Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness: But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation”: This signifies **The Eschatological Reversal Is Complete and Permanent — the Nations That Enslaved and Scattered Will Become Desolations, and the People Who Were Enslaved and Scattered Will Inhabit Their Land Forever.**

The desolation of Egypt and Edom and the eternal habitation of Judah and Jerusalem is the final statement of the eschatological reversal that the book has been building toward. Egypt is the house of slavery, the original place of the covenant people's captivity, and the place to which the covenant violations of the northern kingdom sent them again (Hosea's Egypt). Edom is the perpetual antagonist of Israel, the nation that cheered Jerusalem's destruction (Psalm 137:7) and participated in the violence against the covenant people. Their desolation is the consequence of the violence done to innocent blood. And the Judah that has been scattered and sold and trafficked, whose land was divided and whose children were traded for wine, will dwell forever. The permanent reversal is the final word of the covenant theology of history: the covenant people's inheritance is eternal; the nations that violated it are desolations.

“For the LORD dwelleth in Zion”: This signifies **The Book's Final Declaration Is the Most Concentrated Theological Statement Available — Everything the Book Has Been Working Toward Is Grounded in and Consummated by the Covenant Presence of the Dwelling LORD in the Holy Mountain.**

The for the LORD dwells in Zion is the book's last word, and it is the most important word in the book. The entire sequence — the unprecedented locust disaster, the call to lamentation, the solemn assembly, the return with the whole heart, the divine jealousy for the land, the restored years, the promise of the Spirit on all flesh, the gathering of the nations for judgment, the valley of decision, the mountains dripping with wine and the hills flowing with milk and the fountain from the house of the LORD — all of it is grounded in and consummated by the single theological declaration that the LORD dwells in Zion. The covenant presence is the foundation of the restoration (I am in the midst of Israel, chapter 2:27), the ground of the judgment (the LORD roars from Zion, chapter 3:16), and the final state of the eschatological community (the LORD dwells in Zion, chapter 3:21). Everything else in the book is the outworking of this single central fact.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the For the LORD Dwells in Zion as the Eschatological Declaration That the Covenant Presence Is the Beginning and the End of the Entire Biblical Story — the Alpha and Omega of the Covenant Theology: The book of Joel ends with the same declaration that the book of Revelation ends with: the divine dwelling in the midst of the people (Revelation 21:3: the dwelling of God is with man). The covenant presence — the LORD dwelling in the midst of His people, on the holy mountain, in the holy city — is the eschatological consummation of the covenant relationship that began with the Exodus (I will be your God and you will be my people) and that the disasters and the lamentation and the return and the restoration of Joel have been the redemptive-historical path toward. Receive the final word as the foundation word: the LORD dwells in Zion. Everything else is outworking.

2. Read the Fountain from the House of the LORD as the Anticipation of the Spirit's Work That the Book Has Been Building Toward — the Supernatural Source That Waters the Most Arid Places of the Human Condition: The fountain from the house of the LORD that waters the valley of Shittim is the physical image of what the Spirit's outpouring on all flesh represents in spiritual terms: the supernatural provision that flows from the divine source and reaches to the most arid and apparently unreachable places of the human condition. The Spirit poured on all flesh in chapter 2:28 is the spiritual fountain that the house of the LORD sends to the Shittims of the human world — to the dry valleys of the marginalized, the enslaved, the trafficked, the socially invisible, the ones whom no natural river of

religious privilege would reach. The fountain from the house of the LORD is the image of the gospel's reach: it goes where the natural religious structures do not go.

