Joel

# Introduction

Like Hosea and Amos either side of him in the Hebrew Bible, Joel wants his people to turn to Yahweh and come to worship him. But his reason for doing so is different. He’s not urging his people to turn to Yahweh rather than to other gods, like Hosea, nor to turn to Yahweh in a way that recognizes their community obligations rather than ignoring them, like Amos, but to turn to Yahweh rather than ignoring him in a context of threatened and/or actual natural and/or military disaster. In urging people to turn to Yahweh, he speaks of forms of worship with which he is evidently familiar, but he addresses priests, so presumably he isn’t one. The first two sections of his work are smoother than Hosea or Micah and longer than Amos, which might mean he composed his prophecy in written form, though presumably people then heard it read out from a scroll rather than read it individually.

## A Visionary Scroll

The distinctive focus of Joel is Yahweh’s day. It relates a series of visions of Yahweh’s day in terms of natural and/or military catastrophe. The first two-thirds (1:2—2:27) comprise visions of *a* day of Yahweh—a time of calamity that threatens Judah (not a catastrophe that has already happened: see the comments on 1:4). The crisis is described as a locust epidemic and then compared with a military invasion, but neither vision should be assumed simply to portray the literal nature of the catastrophe that is coming. It’s not usual for scriptural visions simply to give an advance video of an event; usually the event is rather different from the vision, even though it does fulfill it. The vision’s aim is not simply to provide advance information but to provoke a response, and Joel’s visions indicate what the response should be. The nature of the actual response is one of the factors that determine whether and in what way the vision finds fulfillment.

The last third of the scroll relates a vision or a series of visions of *the* day of Yahweh (2:28—3:21 [3:1—4:21]). The visions of a natural or military catastrophe lead to Yahweh’s giving his people warnings and promises about ultimate judgment and ultimate blessing. *The* day of Yahweh will not be a catastrophe that is merely an enhanced version of one of the calamities that do happen to a people from time to time. It will be an event or a series of events that are of ultimate and decisive significance. They involve the passing of a definitive judgment on wayward and oppressive powers in the world and the bestowing of epoch-changing blessing on the people of God. (There are senses in which the words “eschatological” and “apocalyptic” can be applied to both sequences of visions, but these words mean different things to different people. The visions do use out-of-the-ordinary and colorful imagery and 2:28—3:21 [3:1—4:21] do describe ultimate judgment and blessing, but they do not imply that the world is coming to an end or that the fulfilment need be far off—in fact, they speak of it as near.)

The expectation of *a* day of Yahweh and of *the* day of Yahweh is articulated most explicitly in Joel and it is the scroll’s defining characteristic, its “one and only subject.”[[1]](#footnote-1) But its themes run through much of the Scriptures. They reappear in Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, where (more explicitly than in Mark 13) he speaks of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (which in Joel’s terms counts as a day of Yahweh) and of a final day of judgment that is to be distinguished from that event (which in Joel’s terms counts as the day of Yahweh). Neither Joel nor Jesus suggests that the coming crisis will be an act of judgment in face of which people need to repent. It will issue from forces beyond the control of the people of God, and they need to turn to God in order to be ready for it. The scroll’s aim, then, is to get people to respond in the appropriate way to the prospect of *a* day of Yahweh (for instance, by fasting and calling on Yahweh) and to the prospect of *the* day of Yahweh (by living in trust and hope).

Joel’s use of the expression “Yahweh’s day” in connection with both events, and the close association of the two events in Jesus’s teaching, suggest that there is an intrinsic relationship between them. When a day of Yahweh comes, it is a partial embodiment of the ultimate day of Yahweh. When the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. comes, it will be a partial embodiment of the final day. One could draw the same inference from the fact that Peter sees the coming of the Holy Spirit on believers on the first Christian Pentecost as a realization of part of Job’s vision of *the* day.

## A Scripturally-inspired Prophet[[2]](#footnote-2)

Joel incorporates a number of phrases that have close parallels to other Prophets (and to passages elsewhere in the First Testament), too many to be coincidental. They are so numerous and varied that it must be Joel who is the prophet inspired by them rather than that he is the inspiration of these fellow-prophets. The clearest examples are:

1:15 cf. Ezek. 30:2-3

1:15 cf. Isa. 13:6 (also Zeph. 1:7; Obad. 15)

1:20 cf. Ps. 42:1 [2]

2:1-2 cf. Zeph. 1:14-15

2:3 cf. Ezek. 36:35 (also Isa. 51:3)

2:6 cf. Nah. 2:10 [11]

2:13 cf. Jonah 4:2[[3]](#footnote-3)

2:27 cf. Isa. 45:5

2:32 cf. Obad. 17

3:3 cf. Obad. 11

3:10 cf. Isa. 2:4 = Mic. 4:3

3:16 cf. Amos 1:2

3:18 cf. Amos 9:13

3:19 cf. Obad. 10

Joel thus identifies with the prophets whom Israel has recognized as having truly brought Yahweh’s word, in the complexity of their message with its combination of an exhortation to Judah about turning to Yahweh and a promise of restoration—as opposed (for instance) to prophets who simply assured Judah that everything would be okay.

The allusions generate a partial answer to the question of Joel’s date. The scroll gives us no concrete clues about the question, and dates through more or less the entire First Testament period have been argued. But the allusions imply that many of the prophetic scrolls are already in existence, and the links with Ezekiel in particular place Joel in the sixth century or later. This consideration fits the impression one gets from the final chapter that the fall of Jerusalem and the exile have already happened. The lack of any critique of Judah suggests not the period soon after the fall of Jerusalem but rather the context of the Second Temple community in Jerusalem sometime during the period covered by Ezra and Nehemiah. Joel’s most plausible prophetic contemporary is then Malachi. We don’t know whether everything in the scroll comes from a prophet called Joel (about whom we know nothing except his father’s name) or whether his work has been supplemented by other prophets or disciples. But (for instance) the last chapter takes up motifs and expressions from the earlier sections, which suggests that if it did not come from Joel, it came from people who identified with him, and in this sense one can treat the scroll as a unity rather than an anthology.

We don’t know whether *a* day of Yahweh came about in Joel’s time, partly because we don’t know what period it belongs to. Perhaps the calamity of which he spoke happened. One of the arguments that prophets use for Yahweh to fulfill the warnings they utter is that this fulfillment will vindicate the prophet, and it wouldn’t be surprising if the reason for preserving Joel’s messages (like those of other prophets) is that they came true. Or perhaps people turned to Yahweh as Joel urged, and catastrophe was averted. That consequence, too, might have confirmed that he truly spoke a message from Yahweh which was then preserved. Either way, the scroll is about living in light of the twofold day of Yahweh, and that theme is significant for any time. Perceiving the distinctive nature of the scroll thus enables one to see why we do not need to know its date. Evidently Joel and/or his disciples were confident that we could get the point of the messages without having that information; we can get enough information about the context it addresses from the text itself.[[4]](#footnote-4) To put it another way, we cannot establish the significance of Joel’s message on the basis of a “world behind the text,” but we can do so on the basis of considering the “world of the text.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

While Joel comes second among the Twelve Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, in the Septuagint he comes fourth after Amos and Micah. In the absence of any indications that he belonged to the same time as Hosea, Amos, and Micah, one might guess that the reason for the Hebrew order is that Joel almost closes with Yahweh roaring from Zion and giving voice from Jerusalem (3:16) and Amos almost begins there (Amos 1:2), while the reason for the Greek order is that it puts Joel with the Obadiah and Jonah as other scrolls that lack explicit historical reference.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Outline**

1:1 Introduction

1:2-20 A vision of a locust epidemic and of Yahweh’s day, and a series of biddings: listen, face facts, cry out to Yahweh

2:1-17 A vision of an invasion and of Yahweh’s day, and a series of biddings: sound a horn, turn, call a convocation

2:18-27 Promises of restoration

2:28—3:21 [3:1—4:21 in printed Hebrew Bibles]

A vision of Yahweh’s day, of judgment and of restoration

# Joel 1:1—Preface

**Translation**

1Yahweh’s message which became a reality to Yô’ēl ben Pətû’ēl.[[7]](#footnote-7)

## Interpretation

See the comments on Hosea 1:1 and the Introduction to Joel, above. Joel 1:1 is more or less as short as a preface to a prophetic scroll could be (only Obadiah manages to be shorter).The absence of reference to any kings compares with Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi, so it is not an indication of whether Judah had a king at the time or of what century the scroll comes from.

## Theological Implications

See the comments on Hosea 1:1. The thing that Joel and/or his disciples think readers need to know before reading the scroll is not its date or any information about Joel himself but the fact that this is God’s message. The Scriptures thereby confront the modern desire to know about the historical background and the millennial desire to know about the person. Alongside the scroll’s omitting such information is its containing passages (about repentance and about the spirit of God and about Yahweh’s day) that have given it as vibrant an afterlife as any other four pages in the First Testament. “Joel reaches out for the audience as inherent to its first and final purpose, and it does this through its brilliant modification of earlier prophetic discourse.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Yet it remains paradoxical that the scroll does think its readers need to know the prophet’s name, whereas outside the Latter Prophets the entire First Testament is anonymous. Did the eighth-century prophets’ names appear in their scrolls because the prophets themselves were part of their prophecies, and did a tradition thereby develop which continued even in the case of prophets who were not?

# Joel 1:2-20—Listen, Face Facts, Cry Out to Yahweh

**Translation**

2Listen to this, you elders,[[9]](#footnote-9)

give ear, all you who live in the country.

Has this happened in your days,

or in your parents’[[10]](#footnote-10) days?

3Give account of it to your children,

your children to their children,

their children to the next generation:

4The cutter’s leavings, the swarmer ate,

the swarmer’s leavings, the devourer ate,

the devourer’s leavings, the exterminator ate.

5Wake up, drunkards, and cry,

wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the treading,[[11]](#footnote-11)

because it’s been cut off from your mouth.

6Because a nation has gone up against my country,

mighty, without number,

Its teeth the teeth of a lion,

the fangs of a cougar[[12]](#footnote-12) belonging to it.

7It’s made my vine into desolation,

my fig tree into a twig.

It’s totally stripped it[[13]](#footnote-13) and thrown it away,

its branches have gone white.

8Grieve[[14]](#footnote-14) like a maiden[[15]](#footnote-15) clothed in sack

on account of her young husband.[[16]](#footnote-16)

9Offering and libation has been cut off

from Yahweh’s house.

The priests mourn,[[17]](#footnote-17)

Yahweh’s ministers.

10Countryside has been destroyed,

ground mourns,[[18]](#footnote-18)

Because wheat has been destroyed,

new wine has dried up,[[19]](#footnote-19) fresh oil is wasted.

11Farmworkers are shamed,[[20]](#footnote-20)

vinedressers have wailed,

Over grain and over barley,

because the harvest of the countryside has perished.

12The vine has dried up,

the fig tree is wasted.

Pomegranate, palm too, and apricot,[[21]](#footnote-21)

all the trees in the countryside, are dried up.

Indeed, celebration has dried up

from human beings.

13Bind it on and lament, you priests,

wail, ministers of the altar.

Come, spend the night in sack,

ministers of my God.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Because withheld from your God’s house

is offering and libation.

14Sanctify a fast, call a convocation,

gather elders,

All who live in the country,

to the house of Yahweh your God.

And cry out to Yahweh,

15“Oh, for the day!”

Because a day of Yahweh is near,

and it comes as destruction from the Destroyer.

16In front of our eyes

food is cut off, isn’t it—

From the house of our God

celebration and gladness.[[23]](#footnote-23)

17Granules[[24]](#footnote-24) have shriveled under their lumps of dirt,[[25]](#footnote-25)

storehouses are desolate.

Barns are ruined,

because wheat has dried up.

18How the animal sighs,

the herds of cattle wander confused,[[26]](#footnote-26)

Because there’s no pasturage for them;

the flocks of sheep are desolate,[[27]](#footnote-27) too.

19To you, Yahweh, I call,

because fire has consumed wilderness pastures,[[28]](#footnote-28)

and flame has burnt up all the trees in the countryside.

20The animals of the countryside, too, strain towards you,

because the channels of water dry up,

And fire has consumed

the wilderness pastures.

## Interpretation

Joel issues a series of biddings, with the reasons or the subjects about which he is speaking:

* a bidding to the entire people, to listen (vv. 2-4)
* a bidding to drunkards, to wake up, face facts, and grieve (vv. 5-12)
* a bidding to priests, to lament and get the entire people to cry out to Yahweh (vv. 13-20).

Different kinds of biddings with differently-expressed reasoning follow in 2:1-17. The English chapter division appropriately follows MT (L) and MT (C) which have a petuhah after v. 20—MT (A) has a setumah there, and MT (L) and MT (A) have a setumah after v. 12.

The chapter comprises a series of bicola with tricola occurring at strategic points at the beginning and ending of subsections or other points of emphasis (vv. 3, 4, 5, 19); there are four quadricola (vv. 6, 11, 14, 18). In vv. 2-6 there is no pattern over whether cola comprise two, three, or four stresses, but from v. 7 most second cola comprise only two stresses, in keeping with the common pattern for lament as opposed to praise. The chapter incorporates paronomasia and rhyme in v. 10, and utilizes the way the verbs for “dry up” and “be ashamed” can have the same forms.

**Joel 1:2-4**. Joel begins by speaking of a locust epidemic. Is he speaking about something that has actually happened or something that has happened only in a vision he has had? Amos 7:1-3 relates a prophet’s vision of a coming locust epidemic, though it also shows that it would be natural for the prophet to indicate that it’s a vision. On the other hand, Nahum 2 gives a visionary account of the fall of Nineveh without announcing that the account is visionary rather than actual. So Joel’s not telling us at the beginning that the account is visionary doesn’t determine the answer to the question. And it’s hard to identify a similar account of an actual event by a prophet that involves no action by the prophet himself. Further, as the account unfolds, it comes to look more visionary than actual. Verse 4 looks hyperbolic if not surreal or fantastic, like science fiction.[[29]](#footnote-29) The way it apparently recycles traditional language, not least traditional prayer language,[[30]](#footnote-30) also points in this direction. Conversely, if the locust invasion is serious at all, it seems odd that people need to have their attention drawn to the fact and need to be told to grieve. Further, the prophet’s self-references (vv. 6, 7, 13, 19) are easier to understand if he is relating a vision. There are parallels with Jesus’s parables: sometimes Jesus announces that a story he is about to tell is a parable; sometimes he leaves people to work it out. His stories then start in the real world but commonly ricochet into a surreal world and invite people to look at the everyday world in a new way.

The impression that the invasion is visionary will be confirmed by 2:1-11. It constitutes another account of an invasion which is also said to indicate the coming of Yahweh’s day. While one might imagine a prophet giving an account of an actual invasion followed by an account of another coming invasion, in this case both accounts combine elements that look more literal and elements that look larger than life, and the two accounts are simply juxtaposed without Joel giving any indication of their relationship. I infer that they are parallel visions.

That inference helps to answer a second question, or at least reframes it. Is Joel describing a literal locust invasion or are the locusts a figure for a foreign army? The comparison between locusts and an army is made elsewhere (e.g., Judg. 6:5; Jer. 51:14), but there the locusts are explicitly a simile, as they are here in chapter 2, so more likely within the vision in chapter 1 Joel speaks literally. But it is a different question what the vision refers to in actuality, what would could as fulfillment of the vision. Perhaps locusts “means both real locusts and, at the same time, is intended to evoke in the reader’s mind a political enemy.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Although the fall of Nineveh did fulfill Nahum’s vision, the vision was not a kind of advanced video of the event. Visions are imaginative rather than literal. In Joel’s case, we have no account of an event that constituted the vision’s fulfillment. It wouldn’t be surprising if there were some such event, either a natural or military disaster, and if this confirmed that the vision came from Yahweh. But we don’t know.

Joel begins by urging people to listen (v. 2), like many prophets (e.g., Hos. 4:1; Amos 3:1; Mic. 3:1), calling for the attention of the community’s leaders and of the entire people. If we may take the summons literally, it implies that he communicated his message orally even if he had composed it in writing. Throughout the First Testament, “elders” denotes the community’s leaders or senior members, without any necessary implication that they are all of advanced age (as is the case with the “elders” of a church) or that they have a formal position. The parallelism in the first line presupposes that there is a responsibility resting on the people’s leadership and also one resting on the people as a whole. A summons to listen usually heralds an indictment and/or a warning (e.g., Hos. 5:1; Amos 3:1; Mic. 1:2), and in due course Joel will talk about the thing to which they need to pay attention. But on the way to urging them to pay heed to that coming event, his focus is on getting people to pay proper attention to something that has already happened and is unprecedented in their experience or in that of their parents. He is thus raising suspense as he seeks to get his audience to wonder what on earth he can be talking about.

The elders and the people are to pass on the news (v. 3), not just to pay attention themselves. Recounting things to your children is a familiar notion: you tell the story of what Yahweh has done for his people (e.g., Pss. 44: 1 [2]; 48:13 [14]). This exhortation further heightens the suspense, and its being a tricolon adds to the suspense: what is Joel is referring to?[[32]](#footnote-32) It seems unlikely to be good news.

The answer to the question comes in another tricolon (v. 4). One of the episodes in the exodus story, which parents were to tell their children and their grandchildren about, was a locust epidemic that played a role in demonstrating Yahweh’s lordship over Pharaoh on the way to getting the Israelites out of Egypt (Exod. 10:2), and it is a locust epidemic that Joel bids the community talk about. Locusts are a type of grasshopper which is mostly harmless but sometime breeds abundantly, swarms from place to place, and consumes everything that grows in an area. The four nouns for locust might denote different species, though it’s odd that the regular word for “locust” comes second, and one wonders whether Joel would expect his audience to be that expert in entomology. More likely he simply uses a variety of words for the insects, like an English speaker referring to flies, wasps, mosquitos and hornets; Hebrew has several other words that are sometimes translated locust (see e.g., Amos 7:1). The point in the list is to convey the dimensions of the disaster and the relentless sequence of destructive invaders. The repetition of “leavings” conveys how the locusts have demonstrated their devastating capacity to consume crops.

**Joel 1:5-7**. A further tricolon marks the start of a second subsection. The exhortation in vv. 2-4 didn’t say who had experienced the locust epidemic, and the parallel with the exodus story would make it possible to assume it had happened to someone else. Thus the suspense raised by vv. 2-4 is not yet resolved.

Even the initial exhortation to drinkers (v. 5) might be an apostrophe, an imaginary address to members of whatever nation was affected, like the messages addressed to foreign nations in the Prophets (of which Joel 3:4-8 will be an example). The “treading” is the first of a year’s new wine (cf. v. 10), the first to issue from the process of treading the grapes. Mention of it conveys a hint that these drinkers can’t wait to be sampling the new vintage, and Joel’s exhortation implies that they are not taking seriously the dimensions of the calamity he has described. A locust invasion typically takes place in spring, and at such a time drinkers who live in the present have nothing to worry about because they are still enjoying last year’s vintage. Joel wants them to face the facts about how things will be in a few months’ time when they experience “a period of forced detox.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Perhaps “drunkards” is a slur; Joel is addressing the community as a whole, people who are drinkers but who are behaving with the carelessness of drunks.

If there were any doubt, “my country” (v. 6) finally establishes that Joel is talking about Judah and about the people he is directly addressing. Haranguing them as drunks therefore has “shock value.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Prophets easily move between using “he” or “I” to refer to Yahweh, so that “my country” could be Yahweh’s words (likewise “my vine” and “my fig tree” in v. 7). But Joel has not mentioned Yahweh at all yet, and he will do so in the third person in v. 8 and in succeeding verses. Further, combined “my” in v. 13 and “I” in v. 19 must refer to Joel. So Joel is more likely speaking of his country (his vine, and his fig tree), as he has seen them in his vision, not about some foreign land that means nothing to him. He wants to get people to face the facts about a terrible catastrophe that is coming, and he therefore draws attention to the devastating work of the locust host, like that of a human army or a herd of lions. He needn’t be exaggerating when he says they are without number; locusts can number in their billions. He’s exaggerating when he says they have fangs like a lion’s, yet he truly conveys the effect of them on trees and plant life.

More literally, they eventually strip even the bark off trees (v. 7) and leave them bare. Vine and fig appear as fruit trees of key importance (cf. Hos. 2:12 [14]). Sitting under your vine and fig tree is a sign of well-being and blessing (e.g., 1 Kings 4:25 [5:5]; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10). The devastation of vine and fig tree has the opposite implication. The dimensions of the disaster heighten the question whether the calamity had already happened. One would then have thought that the exhortation to wake up would hardly be necessary, though Joel’s later words (v. 15) will indicate why it might still be necessary.

**Joel 1:8-12.** Another imperative (v. 8) does address a girl in an apostrophe: the community is like a girl who has lost the young man she was about to marry. She is thus dressed in clothing made of coarse, rough fabric or goat’s hair, the kind you might wear for work, not the outfit of nicely woven material in which one would usually appear in public, still less one appropriate to a wedding.

The visionary disaster (v. 9) means people having neither grain offering nor drink offering to bring to the temple. Such offerings were to be made morning and evening, with the burnt offerings (Exod. 29:38-42). The priests and ministers have already worked out this implication. While it might affect them personally, as their provision comes from the offerings that people bring, it is too cynical an assessment of Joel to suggest that he focuses on their concern for themselves; 2:14 explicitly describes these two offerings as provided for Yahweh.[[35]](#footnote-35) In general, “ministers” can refer either to the (Aaronic) priests or to other Levites; but later Joel calls them “ministers of the altar” (v. 13), which sounds more like priests (cf. Exod. 28:43; 30:20; Ezek. 40:46). So “Yahweh’s ministers” is simply another way of referring to the priests (cf. Tg).

The countryside’s destruction makes the ground itself mourn (v. 10), along with the priests: that is, its appearance is that of the gloom and darkness of mourning, the opposite of trees waving their “arms” and clapping their “hands” in joyful praise (e.g., Isa. 55:12). All the three key products of the land, newly-harvested wheat, new wine, and fresh oil (see Hos. 2:8 [10]) are altogether gone.

People directly engaged in agriculture (v. 11), which means most people, cannot escape the reality of what they see before their eyes. The farmworkers stand for people involved in growing crops in the fields, who will be able to provide neither their families nor their animals with provision for the next year and are thus ashamed at their prospective failure. The vinedressers stand for people who tend the fruit trees, but the terms will refer to the same people, as each family would have something of everything. The line works aba’b’—the farmworkers are ashamed that they cannot provide grain or barley, the vinedressers grieve over the harvest of the trees in the countryside.

To add to the reference to the vine (v. 12), reference to four more fruit trees sums up the entire fruit harvest. The wonder of the land can be summed up as grain, barley, vine, fig, pomegranate, olive, and “honey” from the dates from palm trees (Deut. 8:8). It’s all devastated. The words for “shamed” and for “dried up” are the same, suggesting that the vines share in the farmworkers’ shame as the ground shares in the priests’ mourning, at their inability to provide for the worship of Yahweh and the celebration with which people engage in that worship. The verbal link also points to the physical aspect of shame. It’s a crushing, debilitating, and diminishing business; it suggests vulnerability and fear.[[36]](#footnote-36)

**Joel 1:13-15a.** The exhortation to face facts centered on the epidemic’s effect on people’s life and worship. Yet even the comment about its impact on the temple made no reference to turning to Yahweh. Joel’s third exhortation urges such a turning.