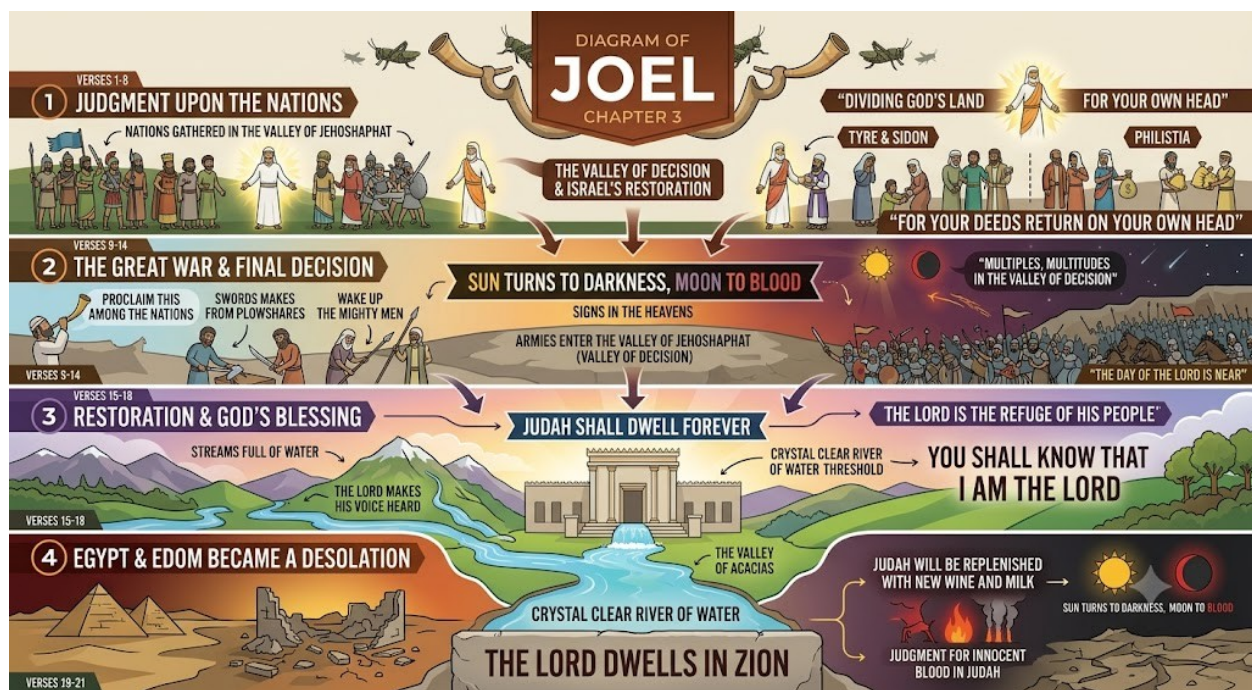
3. Allow the Permanent Covenant Presence — the LORD Dwells in Zion — to Be the Eschatological Anchor That Holds the Community's Identity and Confidence Through Every Season of the Disaster That Precedes the Final Dwelling: The community of faith that lives between the already of the Spirit's outpouring (begun at Pentecost) and the not yet of the LORD's permanent dwelling in Zion (anticipated in Revelation 21–22) is the community that needs the eschatological anchor of Joel's final word as much as it needs the urgent pastoral instructions of the preceding chapters. The locust invasions of the present age — the disasters, the scattered people, the divided land, the valley of decision that looms — are all experienced within the frame of the final word: for the LORD dwells in Zion. This is where it ends. Let the ending shape the endurance.

How This Relates to Today

The fountain from the house of the LORD that waters the valley of Shittim has one of the most comprehensive canonical developments of any image in the book. Joel's fountain becomes Ezekiel's river (Ezekiel 47), which becomes Zechariah's living waters flowing from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8), which becomes John's rivers of living water that Jesus declares will flow from the belly of those who believe in him (John 7:38–39), which becomes the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb in Revelation 22. The canonical trajectory is the progressive fulfillment of Joel's image: the fountain that began in the house of the LORD in Joel ends as the river of the water of life flowing from the throne in the new Jerusalem, bringing healing to the nations and the tree of life bearing fruit every month on either side. Joel's fountain is the seed of which Revelation 22 is the flower.

The for the LORD dwells in Zion also connects backward to the entire book's opening crisis. Chapter 1 described the house of the LORD desolated, the grain offering and drink offering cut off, the priests mourning because the means of their service had been consumed by the locust. The final verse of chapter 3 declares the permanent reversal of that desolation: the LORD dwells in Zion. The house that was emptied and desolated by the locust is the house from which the fountain flows and in which the LORD makes His permanent dwelling. The ending of the book is the reversal of the beginning, and the reversal is permanent: the LORD dwells in Zion forever.

Key Lesson: **The final movement of the chapter and the book reaches its destination in the three overlapping declarations of the divine presence: the covenant recognition formula you shall know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, the fountain from the house of the LORD watering the most arid places, and the book's final word for the LORD dwells in Zion — the permanent covenant presence that is the consummation of the entire sequence from the unprecedented disaster of chapter 1 through the eschatological judgment of chapter 3 and that grounds, justifies, and completes every pastoral instruction, every call to lamentation, every invitation to return, and every promise of restoration that the book has contained.**



Closing Prayer and Theological Synthesis of the Book of Joel

Heavenly Father,

We close Joel chapter 3 — and with it the entire book — having traveled from the unprecedented locust disaster of chapter 1 to the valley of decision of chapter 3, from the solemn assembly and the crying out to the LORD to the multitudes assembling before the divine verdict, from the call to rend the heart and not the garments to the roaring LORD whose voice shakes the heavens and earth and who is the refuge of His people, from the desolation of the house of the LORD to the fountain that flows from that house to water the valley of Shittim, and from the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision to the LORD dwells in Zion.