Joel first (v. 13) addresses the priests or ministers who featured in v. 9, and now requires of them more than listening and more than the mourning that the they were already engaged in. Mourning, after all, need not involve coming to Yahweh. The Israelites in Egypt groaned and cried out, but Exodus 2:23 doesn’t say they were groaning and crying out to Yahweh, though Yahweh heard them anyway. Joel implies another possible aspect to the sense in which they need to face facts—or as well as facing facts, they need to bring them before Yahweh. So it’s time the priests bound on sack like the grieving bride—in other words, it’s time they came before Yahweh not in splendid priestly vestments but in that common coarse cloth garb. It’s time to lament in the manner of people grieving when someone’s died, time to join in the drunkards’ and the vinedressers’ wailing, time to spend the night doing it to show how serious they are as David once did (2 Sam. 12:16), with the kind of all-night crying that Psalm 30:5 [6] speaks of. While David did his fasting and praying in the palace, the priests will do theirs before Yahweh in the temple, especially in light of the focus of their mourning on offering and libation (cf. v. 9). Who is the agent of the withholding of which Joel speaks in the passive? Is it the people holding onto their meagre supplies? But the lines that follow (especially v. 15a) suggest it is Yahweh himself.

The priests are also to take an initiative (v. 14a) in exercising their responsibility to call the elders and the people as a whole who were Joel’s original addressees in v. 2 to come before Yahweh. As a prophet, Joel can summon them, but really it’s the priests’ business. Their doing so will indicate that they’ve come to accept his assessment of what is needed and will signify to the people that his exhortations are not just the ravings of a nutter who has turned a drama into a crisis. Only Joel talks about “sanctifying” a fast (cf. 2:12, 15). The expression compares with sanctifying the Sabbath and sanctifying a battle (3:9); it implies making it an out-of-the-ordinary occasion on which regular activities were suspended. There are various degrees of fasting, and Joel may not have in mind total abstinence from food, but certainly the situation is too serious for there to be time or inclination to feast, as it is too serious for there to be time or inclination for dressing up. Usually the First Testament speaks of “calling” a fast (e.g., Jonah 3:5); here Joel urges the calling of a convocation, which goes with the exhortation to sanctify a fast. The fast is not an observance people will undertake in private; it involves meeting together before Yahweh. It is not an observance people will undertake at home and at work; the word for convocation etymologically denotes restraining, holding back from regular life. The word thus goes well with the idea of holding back from food. The priests are to gather both the elders and the community as a whole. It was quite a venture to bid all the people to listen, and it is a bigger and totally unrealistic venture to expect that the entire country should come to a convocation in the temple, even if the country is simply the little Persian province of Yehud. The bidding is hyperbolic, and perhaps it continues to be simply part of Joel’s vision. But it’s serious.

The priests are then to take the lead in crying out to Yahweh (vv. 14b-15a). The expression “Oh, for the day” echoes Ezekiel 30:2, where the prophet invites the Egyptians to “wail” (the bidding Joel issued in v. 13) in light of a day that is coming for them. The Judahites would have had reason to be pleased to overhear that bidding, but it has come back to bite them.

**Joel 1:15b-18.** This succeeding subsection once again goes over the visionary facts that Joel has urged people to face, but it does so in the framework of that lament in v. 15a which Joel now expands. In other words, vv. 15b-18 are the substance of the cry that Joel urges on the priests or the rationale for that cry. In modern times the expression “the day of Yahweh” has become a technical term, but it was not previously understood in this way,[[37]](#footnote-37) and in the First Testament it is not a one time event, still less one that means the end of history, an end after which there is nothing to follow (otherwise there would be no grandchildren to tell).[[38]](#footnote-38) Isaiah speaks of a day of Yahweh for Babylon, Amos speaks of one for Ephraim, Ezekiel speaks of one for Egypt. Ezekiel uses an expression which more literally means “a day belonging to Yahweh” as opposed to “Yahweh’s day”;[[39]](#footnote-39) if one wanted to make explicit reference to “a day” as opposed to “the day,” this formulation would be a way to do it.

Joel continues to reflect the words of earlier prophecy (v. 15b). While Ezekiel 30:3 adds to the Egyptians’ wail that “a day is near, a day belonging to Yahweh is near,” and the declaration “a day of Yahweh is near” recurs elsewhere (e.g., Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7), Joel’s words more exactly correspond to Isaiah 13:6:

Wail, because a day of Yahweh is near;

it comes as destruction from the destroyer.

Setting his vision in the context of this declaration takes the description of its significance to a new level and adds to the sense in which Joel wants people to face facts. What he has been describing is not simply a natural disaster about which people might simply shrug their shoulders (as the wakeup call has implied). It is a day of Yahweh.

Joel opens the eyes of his contemporaries to the possibility that the Day of the Lord is imbedded already *in any extreme distress* like in the drought and in the locustsof his own time. He is the first and only prophet that not only warns his own generation of the coming of the Day of the Lord, but claims they are already experiencing the dreaded effects of this day*,* though the day is only beginning and has not yet reached its full power.[[40]](#footnote-40)

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

Joel wants people to imagine the event of which he warns (v. 16) and to make the appropriate response. A prophet such as Jeremiah or Ezekiel might have described the earlier fall of Jerusalem and exile in 597 as a day of Yahweh dawning, summoning Judah to turn to Yahweh before it’s too late. Joel wants people to recognize such a summons in his vision of a calamity, to articulate what is before their eyes if they permit themselves to look, to articulate before Yahweh what they see as if it has happened. They are thus drawn into that process belonging integrally to prayer in the Psalms, which spend much time describing to Yahweh things that have happened. One could get the impression that people think Yahweh does not know about them, but the language is performative rather than merely informative. It makes the people’s experience part of the acknowledged relationship between Yahweh and his people rather than something they aren’t talking about. And it implicitly urges Yahweh to act on behalf of his people because he cannot turn away from the tough experience they are drawing his attention to. Having no food inevitably affects their relationship with God, because meeting together with him in the context of celebratory meals is integral to that relationship. No food, no celebration.

The words Joel proposes go on to spell out the down-to-earth realities (vv. 17-18). Stores are gone, and the granaries are therefore empty and have been allowed to fall into disrepair. In the fields, there is no grass for the animals. Like the crops, the animals join with humanity in their reaction to events: they sigh like the Judahites after the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:4, 8, 11, 21), wander about confused like Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 14:3), and are desolate in the way prophets say Judahites will be after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 4:9; Ezek. 4:17).

**Joel 1:19-20.** If vv. 15b-18 are the cry Joel urges on the priests, the transition from “we” to “I” needn’t mean a change in who is speaking. A community prayer can move between “we” and “I” (e.g., Ps. 44) and the “I” might represent the voice of the person voicing the prayer on behalf of the community, or the voce of each individual within the community. On the other hand, Joel has already twice spoken of himself and his involvement in his message (vv. 6, 7, 13), so maybe vv. 19-20 are his own prayer as well as one he wants the community to pray.

The wilderness or pasturage and the countryside or wild (v. 19) refer to the same region, the area between cultivable land (where people can grow wheat and barley) and desert (where nothing much can grow except in oases). In this intermediate area animals such as deer can survive and a knowledgeable shepherd can pasture sheep. The effect of the locust epidemic is as if fire had swept through this region; there’s nothing left by way of pasture or trees. Joel has apparently moved from speaking of what a locust epidemic literally does to speaking metaphorically about the effect of the epidemic, which parallels the effect of fire. A move between images that are literally incompatible or a move from literal to metaphorical is characteristic of the way prayer works in the Psalms (e.g., Pss. 22; 69).[[41]](#footnote-41) But fire and flame consuming is also an image for Yahweh’s own destructive coming (e.g., Lam. 2:3), which adds piquancy to Joel’s appeal to Yahweh in this connection.

The description of the effect of the fire (v. 20) continues to follow the language of prayer:

Like a deer that strains towards the channels of water,

so my entire being strains towards you, God. (Ps. 42:1 [2])

The verb for “strains” comes only in these two places. “At this point, the issue is not only a locust plague; all creation has come to a halt.”[[42]](#footnote-42) It is another way of indicating the seriousness of the way people need to take what Joel has seen.

## Theological Implications

1. Listen, face facts, cry out to God summarizes key aspects of the relationship between the people of God and God himself.
2. There is a responsibility for listening, facing facts, and crying out that rests with the leaders of the people of God and a responsibility that rests with the people. The responsibility of the leaders is to draw the people into listening, facing facts, and crying out.
3. Though the idea that the locust plague is unprecedented may be an exaggeration, the hyperbole indicates the monumental nature of what has happened. “The prophet is in the habit of saying many things by way of hyperbole for greater impact on the listeners, since, no matter what the words are, they pale before the events.”[[43]](#footnote-43)
4. Theodore identifies the four kinds of locust as standing for the Assyrian kings Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, and Sennacherib, and the Babylonian king who eventually took the Judahites into exile.[[44]](#footnote-44) For people listening to the Joel scroll who were not Joel’s immediate audience, the answer to the questions about actual or visionary or about literal or metaphorical might make little difference. For them, the reality of disasters is what matters, and the reality of disasters of different kinds (e.g., natural or military).
5. Like prophets such as Amos and Jeremiah, Joel assumes that things happening in nature can indicate what God is doing. There is a unity about reality. And days of Yahweh come to the people of God and to the world from time to time. The people of God need to be able to recognize the harbingers of a day of Yahweh, though it is easy not to do so. In California, who responds to the drought by fasting and crying out to God? In Europe, who responds to ethnic tensions seriously by fasting and praying?
6. The worst thing about a disaster may be that it takes away from people’s capacity to worship and celebrate together, with God. On the other hand, it may be the possibility of bringing calamities before God that makes it possible to face them.
7. An ecological hermeneutic invites us to grieve with sufferings nature,[[45]](#footnote-45) but such a hermeneutic also brings out the pathos of Joel’s picture. Nature is divided against itself. Yet nature is just doing what nature does. Nature itself is then capable of mourning, sighing, wandering confused, feeling desolate, and striving towards God. Humanity’s job is to cry out to God on nature’s behalf (or to cry out for God to take the side of nature against nature) and not just on its own behalf.
8. There is honor and satisfaction that attaches to being able to feed one’s family and provide for the worship of God, and thus shame and grief that attaches to not being able to do so. Shame needs to make people turn to God.[[46]](#footnote-46)
9. There are times when prophets have to confront people about the nature of their worship (see Hosea). There are times when prophets have to confront people about their life outside worship, which makes their worship offensive (see Amos). There are times when prophets have to confront people about not coming to worship (see Joel). There are times for critiquing fasting because it does not express the whole person’s turning to God. There are times for urging fasting because people are not turning to God. There are times for critiquing formal expressions of worship such as dressing in the garments of mourning or dressing in garments of splendor, and times for urging them because the formal expression is an outward expression of the real.
10. God is a sometimes a destroyer; he is the one whose fiery flame sometimes consumes. But this doesn’t mean we stop praying to him; rather it means we pray to God against God.

# Joel 2:1-17—Sound a Horn in Zion

**Translation**

1Sound a horn in Ṣiyyôn,

shout on my sacred mountain:

“All who live in the country should tremble,

because a day of Yahweh is coming.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Because it’s near,

2a day of darkness and gloom,

A day of cloud and murkiness,

like dawn[[48]](#footnote-48) spread over the mountains.

A numerous, mighty company,

the like of which[[49]](#footnote-49) has not happened from of old,

And after which there will not happen again,

through the years of age after age:

3Before it fire has consumed,

behind it flame blazes.

The country was like Eden Garden before it,

behind it desolate wilderness—[[50]](#footnote-50)

yes, there has been nothing of it[[51]](#footnote-51) surviving.

4Its appearance is the very appearance of horses,

like cavalry,[[52]](#footnote-52) so they run.

5As with the sound of chariots

over the heads of the mountains they leap,

As with the sound of a fiery flame

consuming straw,

Like a mighty company

lined up for battle.

6From before it peoples writhe,

all faces collect a flush.[[53]](#footnote-53)

7Like strong men they run,

like men of battle they climb a wall.

Each in his ways they go,

they don’t pledge[[54]](#footnote-54) their paths.

8None jostles his brother,

each man on his own highway they go.

In among weaponry[[55]](#footnote-55) they fall,[[56]](#footnote-56)

they don’t make dishonest gain.[[57]](#footnote-57)

9At the town they rush,

at the wall they run.

At the houses they go up,

through the windows they come like a thief.

10Before it[[58]](#footnote-58) earth has shaken,

heavens have trembled,

As sun and moon have gone dark,[[59]](#footnote-59)

and stars have gathered up their brightness,

11And Yahweh has given his voice

before his force.

Yes,[[60]](#footnote-60) his camp is very numerous,

yes, that acting on his word is mighty,[[61]](#footnote-61)

Yes, Yahweh’s day is great, very awe-inspiring,

who can contain it?

12But even now (Yahweh’s proclamation):

Turn back to me with your entire inner self,[[62]](#footnote-62)

with fasting, with crying, and with lamenting.

13Tear your inner self and not your clothes

and turn back to Yahweh your God,

Because he is “gracious and compassionate,

long-tempered and big in commitment,”

and relenting about anything bad.

14Who knows, he may turn back and relent,

and let a blessing remain behind him,

An offering and a libation

for Yahweh our God.

15Sound a horn in Ṣiyyôn, sanctify a fast,

call a convocation, 16gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation, collect the elderly,

gather the infants, even the ones nursing at the breasts.

The groom is to go from his room,

the bride from her canopy.

17Between the porch and the altar,

the priests, Yahweh’s ministers, are to cry,

And say, “Spare your people, Yahweh,

don’t give your domain over to reviling,

to the nations’ ruling over them.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Why should they say among the peoples,

‘Where is their God?’”

## Interpretation

Joel 2:1-17 essentially restates the message from chapter 1. The two sections are also parallel in their nature: as 1:2-20 relates a vision given to Joel had rather than being an account of an event, all the more clearly 2:1-17 relates a vision. Perhaps one is to imagine that Joel received the first vision and delivered the message on a particular occasion in the temple precincts in Jerusalem or in a public square, then this second vision and message on another occasion. One could compare the questions raised by the overlap between these two “stories” with the question of the relationship of Hosea 1 and Hosea 3.[[64]](#footnote-64) Here there is no equivalent to the “further” of Hosea 3:1 and thus nothing to inhibit the conclusion that in the Joel scroll 2:1-17 parallels 1:2-20.[[65]](#footnote-65)

* This section also begins with an exhortation that aims to get people’s attention, but it is Joel’s report of Yahweh’s commission to him to get people’s attention rather than his own exhortation to the community to listen—though its indirect effect is the same.
* It urges the entire community to involve itself in a response to what the vision pictures.
* It almost begins with a declaration that a day of Yahweh is near, as the first vision almost ends with such a declaration; though it says that the day is coming or has come (a participle or a qatal) as opposed to saying the day comes or will come (yiqtol).
* It describes the coming of a numerous, mighty, army-like company, which fits with the description of the “nation” of locusts in the first vision, though it extensively develops the simile and adds that Yahweh is its commander-in-chief.
* It describes an event of unprecedented nature, as the first vision did; it adds that the event will also never be equaled in significance in the future.
* It describes an event associated with fire and flame, which suggest the presence of Yahweh, and adds cosmic reverberations to the phenomena.
* It describes the total destruction of growth in a landscape, but adds the picture of the “army” attacking a city.
* It urges lamentation, fasting, and convocation, but adds turning back to Yahweh as the gracious and flexible God.
* It expresses concern about offering and oblation, but makes explicit the possibility that Yahweh may make it possible to restore them.
* It thus presupposes that notwithstanding the visionary portrayal of events as actual, the future is actually open and it is possible for the people to turn to Yahweh and for Yahweh to turn.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The openness of the future suggests one answer to the question “Why preserve such a description of impending doom?[[67]](#footnote-67) That question relates to the question what happened after Joel shared his visions, and whether they found fulfillment. Maybe people responded and the disaster did not materialize, and that was a reason for holding onto the visions. Or maybe people didn’t respond and some form of disaster did materialize, and that was a reason for holding onto the visions. Either aftermath might encourage the liturgical usage of the visions with a view to maintaining hope and maintaining prayer.

The section is dominated by bicola, though tricola close vv. 1-3, open vv. 12-14, and add emphasis to vv. 13b and 17bαβγ. A number of lines continue by enjambment into the subsequent line, which could not stand on its own, and thus form a quadracolon (e.g., vv. 1bβ-2a; 2b; 14) or a pentacolon (v. 13), or into two subsequent lines and thus form a sexacolon (vv. 5; 10-11aαβ). Through vv. 4-9 the usual Hebrew word order is reversed and nouns precede verbs, conveying a staccato and breathless effect and emphasizing the manner of the coming, especially for the description of the attacking “army.”

**Joel 2:1-2a**. “Once again there is a nice description of war for us.”[[68]](#footnote-68) In Joel’s vision (v. 1aαβ), Yahweh issues an opening double bidding that parallels Hosea 5:8 in combining language that suggests making people aware that an attacking army is coming (sound a horn, shout) with language that suggests a summons to worship (Zion, my sacred mountain). Given that v. 2 takes up a line from Zephaniah 1:15, it is also significant that Zephaniah 1:16, too, speaks of a horn and a shout. Part of Joel’s inspiration lies in these prophetic predecessors, and a pattern of events that they relate is to be repeated in Judah’s experience. Whereas the perspective of chapter 1 was the country as a whole, the perspective of this section is its capital city, though initially it refers not to Jerusalem, the city as a whole, but to Zion, the temple mount. The entities that are figuratively addressed are guards standing at what is also that high point of the city to apprise it of trouble when trouble threatens. The frightening fact about the event of which they are to give warning is that it will affect Yahweh’s sacred mountain, the place that especially belongs to him, the place where his dwelling is, a place he therefore defends (e.g., Ps. 48).[[69]](#footnote-69) But (it will transpire) he is the one who is commissioning an attack on it.

Yahweh goes on to detail the contents of the shout (v. 1aγbα). The people who hear the horn and the shout should quake, because a day of Yahweh is coming: Joel immediately introduces this declaration to his actual hearers rather than holding it back for a climactic moment as he did in chapter 1. Perhaps we are to suppose that this vision follows up the previous one so that there is no suspense to be gained by holding anything back. Previously Joel followed Isaiah 13:6-9 in saying that Yahweh’s day is near and that it comes; here he says it’s coming and that it’s near. He again follows Isaiah 13 in the move from yiqtol to participle.

Joel’s own characterization of the day (vv. 1bβ-2a) confirms that characteristically its arrival is bad news for the people on whom it comes. The first two cola exactly repeat Zephaniah 1:15bγδ; darkness and gloom are also the words used to describe the affliction in Egypt that follows on the locust epidemic there (Exod. 10:22). The characterization as cloud and murkiness corresponds to the description of the darkness that envelops God, indicates his presence, and protects people from his dazzling brightness (Deut. 4:11; 5:22 [19]; Ps. 97:2). The coming of Yahweh on his day is a serious business. The image of dawn spread over the mountains is then Joel’s own gloss. The speedy and unstoppable coming of dawn should be good news. But if you have something to hide, it means exposure.[[70]](#footnote-70)

**Joel 2:2b-3**.In a “drumbeat of dread”[[71]](#footnote-71) (v. 2b) Joel goes on to characterize the army of whose approach the horn and shout gave warning. This company is numerous and (as 1:6 said) mighty. Again he adds that the likes of it is unprecedented and unlikely ever to be seen again (cf. 1:3).

As in 1:19 he speaks of fire and flame consuming and burning up (v. 3), and again it’s presumably a metaphor, but a theological one: it suggests Yahweh’s activity. That implication is also suggested by the image of fire going before it (cf. Ps. 50:2; 97:3) and even blazing behind it. The result is that an Eden-like country becomes a desolated wilderness (cf. 1:7, 17, 18). The latter reference frustrates the expectation that something complementary will follow the phrase “Eden Garden” and constitutes “a brilliant exploitation of the possibilities of surprise inherent in the system of parallelisms.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Turning Eden Garden into a desolation reverses the reversal promised in Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35. Joel adds his own gloss with the reference to there being nothing of the countryside that escaped from the fire (but cf. Lam. 2:2).

**Joel 2:4-9**.The devastators resemble an army (v. 4). While there is no explicit mention of locusts in this section (they will reappear in v. 25), since the devastators are explicitly *like* an army, they are not actually an army in Joel’s vision, though this does not stop them being an army in the reality to which the picture ultimately corresponds.[[73]](#footnote-73) Strangely but obligingly, locusts look rather like miniaturized horses, and their host speeds like cavalry; horses are military animals. Revelation 9 takes up the picture of horse-like locusts.

Their host makes a whirring and a crunching noise(v. 5) that could cause one to think of chariots rumbling or of fire consuming straw or of the noise of a jet engine,[[74]](#footnote-74) and the contours of the land don’t inhibit the host’s progress as they might inhibit chariots. It operates with what looks like the discipline of an enormous but well-ordered force.

Not surprisingly, it terrifies the people whose land it attacks (v. 6). Indeed, to speak hyperbolically, it terrifies peoples (plural).

Its discipline expresses itself in the way its members individually proceed (v. 7). They resemble the well-drilled members of a special force doing exactly what they have been trained to do (cf. Prov. 30:27). They speed like fit and hardened warriors and they baulk at no physical challenge. They don’t make any offers to defenders or to fellow-soldiers, in an attempt to get out of the conflict; they are like the Medes who don’t care about silver or gold (Isa. 13:17).

They march straight ahead and stay in rank without getting in each other’s way (v. 8). They know the route they’re to take and they stick to it. They throw themselves at a town’s defenders and power through them without pausing or hesitating, and without bribery or empty promises.

Thus they hurl themselves headlong at a town wall (v. 9) and specifically at the houses that are set in the wall, through whose windows the attackers can come like robbers. Through the account Joel maintains the dual picture of a locust army and a human army; locusts were notorious for being able to invade houses like ants or cockroaches or lizards, to the despair of their inhabitants (Prov. 30:27-28).

**Joel 2:10-11**. Joel draws back from the vivid portrayal of the progress of the human/locust army to comment on the wider reaction it has aroused, and moves to speaking in qatal rather than yiqtol verbs.

The reaction of earth and heavens, of sun, moon and stars (v. 10), is the natural response of the cosmos to an awareness that Yahweh has been acting. Once again Joel is inspired by the vision of a day of Yahweh in Isaiah (see Isa. 13:10), and once again he inspires Revelation’s locust vision (see Rev. 9:2). Why does the cosmos react in the way it does? Because the event Joel has been describing is so impressive? Because the event is objectively so important? Because the event has implications for the whole cosmos?

Part of the answer is “None of the above” (v. 11). The verb tense having reverted to that in v. 3, the line takes us back behind the account of the army’s advance and makes more explicit what underlay it. While v. 3 hinted that it was Yahweh who set it on its mission, only now is it explicit that the army is Yahweh’s army. Yahweh’s giving voice makes extraordinary things happen (e.g., 3:16; Ps. 18:13 [14]; Jer. 25:30; Amos 1:2). It was he who gave the battle cry at the head of the army. And this army that implements his commands is of spectacular size. Thus the day of Yahweh that has arrived is awe-inspiring and irresistible.

**Joel 2:12-14.** One might therefore have thought that it was all over, but the pattern of chapter 2 follows that of chapter 1. Indeed, it does so in an enhanced form, because Yahweh now speaks.

Actually the “even now” (v. 12) indicates it’s never over until it’s over, and the “Yahweh’s proclamation” underlines the point. The picture of a calamity that’s going to happen or could happen is designed to push people to turn back to Yahweh before it does happen, before vision becomes actuality. Usually “turning back” (*šûb*)implies that people have turned away, but it need not do so (e.g., Ps. 22:27 [28]; Isa. 19:22), and in Joel there is no reference to wrongdoing or waywardness that people need to turn from.[[75]](#footnote-75) The idea is simply that people need to turn to Yahweh whenever disaster happens or is threatened, in the way that (say) people in the Maccabean crisis would need to. That crisis and Joel’s crisis are not disasters that issue from people’s sin but they are disasters, and people need to direct themselves to Yahweh, with their whole inner being and with the fasting, crying, and lamenting of which chapter 1 spoke, which is the necessary outward expression of their interior turning.