We have received the book's three great movements as the sequence they are designed to be: the lamentation that names the disaster honestly and brings it to God without diplomatic softening; the return with the whole heart that the yet even now keeps available even in the face of the advancing army; and the eschatological vision of the judgment of the nations and the permanent covenant presence of the dwelling LORD that is the destination toward which the whole sequence has been moving. Let the sequence be received as the pastoral wisdom it is: lamentation before petition, return before restoration, judgment before peace, the rending of the heart before the dripping of the mountains with sweet wine.

And let the book's final declaration — for the LORD dwells in Zion — be the eschatological anchor of our present life. We live in the in those days that Joel 2:28 announced and Acts 2 declared has begun.

The Spirit has been poured out on all flesh. The sons and daughters are prophesying, the old men are dreaming, the young men are seeing visions, the servants and servant women have received the Spirit. The everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved is the open offer of the present moment. The valley of decision is coming. And the LORD — the jealous, gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love LORD who relents over disaster when His people return with their whole hearts — dwells in Zion. This is where it ends. Let the ending shape the endurance.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the One who is both the fountain from the house of the LORD and the LORD who dwells in Zion, in whom all the promises of Joel find their Yes and Amen — Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone*

Prologue

The Book of Joel is a trumpet blast from heaven.

Across the centuries, its message still echoes with unmistakable clarity: **God is holy. Sin has consequences. Repentance is urgent. Mercy is available. Hope is certain.** Though Joel wrote to the people of Judah during a time of national crisis, his words transcend his own generation and speak with prophetic force to every age.

The opening scene is unforgettable. A devastating plague of locusts has swept across the land, stripping vineyards, orchards, and fields until nothing remains. What was once fertile has become barren. Joy has been replaced by mourning, abundance by famine, and celebration by lament. Yet Joel makes it clear that this catastrophe is far more than an ecological disaster. It is a divine summons—a call from Almighty God for His covenant people to awaken from spiritual indifference and return to Him with sincere hearts.

Joel understood something many fail to recognize today: God often uses earthly events to accomplish heavenly purposes.

The locust invasion was not the final message; it was the opening illustration. Through this historical judgment, Joel points beyond his own day to an even greater reality—the coming **Day of the Lord**. This phrase becomes the heartbeat of the entire prophecy. It speaks of God's righteous intervention in history, His judgment upon rebellion, His faithfulness to His promises, and His ultimate triumph through the reign of His Messiah.

In many ways, Joel serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. His prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is quoted by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, demonstrating that God's redemptive plan unfolds exactly as He has declared. Yet Joel's vision extends beyond Pentecost, reaching forward to the future restoration of Israel, the judgment of the nations, and the glorious reign of Jesus Christ. His prophecy reminds us that history is moving toward a divinely appointed conclusion under the sovereign hand of God.

This commentary has been written with a deep conviction that every word of Scripture is inspired by God, completely trustworthy, and eternally relevant. The goal is not merely to explain the text but to expose its riches through careful verse-by-verse study. Throughout these pages, we will examine Joel's historical setting, literary structure, Hebrew vocabulary, theological themes, prophetic significance, and practical application for believers today.

Each chapter has been prepared with pastors, Bible teachers, students, and serious readers of Scripture in mind. Whether you are preparing sermons, leading Bible studies, or pursuing personal spiritual growth, my prayer is that this commentary will serve as a faithful guide through one of the Bible's most profound prophetic books.

The world in which we live bears striking similarities to Joel's day. Moral confusion has become commonplace. Nations boast in their own strength while neglecting the authority of God. Many profess faith while their hearts remain distant from Him. Yet the message of Joel remains unchanged:

"Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13).

That invitation still stands today.

Joel is not merely a prophet of judgment; he is a prophet of hope. His book concludes not with destruction but with restoration. The God who disciplines also heals. The God who judges also forgives. The God who humbles His people also exalts them in His perfect time. His mercy is greater than our failures, and His promises are stronger than our fears.

As you begin this journey through Joel, approach God's Word with humility, prayer, and expectation. Read the biblical text carefully. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate your understanding and apply these timeless truths to your heart.

The locusts remind us that earthly security can disappear in a moment.

The Day of the Lord reminds us that history is moving according to God's sovereign plan.

The promise of restoration reminds us that no life surrendered to Christ is beyond the reach of His grace.

May this verse-by-verse commentary deepen your understanding of God's Word, strengthen your confidence in His sovereign purposes, and increase your anticipation of the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Until that day, may we live faithfully, proclaim His truth boldly, and wait expectantly for the fulfillment of every promise He has made.

"The LORD is great and greatly to be praised, and His purposes shall stand forever."