Joel then provides his gloss on Yahweh’s own invitation and challenge (v. 13), adding that (on the other hand), neither is the turning to be one that is merely outward. As well as being body as well as inner self, it’s to be inner self and not just externals. It means an inner circumcision not just an outward one (cf. Deut. 30:6).[[76]](#footnote-76) The basis for a confident turning is who Yahweh is: gracious, compassionate, long-tempered, and big in commitment. The description corresponds more or less word for word with his own self-description at Sinai (Exod. 34:6), which is often alluded to in the First Testament. Joel’s words correspond particularly to the version in Jonah 4:2, which also goes on to the additional note that he is “relenting about anything bad.” These words resonate further with Sinai (see Exod. 32:12, 14),[[77]](#footnote-77) though the formulation in Joel and Jonah is even closer to Jeremiah 18:8.[[78]](#footnote-78) Joel thus invites people to turn to Yahweh on the basis of the assurance that he will behave in a way consistent with his behavior at Sinai (*a fortiori* if they do not have apostasy to turn from) and consistent with his dealing in relation to Nineveh (*a fortiori* if they do not have gross waywardness to turn from). While the exhortation to fast, cry, and lament thus recapitulates chapter 1, the motivation is different: not the awfulness of the calamity but the graciousness of Yahweh.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Not that anything can be taken for granted (v. 14). “‘Who knows’ how God will respond to this lament?... Not even God’s own prophet is certain of what the future holds! At such times, one is simply called to trust in God.”[[80]](#footnote-80) Again the collocation of the two turnings and the collocation of Yahweh’s turning and relenting correspond to those in Jonah (3:8-10). The talk of a blessing is Joel’s more distinctive note. Blessings consist especially in the fruitfulness of the harvest, which would be imperiled by a locust epidemic (e.g., Deut. 28:2-8; Ps. 67). Yet letting a blessing “remain” implies further that people are not to take too much for granted. It’s the verb that lies behind the words for remains or remainder. It doesn’t imply too high an expectation (cf. other passages from the Second Temple period such as Ezra 9:8, 15; Neh. 1:2-3). On the other hand, “behind him” makes for an encouraging contrast with the “behind it” (the same Hebrew word form) in v. 3. Here the focus and perhaps the basis of the expectation is that such a blessing will make possible the offering and libation to Yahweh of which 1:9 and 13 spoke.

MT has a petuhah after v. 14 (and no division after v. 17) which does properly mark a point at which there is something to be said for stopping and reflecting for a moment.

**Joel 2:15-17.** But Joel goes on to spell out the nature of the turning that Yahweh has urged. “Seven imperatives and four jussives in the space of three verses generates a sense of urgency.”[[81]](#footnote-81)

He first repeats the bidding from the opening of this section (v. 15). Whereas there it was Yahweh’s bidding and it suggested something threatening, here it is Joel’s own exhortation and it has the other possible significance of such a bidding, a summons to worship. Joel reprises a further series of earlier exhortations to people such as priests, as he comes near the end of his process of seeking to get people to turn to Yahweh (see 1:14).

He adds a bidding to sanctify the congregation (v. 16)—that is, to get them separated from everyday activities so as to be able to keep company with Yahweh for a while. And he speaks of elderly and young instead of elders and ordinary people. It is to be a gathering of the entire community, including people who might seem too young or too old. People who might be focusing on something else such as their imminent marriage are not excused. That’s how important and pressing it is.

The priests were to assemble in front of the actual temple building (v. 17), in the courtyard between its porch and the altar for sacrifice. The people in general would gather in the outer courtyard and would thus be able to see or at least hear what was going on. There’s a nice contrast in Joel’s commission with the picture of the activity there in Ezekiel 8:16, the only other passage referring to the space “between the porch and the altar.” The mention of the altar implies that the priests would be offering sacrifices; it was customary for sacrifices to accompany prayers and for prayers to accompany sacrifices. The prayers will be urgent cries—in the Scriptures prayer is more fervent and abandoned than it is in Western churches. Alongside the sequences of linked terms in vv. 15-17a, five further pairs of terms appear in the prayer Joel prescribes. The request is that Yahweh should “not give over” and should rather “spare”; talk of sparing again links Joel and Jonah (4:10-11), with the implication “If you can spare Nineveh, spare us,” or “Yahweh can spare Nineveh as he spares Jerusalem.” The subject of the prayer is “your people” and “your domain”—conventionally “your inheritance,” but the word draws attention to the certainty of possession rather than the means of acquisition (and obviously Yahweh doesn’t “inherit” things). The fate against which people are to pray is reviling or alien rule, among the nations or the peoples. The one to whom people are to pray is Yahweh and “their God”; it is common in First Testament prayers to urge God to take account of the discredit he will bring on himself if he does not respond when people ask, “Where is he?” (cf. Pss. 42:3, 10 [4, 11]; 115:2).

## Theological Implications

1. The fact of monotheism, or rather the fact that Yahweh alone is God, means that God has a complex relationship with his people and with events. There are not a number of gods among whom roles can be shared (the common Christian recourse, which makes God the angry judge and Jesus the nice savior). God is the one who makes disasters happen. God is also the one who warns of disaster. In fact, he is like a father. “In the final analysis, Jerusalem can be threatened only by the God whose will has been proclaimed to Israel” who comes with the army depicted in vv. 2-10.[[82]](#footnote-82) And the only escape from this God is by turning to him. “The crucial point” in vv. 1-11 “is that Yahweh personally commands the army…. The people are faced with the awesome arrival of the Lord himself.”[[83]](#footnote-83)
2. The horse-like locusts are part of the inspiration of the account of the first woe in Revelation 9:1-11. In Revelation they thus take part in events that happen at the End. In Joel they take part in an event that happens within history. The reappearance of the locusts in Revelation is a symbol of the fact that the day of Yahweh that can happen in the history of God’s people and the series of events that relate to the End do have a relationship with each other. The day of Yahweh of which Joel speaks is is a harbinger of that final day. Joel does note that tumultuous events on earth are significant not only for people on earth and that reverberations in the heavens accompany them, and he thereby hints at that significance of a day of Yahweh.
3. Joel 2:12-17 is a traditional reading for Ash Wednesday, which invites people to see the turning to God of which it speaks as a turning away from sin.[[84]](#footnote-84) This rereading of the passage parallels the designation of certain psalms as the Penitential Psalms, when most of them are not penitential. First Testament spirituality is less preoccupied by penitence than Christian spirituality is, though more preoccupied by an actual turning from sin. Conversely, Joel’s preoccupation with disaster that comes from God but that is not brought into connection with sin is of significance in relation to the way Jewish people relate to God in light of the Holocaust[[85]](#footnote-85) and the way the Latin American church might relate to Joel.[[86]](#footnote-86)
4. Turning to God involves both the entire inner self and the entire outer self—fasting, crying, lamenting. Merely outward turning is insufficient. Merely inward turning is insufficient. Further, turning to God involves the community as a whole and not just the individual, and it makes its demand of the entire community.
5. Joel’s characterization of God as gracious, compassionate, long-tempered, and big in commitment nails key characteristics of God. Graciousness means that the relationship between God and his people has its basis in God’s love and generosity and not in what they deserve. Compassion means that God has the feelings of a mother for the children of her womb, especially when they are threatened by disaster. Long-temperedness means that God looks in the eye the shortcomings of the people of God but keeps resisting the temptation to act in anger against this people, though it doesn’t mean that God is incapable of letting his temper have its way eventually. Commitment means that God is not only faithful when his people are faithful to him but that he stays faithful even when they have forfeited any right to faithfulness.
6. In view of passages such as v. 13

there is a clear necessity that after speaking of God's grace and mercy we should consider the perfection of the divine patience as a special perfection of the love and therefore of the being of God…. These three—Yahweh's grace, mercy and patience (or longsuffering), usually completed by the comprehensive thought of His "great faithfulness"—are described as the distinctive marks of the God revealed and active in Israel…. The love of God is necessarily grace because it expresses the condescension of the unconditionally superior to the unconditionally inferior—of the Creator to His creature. It is because this condescension—in the absolute freedom without which it would not be such—is manifest in the God revealed in Jesus Christ that we say that God's love is gracious love. And further, God's grace is essentially merciful because the absolute subordinate in this relation finds himself, the creature as such and as a sinful creature, in a position of needy distress and misery, because God's turning to him, as that of the absolute superior, implies necessarily that God espouses the cause of the creature in all his need and distress, sharing it, making it His own, taking it to His own heart…. The case is exactly the same now that we proceed to affirm that His love bears essentially the character of patience. Patience exists where space and time are given with a definite intention, where freedom is allowed in expectation of a response. God acts in this way. He makes this purposeful concession of space and time. He allows this freedom of expectancy. That He does so lies in His very being. Indeed, it is His being. Everything that God is, is implied and included in the statement that He is patient.[[87]](#footnote-87)

1. God’s relenting of bringing disaster on his people issues from all those personal characteristics. Calvin comments,

The Prophet here not only describes the nature of God, but goes further and says, that God, who is by nature placable, will not remain fixed in his purpose, when he sees people returning to him in sincerity; but that he suffers himself to be turned to show favor, so as to remit the punishment which he had previously denounced. And it is a mode of speaking which often occurs in Scripture, that God repents of evil; not that he really changes his purpose, but this is said according to the apprehensions of men: for God is in himself immutable, and is said to turn from his, purpose, when he remits to man the punishment he has previously threatened. Whatever proceeds from God’s mouth ought to be regarded as an inviolable decree; and yet God often threatens us conditionally, and though the condition be not expressed it is nevertheless to be understood: but when he is pacified to us and relaxes the punishment, which was in a manner already decreed according to the external word, he is then said to repent. And we know, that as we do not apprehend God such as he is, he is therefore described to us in such a way as we can comprehend, according to the measure of our infirmity. Hence God often puts on the character of men, as though he were like them.[[88]](#footnote-88)

While it may be that God knows ahead of time that he is going to relent, and that his relenting is thus part of his “inviolable decree,” the assertion that God is accommodating himself to our apprehensions in speaking of relenting has no basis in the Scriptures, any more than the idea that in speaking of loving us he is accommodating himself to our apprehensions.

God can certainly repent of having promised or demonstrated His help to Israel in different ways. He can retract in the most terrible manner by showing Himself as the One He is in His wrath. But He cannot and never does repent of being the One He is. He is this One even in His wrath; the God of Israel.

It would be most unwise, then, to try to understand what the Bible says about God's repentance as if it were merely figurative. For what truth is denoted by the "figure" if we are not to deny that there is an underlying truth? It would be just as foolish to try to see in the alteration which is certainly contained in the idea of repentance only an alteration in man in his relation to God, but not an alteration in God in His relation to man. Of course, in so far as this relationship rests on an attitude of God's, it is immutable in the sense that it is always and everywhere God's relationship to man, the being and essence of the One who loves in freedom. Yet it would not be a glorifying, but a blaspheming and finally a denial of God, to conceive of the being and essence of this self-consistent God as one which is, so to speak, self-limited to an inflexible immobility, thus depriving God of the capacity to alter His attitudes and actions.[[89]](#footnote-89)

The declaration that God really does relent in response to our turning is a precious truth. God sometimes really does do something in response to our prayers. Further, “relent” (*nāḥam* niphal) is a feelings word as well as an action word. God is inwardly moved by our prayers and relieved that he does not have to implement the decision he has made to bring trouble to us.

1. On the other hand, it is indeed true that “the Prophets of God do not always very anxiously hold to what seems consistent in their discourses.”[[90]](#footnote-90) In this respect they (and Joel in particular) are like protest psalms, which can affirm both God’s abandonment, God’s aggression, God’s compassion, and God’s judgment.[[91]](#footnote-91) Joel doesn’t want to encourage either uncertainty or torpidity in people in their relationship with God. Relationships with God are not calculable and predictable. Israel really does have to cast itself on God’s mercy without presupposing the response. As there is a both/and about inner person and outward expression, there is a both/and about confidence and humility. Israel must turn back and see if God turns back. From Jonah Joel “seizes upon the hermeneutics of the *freedom* of God.”[[92]](#footnote-92)
2. The blessing that God may graciously leave behind gives us the wherewithal to give him praise and worship. And part of the motivation that we present to God for rescuing us is that he will otherwise look stupid.

# Joel 2:18-27—Promises of Restoration

**Translation**

18And Yahweh became passionate[[93]](#footnote-93) about his country,

and had pity on his people.

19Yahweh averred[[94]](#footnote-94)

and said to his people:

Here am I, sending wheat to you,

new wine and fresh oil, and you’ll be full of it.

I will no more make you

an object of reviling among the nations.

20The northerner I will send far from you,

and drive him to a dry and desolate country:

His face to the eastern sea,

his rear to the western sea.

His smell will go up, his stink will go up,[[95]](#footnote-95)

because he’s[[96]](#footnote-96) acted big in what he’s done.[[97]](#footnote-97)

21Don’t be afraid, ground, rejoice and celebrate,

because Yahweh has acted big in what he has done.

22Don’t be afraid,[[98]](#footnote-98) animals of the countryside,

because the meadows in the wilderness have become green,

Because the tree has born its fruit;

fig tree and vine have given their wealth.

23Children of Ṣiyyôn, rejoice and celebrate,

because of Yahweh your God.

Because he has given you

the first rain[[99]](#footnote-99) in accordance with faithfulness,[[100]](#footnote-100)

And has made a downpour fall for you,

first rain and late rain in the first [month].[[101]](#footnote-101)

24The threshing floors will be full of grain,

the vats[[102]](#footnote-102) will abound in new wine and fresh oil.

25I will make good for you the years

that the swarmer ate,[[103]](#footnote-103)

The devourer, the cutter, and the exterminator,

my great force, which I sent off against you.[[104]](#footnote-104)

26You will eat and eat[[105]](#footnote-105) and be full,

and praise the name of Yahweh your God,

The one who has dealt with you by acting in an extraordinary way—

and my people will not be shamed ever.

27You will acknowledge that I am within Israel,[[106]](#footnote-106)

and I am Yahweh your God,

And there is no other;

my people will not be shamed ever.

## Interpretation

Yahweh has determined to reverse the devastation pictured in the two visions. But once again we have to read between the lines to interpret the transition to this section from the previous one. There is a “conceptual gap between Joel 2:17 and 2:18”[[107]](#footnote-107) and “Joel turns over the *interpretation* of his narrative plot to the reader” by means of this gap.[[108]](#footnote-108) Its report of Yahweh’s response to the people’s turning corresponds to the kind of declaration that petitioners hope to receive in response to their prayers, but Joel gives no indication that the people have done what Yahweh and Joel said. The effect of vv. 18-27 is therefore rather to reinforce the message about God’s nature in vv. 13-14. Yahweh has made his determination because of who he is. His declaration compares with promises of deliverance in other prophets (e.g., Isa. 41:10-20; 43:1-5), which do not presuppose that people have turned to Yahweh and rather form part of an invitation to turn.

Joel is likely again relating something he has seen in a vision.[[109]](#footnote-109) As 2:1-17 took up motifs from 1:2-20, so 2:18-27 takes up motifs from both visions. In light of the new beginning in 2:28 and the move to a different way of speaking about the future, MT appropriately provides a division marker after 2:27 (setumah in L, petuhah in A and C). This section outlines as follows:

2:18-19aα Joel’s introduction.

2:19aβ-20 Yahweh’s promise of restoration (cf. 1:10; 2:17)

2:21-24 Joel’s encouragement (cf. 1:7, 12)

2:25-27 Yahweh’s promise of restoration from the epidemic, and of honor (cf. 1:4, 11)

I have laid out the section as bicola (vv. 20a, 25, and 26 as quadricola) but it could be taken as rhythmic prose. It incorporates some parallelism and use of imagery, but also a number of *waw*-consecutives, occurrences of the object marker and the relative particle, and two cola with five stresses (though they would easily reformat as four-stress cola, as in 1:19.

**Joel 2:18-19aαβ.** While it is possible, then, that we are to assume that the people have done as the two visions urged, Joel doesn’t say so, and the text more straightforwardly reads as a revelation about Yahweh’s attitudes and intentions. It suggests a different kind of motivation for a response to Yahweh from the one provided by the visions in 1:2—2:17. The declaration that Yahweh is a passionate God (the verb *qānā’*)goes back to Exodus 34, like the characterization in v. 13 (see Exod. 34:14 for the adjective *qannā’*). The narrower translation “jealous” makes sense in the Exodus context and in threats to Israel, and the Talmud quotes it in this connection.[[110]](#footnote-110) But in the context of promises in the Prophets, the broader meaning of zealous ardor applies. Yahweh’s passion means he sets about restoring his people (e.g., Ezek. 39:25; Zech. 1:14; 8:2). Yahweh deeply cares about his land, the land that had been devastated in Joel’s visions, and he has had pity on his people who had become an object of opprobrium through invasion and defeat. “The slim basis for hope resting behind the expression, *mî yôdēa‘* [who knows], has been shown to be reliable once more.”[[111]](#footnote-111) At least, it has been shown to be so in Joel’s vision.

**Joel 2:19aγδ-20.** So Yahweh makes promises that reverse the calamities in the two visions. On one hand (v. 19aγδ), he is going to restore supplies of newly-grown wheat, newly-fermented wine, and freshly-pressed oil (cf. 1:10). Whereas the First Testament is often aware of the dangers of people being full of these fine things (e.g., Deut. 6:11; Hos. 13:6), Yahweh is here relaxed about letting them be full of them.

Tg assumes that the reviling of which Joel goes on to speak (v. 19b) relates to the people’s lack of food and their hunger (cf. Ezek. 36:30), which would link with the first vision, but more likely it relates to the reviling that the second vision referred to, which came about through invasion and defeat (cf. 2:17).

Yahweh elaborates the implications (v. 20) in a way that confirms the idea that the military-like invasion of 2:1-17 could indeed stand for a military invasion. The First Testament commonly characterizes an invader as the enemy from the north, in light of the fact that the north was the direction from which most enemies came and was the location of the abode of the gods (e.g., Jer. 1:13-15). Given that the locusts who symbolized the invader turned the country into a desolate wilderness, it will be appropriate that he should be driven to a dry desolate country (2:3; see also 1:19-20). The references to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean suggest that the dry and desolate country is southern Judah, dry and desolate from east to west. The northerner is indeed a vast horde: its vanguard comes to grief on one shore, its rearguard on the other shore. The disgusting smell is another motif from the account of epidemics in Exodus, which variously cause the Nile to smell and the country to smell (Exod. 7:17-21; 8:5-15 [1-11]). It’s what the northerner deserves for acting big, a recurrent characterization of an arrogant power (see especially Dan. 8:4, 8, 11, 25; also Lam. 1:9).

**Joel 2:21-24.** Joel takes up the implications of Yahweh’s promises. His bidding the ground not to be afraid in light of them (v. 21) is a standard prophetic encouragement to Israel. The ground has had reason to be afraid, and specifically to mourn, and celebration and gladness had disappeared from people’s worship because the ground did not produce the wherewithal for worship (1:10, 16). It is now encouraged to celebrate and rejoice instead of mourning. The ground celebrates by being colorful and by manifesting its produce, but the exhortation to celebrate has a metonymic aspect; Joel is also encouraging the community to celebrate and rejoice. Prophets commonly encourage kings or Israel itself not to be afraid; Joel indirectly encourages Judah by directly encouraging the natural world in this direction. In such biddings, the encouragement can be based on something that has been declared though not actually yet implemented (e.g., Isa. 41:13; 43:1), and so it is here. A promise from Yahweh changes the face of its recipients before they see its implementation. The specific event that is declared though not yet actual is described in a neat contrast with v. 20bβ. Yahweh is the one who is in a position to act big in what he does and to put down the pretender. Psalm 126:2-3 applies to Yahweh the language of acting big in what he does, in a context like the one Joel presupposes, when Judah needs Yahweh to act in this way again.

Joel addresses a parallel exhortation to the wild animals (v. 22), who have reason to be afraid because a locust epidemic deprives them of their food. They have been straining towards Yahweh because of the fire that has afflicted the wilderness meadows (2:19-20). Confidence can replace fear for them, too. The metonymy implicitly reappears in the comment about fruit trees. Human beings would not want the wild animals celebrating too much over the trees’ fruitfulness. That fruitfulness is indeed a reason for human celebration, especially given the symbolic significance of vine and fig tree (see 1:7 and the comments).

At last the community is openly invited to celebrate and rejoice (v. 23). Of the verbs in v. 21a, the first was thus taken up in v. 22 and the other two reappear here. While epidemics are an occasional problem in Judah, drought is a more common one, so the basis of rejoicing here is the promise of the gift of rain. The first rain in October and November softens the ground after the summer drought and makes plowing and sowing possible. The crops come to fruition with the aid of the late rain in March and April, which counts as the beginning of the year if one treats Passover as “the beginning of months” and its month as the first month (Exod. 12:2). The main rain comes in between the first and the late rain; while these two play key roles, the reference to them may imply a merism—they also cover everything in between, which might also be denoted by the word “downpour.”[[112]](#footnote-112) Yahweh’s making the year work out the way it should and the way it needs to will be an expression of his faithfulness, the faithfulness that makes him act in passion to restore his people in a way that’s unrelated to what they deserve.

The happy result will be a superabundance of the three archetypal three products of the harvest (v. 24): contrast 1:10 and compare 2:19, and see the comments on Hosea 9:2.

**Joel 2:25-27.** Once again Yahweh speaks, taking up the four words for locust from 1:4 and accepting responsibility for sending off the epidemic.

His promise to make up for the years the locusts had eaten (v. 25) perhaps implies that the four words for locust denoted four years of epidemic. Future harvest(s) will be so spectacular that they will compensate for the lost one(s). There is some nice gracious irony in Yahweh’s speaking of “making good” or “making up for” or “repaying” (*šālam* piel), which usually refers to people repaying or making restitution to Yahweh or to a human being whom one has wronged.[[113]](#footnote-113) The expression “the great force” invites readers to have a human army in mind, which again supports the idea that the locusts could stand for a human army. In place of the four words for locust, Tg has “peoples, tongues, governments, and kingdoms,” recalling the expressions used in Daniel and in Revelation.

Once again (v. 26) there is a promise that Yahweh will take the risk of providing for the people so that they will be full (cf. v. 19). They will eat and eat as the locusts once did. Here Yahweh perhaps implicitly recognizes the danger that such generosity might make people forget him: he adds the reminder that his generosity should properly make them enthuse over who he is and over the extraordinary way in which he has now dealt with them, which will apparently make them forget the calamity for which he accepts responsibility. Thus there will be no more shame. The move to talk of Yahweh’s extraordinary acts and of the removal of shame suggests that in these two lines Yahweh is again combining reference to deliverance from natural invaders and from human invaders.

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

## Theological Implications

1. God is passionate about the land. As the God of nature he cares about the land, and in particular about the land of Canaan. The ground itself rejoices and celebrates when it displays its beauty and parades its produce. He cares about the animals too, and promises not to leave them un-provided for. God speaks to the ground and the animals and encourages them not to be afraid, as well as encouraging humanity to rejoice. “Salvation which hasn't passed through the soil is no salvation. Salvation which doesn't assure the livelihood of animals is no salvation.”[[114]](#footnote-114)
2. God’s passion and the pity in which it issues are also important to his people, and they issue in action even if for a while his people have to live by faith in promises. As the God of nature he can use nature as a means of chastising his people, but that is his strange work. It fits his character better to use nature as a means of blessing his people. Wheat, wine, and oil are his gifts to them. He gives more than enough; he acts big in what he does. He acts in extraordinary fashion. He gives so that people can be full and can rejoice in the fact—and make it a reason to praise him. They are urged to celebrate the way God gives them these gifts and makes the cycle of weather unfold so that the agricultural year works out. It is an expression of his faithfulness.
3. God’s sovereignty means that he is the one who makes his people an object of reviling to other peoples, and he can shame them through what happens despite their trust in him. Sometimes they deserve it, but sometimes his bringing calamity has no such explanation. They can at least be sure that bringing calamity will not be his final act. He terminates the trouble he brings. Further, he makes up for the loss he brings. And he removes the shame he brings. The people of God can find strange encouragement in the way the entities God uses to bring calamity are characterized by arrogance, acting for their own reasons not as people who want to serve God. It is one reason why God will not leave them in power over his people forever.
4. The end result of God’s work of restoration will be an acknowledgment of Yahweh as the only God and a resealing of the relationship between “your God” and “my people.”
5. The pattern of a day of Yahweh succeeded by a day of restoration is illustrated by the story of the Jewish people over the period that began at the end of the nineteenth century. Pogroms in Europe were followed by the Zionist movement which issued in a much more substantial Jewish presence in the land that had been promised to Abraham. The Holocaust was followed by the establishment of the State of Israel. One might pray that the correlative “Disaster” (the Nakba) for the Palestinian people might also be followed by a day of restoration, and in particular that it might be so for the Palestinian church.