Soli Deo Gloria

Dr. Paul Crawford

Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing to study the Book of Joel with me. It is both an honor and a privilege to accompany you through one of the most profound prophetic books in all of Scripture. My prayer is that this commentary will do far more than increase your biblical knowledge—it will deepen your love for the Lord, strengthen your confidence in His Word, and draw you into a closer walk with Jesus Christ.

The Book of Joel has captivated believers for centuries because it speaks with remarkable relevance to every generation. Although its setting is ancient Judah, its message reaches into our own day with striking clarity. Joel reminds us that God is sovereign over history, faithful to His covenant, patient in extending mercy, and certain to fulfill every promise He has made. His prophecy calls God's people to repentance, encourages them with the hope of restoration, and points forward to the glorious return of our Lord and Savior.

As I prepared this commentary, I sought to remain faithful to the biblical text above all else. My goal has never been to promote personal opinions or theological speculation but to explain the Scriptures accurately, clearly, and practically. Every chapter has been written using a literal, grammatical, and historical approach while recognizing the unity of God's redemptive plan throughout the entire Bible.

Throughout this commentary, you will find verse-by-verse exposition, historical insights, Hebrew word studies, cross-references, doctrinal observations, and practical applications. These tools are intended to help you understand not only what Joel wrote but also why his message continues to matter today.

Whether you are a pastor preparing sermons, a Bible teacher leading a class, a seminary student pursuing theological studies, or a believer seeking a deeper understanding of God's Word, I pray this volume becomes a trusted resource that encourages careful study and faithful application of Scripture.

One conviction has guided every page of this commentary: **the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God.** It is the final authority for faith and practice, revealing God's character, His plan of redemption, and His purposes for humanity. Every generation needs to hear its message, and every believer needs to build his or her life upon its unchanging truth.

Joel's prophecy reminds us that judgment is real, but so is grace. The Day of the Lord is coming, yet God continues to extend His invitation: "Return to Me." That invitation remains open today through the saving work of Jesus Christ. No one is beyond the reach of God's mercy, and no promise of God will ever fail.

As you read these pages, I encourage you to keep your Bible open. Read each passage carefully before consulting the commentary. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Compare Scripture with Scripture, and allow God's Word—not the commentary—to shape your convictions. If this book leads you to spend more time in the Bible than in these pages, then it has accomplished its greatest purpose.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the many pastors, teachers, scholars, and faithful believers whose love for God's Word has encouraged my own ministry over the years. Most of all, I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has graciously called me to preach His gospel, teach His truth, and proclaim the hope of His soon return.

May the Lord richly bless your study of Joel. May He strengthen your faith, deepen your understanding, and prepare your heart for the glorious day when our faith becomes sight and we stand in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of your journey through God's Word.

In His Service,

Dr. Paul Crawford

JUDGMENT IS REAL. MERCY IS AVAILABLE. HOPE IS COMING.



The Book of Joel is a prophetic masterpiece that speaks with power, relevance, and urgency to every generation. In just three chapters, the prophet declares God's warning to a sinning nation, His call to repentance, His promise of restoration, the outpouring of His Spirit, and the coming Day of the Lord—a future time of judgment for the wicked and triumph for His people.

Joel: The Locusts, the Lord, and the Last Days is a comprehensive verse by verse commentary that takes you verse by verse through this powerful book, uncovering its historical background, theological depth, and prophetic significance.

INSIDE YOU WILL DISCOVER:

- A detailed exposition of every verse in Joel
- The meaning and significance of the locust judgment
- The urgent call to repentance and returning to the Lord
- The promise of restoration and God's abundant blessings
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit—past, present, and future
- A clear explanation of the Day of the Lord
- Practical application for today's believer
- Insights that connect Joel to the New Testament and the end times



Whether you are a pastor, teacher, student, or devoted believer, this commentary will deepen your understanding of God's Word and strengthen your faith in His promises.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR DR. PAUL CRAWFORD

Dr. Paul Crawford is a Bible teacher, author, and pastor with a passion for the inerrant Word of God and the hope of Christ's return. For more than four decades he has preached, taught, and written to help believers understand Scripture, stand firm on biblical truth, and live in light of eternity. His heart is to see God's people equipped, encouraged, and prepared for the Day of the Lord.

PERFECT FOR:



PASTORS AND PREACHERS

A trusted resource
for sermon preparation
and Bible study.



BIBLE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Gain a deeper
understanding of
prophetic Scripture.



SMALL GROUPS AND SUNDAY SCHOOL

Ideal for group study
and discipleship
materials.



EVERY BELIEVER SEEKING DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Be equipped to live
faithfully in these
critical times.



A TIMELY MESSAGE. A TIMELESS GOD.

Prepare your heart. Revive your faith. Anticipate His return.

“Blow the trumpet
in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.
Consecrate the
congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom
leave his room,
and the bride her
chamber.”

JOEL 2:15–16