# Joel 2:28—3:21 [3:1—4:21]—Then Afterwards….

## Translation

28It will happen afterwards:

I will pour my breath on all flesh,

and your sons and your daughters will prophesy.

Your elderly people will have dreams,

your young people will see visions.

29And further, on servants and on maidservants

in those days I will pour my breath.

30And I will put portents in the heavens and on the earth,

blood, fire, and palm-trees[[115]](#footnote-115) of smoke.

31The sun will turn into darkness,

the moon into blood,

Before the coming of Yahweh’s day,

great and fearful.

32But it will happen that everyone

who calls in Yahweh’s name will escape.

Because in Mount Ṣiyyôn and in Yərûšālayim there will be

a group that evades it as Yahweh has said,

and among the survivors[[116]](#footnote-116) whomever Yahweh calls.[[117]](#footnote-117)

3:1Because there, in those days,

in that time,

When I restore the fortunes of Yəhûdāh and Yərûšālayim,

2I will collect all the nations.

I will take them down to Jehoshaphat Vale,

and enter into decision-making with them there,

About my people, my domain, Yiśrā’ēl,

which they scattered among the nations.

They shared out my country,

3and for my people they threw a lot.

They gave a boy for a whore,

and a girl they sold for wine, and drank.

4And further, what are you [doing] in relation to me,

Ṣōr and Ṣîdôn, and all you regions of Pəlegeš?

Are you paying recompense to me,

or are you recompensing me?

Quickly, with haste,

I will turn back your recompense on your head.

5Because my silver and my gold you took,

and my good objects of desire you brought to your palaces.

6The Yəhûdites and Yərûšālayimites you sold to the Yəwānites,

in order to send them far from their territory.

7Here am I, arousing them from their place to which you sold them,

and I will turn back your recompense on your head.

8I will sell your sons and your daughters

into the hand of the Yəhûdites,

And they will sell them to the Šəbā’ites,[[118]](#footnote-118)

to a far off nation;

because Yahweh has spoken.

9Call this out among the nations,

sanctify a battle!

“Arouse the strong men so they come near,

so all the men of battle go up!

10Beat your hoes into swords,

your pruning knives into lances!

The feeble man is to say,

‘I’m a strong man!’

11Hurry,[[119]](#footnote-119) come, all you nations,

from all around, and collect yourselves.”[[120]](#footnote-120)

Take down[[121]](#footnote-121) there

your strong men, Yahweh.

12The nations are to rouse themselves and go up

to Yəhôšāpaṭ Vale.

Because there I will sit to decide

for all the nations from all around.

13Swing the sickle,

because the harvest has got ripe!

Come trample,

because the press has got full!

The vats have abounded—

because their bad dealing is great!

14Masses, masses,

in Determination Vale,

Because a day of Yahweh is near

in Determination Vale!

15Sun and moon have gone dark,

stars have gathered up their brightness.

16Yahweh will roar from Ṣiyyôn,

will give voice from Yərûšālayim,

and the heavens and the earth will quake.

But Yahweh is a shelter for his people,

a stronghold for the Yiśrā’ēlites,

17And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh your God,

dwelling in Ṣiyyôn my sacred mountain.

Yərûšālayim will be sacred,

and strangers will not pass through it again.

18And it will happen on that day:

the mountains will drop treading,

The hills will run with milk,

all the channels in Yəhûdāh will run with water.

A fountain will go out from Yahweh’s house,

and water Acacias Wadi.

19Mișrayim will become a desolation,

’Ĕdôm will become a desolate wilderness,

Because of the violence to the Yəhûdites,

in whose country they shed blood that was free of guilt.

20Yəhûdāh will remain forever,

Yərûšālayim for generation after generation.

21I will treat as free of guilt[[122]](#footnote-122) their blood that I did not treat as free of guilt,

as Yahweh dwells in Ṣiyyôn.

## Interpretation

“Here the real prophecy begins, which we must clearly separate from what has gone before.”[[123]](#footnote-123) Joel 2:27 would have made a fine ending to the scroll. We have noted that MT (A) and MT (C) place a petuhah there, and printed Hebrew Bibles start a new chapter at this point. Joel 1:2—2:27 comprised a coherent collection of visions with some internal cross-reference. They all focused on the prospect of a disaster conceptualized as an epidemic for which a military attack provided a simile and which could also be a metaphor for such an attack, after which Yahweh would restore things to what they were. It would be a day of Yahweh, and there was a larger than life aspect to the calamity and the restoration, but they comprised an enhanced version of something that could easily be pictured.

Joel 2:28—3:21 [3:1—4:21] is not one single straightforward prophecy but an assemblage; MT divides it into three sections or subsections, 2:28—3:8; 3:9-17; 3: 18-21 [3:1—4:8; 4:9-17; 4:18-21]). It does have a focus, and its focus distinguishes it from what preceded, though at the same time it takes up motifs from those earlier sections[[124]](#footnote-124) and Yahweh continues to speak.[[125]](#footnote-125) It is not the case that we move from the material to the spiritual;[[126]](#footnote-126) the spiritual has featured in 1:2—2:27 and the material will feature here. Its focus lies on what looks more like an ultimate and final crisis involving the relationship of Yahweh and of Judah to the nations as a whole. The resolution of this crisis will not mean the end of the world or the end of history but it will mean life put on even keel for Judah. Paradoxically, the focus on an ultimate crisis goes along with reference to specific peoples (Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Ionia, Egypt, Edom), which was not a feature of 1:2—2:27.

I have again laid out the section as bicola, though again some subsections may be seen as more like rhythmic prose with some parallelism. Thus I have sometimes treated a sequence of more than four words as a single colon, in 3:1b, 4aβ, 6a and 17aα. As well as tricola in 3:8aγδb and 16a, I have found quadricola in 3:1-2aα and 2aβbαβγ.

**Joel 2:28-29 [3:1-2].** The opening declaration is a mind-bending one, for several reasons different from the ones that strike the Christian reader. “It will happen afterwards”(2:28aα [3:1aα]) is not a technical expression indicating that the material that follows belongs to a different era from what precedes, but it does indicate some disjunction, and there has been nothing to prepare us for the innovative statement that Yahweh now makes. The later reference to “those days” also suggests a disjunction.

Prophets very often speak of Yahweh pouring out (2:28aβ [3:1aβ]), but what he pours out is wrath, fury, and anger. Only in Ezekiel 39:29 does Yahweh speak of pouring his breath (*rûaḥ*)on his people, which suggests the possibility that “the starting point for Joel’s oracle of the future is where Ezekiel’s left off”[[127]](#footnote-127)—though the date of Ezekiel 38—39 is almost as uncertain as the date of Joel. The image of pouring out breath or wind or spirit is puzzling, whereas the image of pouring out anger is easier to understand (see esp. Jer. 6:11). No one makes more reference than Ezekiel to Yahweh pouring out his wrath, fury, and anger, and Ezekiel 39:29 might therefore itself be a riff on that image. Further, Ezekiel is dense with references to the breath/wind/spirit of Yahweh, and he envisions Yahweh putting his breath/wind/spirit into Israel as he restores the people to life. So Ezekiel 39:29 brings together two of Ezekiel’s important motifs in declaring the good news that Yahweh now intends to pour out something different from wrath and thus not merely to put his breath/wind/spirit within the people but to overwhelm them with it. This collocation within Ezekiel may well thus lie behind Joel’s words, but it might be unlikely that his hearers could make these connections, and for them the rhetorical effect of his words could have a different dynamic. For people who had never heard reference to pouring out breath/wind/spirit, the expression would likely suggest pouring out anger (cf. *rûaḥ* in passages such as Judges 8:3; Job 15:13; Prov. 29:11; Mic. 2:7). God’s pouring out his breath/wind/spirit on all flesh would suggest the kind of act of judgment that Joel 3 will indeed go on to speak of.

The following cola (2:28aγb [3:1aγb]) spell out and clarify the phrase’s implications but also heighten the suspense. Yahweh’s pouring out his breath on all “flesh” suggests the dynamic power of God over against humanity’s fragile creatureliness (cf. Isa. 31:3).[[128]](#footnote-128) Allusions to the presence and activity of Yahweh’s breath/wind/spirit in Ezekiel relate to Ezekiel himself or to the people corporately (cf. Isa. 61:1; 63:8-14; Hagg. 1:14; 2:5). Here the “all flesh” to which Yahweh alludes is the entire Judahite community, but Yahweh individually and universally, without limitation in terms of sex, age, or class. While prophesying might refer to something like speaking in tongues (cf. 1 Sam. 10:11; also Num. 11:25-29), in Ezekiel the verb refers to bringing a message from Yahweh to his people. That implication is suggested by the subsequent references to dreams and visions, which are ways of Yahweh’s conveying such a message. The problem is, there is little reason to be too enthusiastic about a widespread outburst of prophecy, dreams, and visions. Prophets usually say disturbing things; Joel illustrates the point, like Ezekiel.[[129]](#footnote-129) Joel and Ezekiel illustrate the same point about visions. Likewise, dreams are at least as likely to be worrying as encouraging (see e.g., Dan. 2 and 4).

The phrase “in those days” and the repetition of “I will pour my breath/wind/spirit” round off the subsection, closing the bracket begun in 2:28a [3:1a].

**Joel 2:30-32 [3:3-5]**. Yahweh goes on to heighten the worrying angle on his words. What do the prophecies, visions, and dreams relate to?

The sequence from what precedes (2:30-31a [3:3-4a]) suggests that the prophecies, dreams, and visions announce portents and/or accompany portents and/or interpret portents. “Portents” usually refers to the wonders Moses brought about in Egypt, which also fits the reference here to blood and fire. But these portents are in the heavens as well as on the earth, and they are accompanied by palm tree-like columns of smoke and by the negative transformation of sun into darkness and moon into something blood-red.

Joel now speaks explicitly about “Yahweh’s day” (2:31b [3:4b]. Although there was a cosmic aspect to earlier references to that day (1:15; 2:1, 2, 11), here its cosmic reverberations are of a different order. Whereas the events described in 1:2—2:17 belonged to “*a* day of Yahweh,” there is more argument for seeing this moment as “*the* day of Yahweh,” and the argument will increase through the section. Whereas it was possible to imagine the day of Yahweh described in 1:2—2:17, it is harder to imagine what this day will be literally like (though maybe it is easier in the modern West when we know about the atomic bomb). But the impression the imagery is designed to convey is clear enough: Yahweh’s day will be great and fearful.

Yet the intention to convey that impression is only half the story (2:32 [3:5]). The real point is to offer reassurance to people in Judah, that they need not fear Yahweh’s day.[[130]](#footnote-130) The prophets, visionaries, and dreamers will also have this ministry of reassurance. The dynamic of the message thus contrasts with that in 1:2—2:17. There, people had good reason to fear the coming day; it would overwhelm the community as a whole. Here, one can escape it or survive it. In effect, Joel introduces the idea of the “remains” or “remainder” or “remnant,” though he does not use any of the most common family of words conventionally translated thus (from the root *šā’ar*). He speaks of people who escape (a word one would use of escaping danger), of a group that evades the catastrophe (the word used for evading the epidemic in 2:3), of a group of survivors (most commonly, people who survive a battle). There is no need for it to be a small group (as the “remainder” words imply). “Everyone” can be in this group; the entirety of Jerusalem (and by implication Judah) can escape. They do have to be people who call in Yahweh’s name. As usual, belonging to the people of God requires personal commitment as well as membership of the right ethnic group. Further, the idea of the “remainder” is that Yahweh exempts a group from the devastation that comes on Israel so that the entire people is not eliminated; the people who remain do not survive because they deserve it more than the people as a whole but because Yahweh is committed to keeping his people in being. Here the people who escape and survive are first described as the people who “call (upon God) by the name Yahweh.”[[131]](#footnote-131) The question is, where do you turn when there is a crisis? Do you turn to other deities or look for your own way of escape? Or do you gather on Mount Zion in the way Joel earlier urged (1:13-15; 2:1, 12-17)? The people worshiping in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion, in this way, will find it a place of safety. There is a close similarity between 2:32bαβ [3:5 bαβ] and Obadiah 17, which may mean that “as Yahweh has said” refers to that verse. Neatly, Joel then closes with a reference to the other kind of calling that is involved in the relationship between Yahweh and his people, the kind of calling that is integral to the first reason why Yahweh keeps a remnant in being, his commitment.

**Joel 3:1-3 [4:1-3].** Yahweh’s “because” indicates that he will here answer some of our questions about the relationship between this final section and the main body of the scroll. He is talking about the time to which 2:18-27 referred, the time when he has restored the fortunes of his people (on that expression, see Hos. 6:11 and the comments).

“In those days, in that time” (vv.1-2aα) there is something else to happen. From 2:18-27 one might have inferred that the time of restoration would simply be the end of the story. In practice, God’s acts of restoration are never the end of the story—any more than his acts of judgment. Any individual day of Yahweh is not the final day of Yahweh. What is to follow is actually something much bigger, something world-encompassing. The relationship between this last section of the scroll and what has preceded is comparable to that between Ezekiel 38—39 and what preceded. One might have thought that Ezekiel 37 would be the end of the Ezekiel scroll (perhaps it once was), but it is not. The implementing of Yahweh’s promises in the establishment of the Second Temple community is not the end of the story. As Ezekiel 38—39 envisages a subsequent gathering of the nations, so does Joel .

Once again Joel is sharing a vision (v. 2aβbαβγ), of a plain big enough for a gathering of all the nations (!). Since Jerusalem is more or less on the top of the Judahite mountains, the vale is bound to be “down” from there. The Vale of Jehoshaphat, “Yahu-has-decided,” is not a place you could find on a map of Jerusalem. Joel’s geography also parallels the geography in Ezekiel—here that in Ezekiel 40—48. The name of the vale comes from the story in 2 Chronicles 20. King Jehoshaphat is under attack from Moab, Ammon, and Edom, and Yahweh bids him march south from Jerusalem, but defeats the attackers without Jehoshaphat needing to engage with them.[[132]](#footnote-132) The name Jehoshaphat Vale also picks up the story’s reference to Blessing Vale (2 Chron. 20:26). Further, the link with this story lies behind Joel’s reference to “Judah and Jerusalem”; most of the First Testament instances of that phrase come in 2 Chronicles, three of them in the Jehoshaphat story. Joel’s vision is of a vastly heightened version of that incident. Yahu is an alternative version of the name Yahweh, perhaps an older form of it; in the First Testament it features only in compound names such as Jehoshaphat (Joel’s own name, which means Yahweh is God, incorporates the even shorter form Yo). The verb *šāpaṭ* is conventionally translated “judge,” and judgment is what Joel will go on to refer to, but passing a negative judgment is only one aspect of its meaning—only one aspect of the exercise of authority or the making of decisions, which is more broadly the word’s meaning.[[133]](#footnote-133) Yahweh needs to exercise some authority and take some decisions, because of how the nations have treated his people, his domain (see 2:17 and the comments). That double description underlines how for their sake and for his own sake he cannot simply ignore the nations’ action. He evidently refers to the scattering of Israel by the great empires, most recently by Babylon but perhaps also by Assyria. Jeremiah 50:17 names those two imperial powers in this connection, in one of the First Testament’s few references to such “scattering.” But “all the nations” would imply a recognition that other nations were also involved in the affliction of Judah, such as the ones named later in this chapter.

Scandalously, Joel adds (vv. 2bδ-3), the nations have divided up the country that Yahweh had given the Israelites to divide among themselves (see e.g., Josh. 13:7). They cast lots for it. Most First Testament references to “lots” come in Joshua 14—21 in connection with that original dividing up, but Joel takes up the actual language of Obadiah 11. And they did it with total callousness—or with regular callousness. The losers in war commonly end up as slaves. The Torah is realistic about the fact, though it tried to mitigate it (cf. Deut. 21:10-14). In the process of making the most of the human proceeds, the nations’ soldiers would sell a boy into slavery in return for sex, or they would sell a girl into slavery for a drink and then sit back and enjoy it.

**Joel 3:4-8 [4:4-8].** In a kind of “internal footnote”[[134]](#footnote-134) Yahweh goes on to make more explicit the point about nations other than the imperial powers.

Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia (v. 4) are the great powers on the Mediterranean coast. The first two are the Phoenician cities to the far northwest; Tyre is well-known as a trading people and Sidon often appears as its sidekick (cf. the reference to Phoenicia in this connection in Hos. 12:7 [8]). Immediately to the west of Judah “the regions of Philistia” would cover the Philistine city states of Ashdod, Ashqelon, Eqron, Gat, and Gaza (cf. Josh 13:2-3). Alexander proceeded from Tyre to Gaza on his way to Egypt.[[135]](#footnote-135) While Amos 1:6-10 refers to the involvement of both Philistia and Tyre in the slave trade, Joel’s other links with Ezekiel suggests that it is likely more significant that Philistia appears with Tyre and Sidon in Ezekiel 25:15—28:26 (cf. Zech. 9:3-8). Yahweh’s question is, what reason have you got for taking action against me? What have I done to you? What are you paying me back for? They are rhetorical questions; these peopleshave no basis for what they’ve done. And therefore Yahweh intends to pay them back for what they’ve done, and soon.[[136]](#footnote-136)

So what have the Phoenicians and the Philistines done (vv. 5-6)? Perhaps the implication is that they took part in the pillaging of the Jerusalem temple, which is specifically attributed to the Babylonians (cf. 2 Kings 24:13-14), but we have no record of their involvement. Likewise we have no account of their involvement in specifically selling Judahites and Jerusalemites to the Ionians (the Greeks), though the reference to people going into captivity westward, and not merely eastward to Babylon, fits with the talk in Isaiah 40—66 of exiles being brought back from across the sea. But Ezekiel may again be the background to Joel’s reference to Ionia (see Ezek. 27:13).

Yahweh intends to see that justice is done (vv. 7-8), whatever was the Phoenicians’ and Philistines involvement. Once, Yahweh had “aroused” Cyrus and the Medes to put down Babylon (e.g., Isa. 13:17; 41:2, 25; 45:13). Now he will arouse the sleeping Judahites, content with their life in Ionia, and get them involved in imposing justice on the Phoenicians and Philistines. These peoples will be treated on a fair, eye-for-an-eye basis (“the interplay of actors is energized by a single idea, *lex talionis*”).[[137]](#footnote-137) They, too, will watch their sons and daughters taken off into slavery with the Shebeans (Sheba also features in Ezek. 27:22-23), a trading people from south Arabia (cf. Isa. 45:14). Are Joel’s audience back in Judah inclined to doubt whether this is a plausible idea? Can the exiles really be woken up from their torpor? Does Yahweh really get involved in events in that way? Does he really bring back recompense on peoples’ heads (the phrase echoes Obad. 17)? In case the Judahites are inclined to ask such questions about Joel’s implausible declaration, Joel reaffirms that it is Yahweh’s proclamation (only here does he add such a backing for one of his outrageous statements).

**Joel 3:9-11 [4:9-11]**. Joel returns to the big picture from vv. 1-3; Joel himself continues to speak (cf. v.8b).

The proclaimers he charges (v. 9) are supernatural aides like the ones once bidden to comfort Judah by commissioning some highway building (Isa. 40:1-5). By their proclamation they sanctify a battle (cf. Jer. 6:4; Mic. 3:5). Earlier Joel had spoken of sanctifying a fast (1:14; 2:15) and we noted the link with the idea of sanctifying the Sabbath. Sanctifying means taking something ordinary and turning it into something that especially belongs to God. War could be seen as something ordinary, undertaken in the national interest, and also as something dangerous that might just bring down disaster on its initiators. Sanctifying a battle makes it part of a people’s relationship with God, subordinates it to God’s purpose, and calls for God’s help. War is a means of executing judgment on wrongdoing.[[138]](#footnote-138) There is thus an immense irony in Yahweh’s bidding. The supernatural aides are sanctifying a battle in Yahweh’s name in which the nations are going to take part in order to be defeated. In proclaiming that there is to be a battle, the aides will be arousing the strong men, the warriors (the two expressions recur from 2:7), again as Yahweh once aroused the Medes (cf. v. 7 and the comments). Joel thus adds to the irony, because this arousing is an arousing to defeat.

The aides are to deliver the necessary message to the warriors (v. 10). It constitutes another irony, the reversing of the promise in Isaiah 2:4 = Micah 4:3.[[139]](#footnote-139) The hoe is the tool with which one digs into the soil to break it up and the pruning knife is the tool a farmer uses to cut back the branches of a vine after the harvest. The warriors are to turn such tools into weapons. “The iron hoes and pruning hooks are the tools upon which their daily lives depend. They probably would have well understood what it meant to beat their hoes and pruning hooks into swords and spears. This activity would mean no turning back for them.”[[140]](#footnote-140) But they will do this conversion for a battle in which they will be defeated. Like conscripts in the First World War trenches, the ordinary guy is to tell himself he can be a warrior, but he will do so in order to go to his death.

So the aides are to bid all the nations to gather (v. 11). In the subsection’s closing line Joel turns to speak to Yahweh, to “commission” him also to bring his army down to the Vale, in the manner of the voice of prayer that arouses Yahweh (Pss. 35:23; 44:23 [24]; 80:2 [3]).

**Joel 3:12-16a [4:12-16a].** Inresponding to Joel’s commission (v. 12), Yahweh first reaffirms that the nations are to assemble, to arouse themselves—that verb recurs. They “go up” to the Vale—maybe because one always “goes up” for battle, maybe because they will have to “go up” towards Jerusalem, maybe because their “going up” contrasts with Yahweh’s “going down” from the heavens and/or from Jerusalem itself in v. 11b. There, then, Yahweh will take his seat to issue his decision about them. “The anticipated encounter between the armies of the nations and YHWH was a monumental mismatch” (cf. Mic. 4:11-13).[[141]](#footnote-141) Here the language with its talk of decision-making corresponds with rather than contrasting with Isaiah 2:4 = Micah 2:3.

The decision is one to be implemented with violence (v. 13), though the imagery changes once again. Joel has spoken of a battle and of a court scene but now speaks of a harvest (cf. Hos. 6:11a and the comments). Picture what the harvest is like for your wheat, your olives, and your grapes, says Yahweh, and you will get the idea of what Yahweh’s day will be like for the nations. Presumably it is again the supernatural aides who are addressed; they are now supernatural harvesters. They are like people applying the sickle to the wheat when it’s ripe, like people trampling the grapes because the press is now full of them, like people pressing the olives which have also filled their vat—If the vat refers to the olive press (as in 2:24) and thus the verse refer to all three key crops. The last colon makes explicit that the ripeness and fullness are not the good kind that marks the literal harvest (as in 2:24) but a bad kind. The bad dealing of the nations has gone on for long enough.

So vast numbers have gathered in Determination Vale (v. 14)—an alternative title to Vale of Yahu-has-decided. The more concrete meaning of the verb from which “determination” comes (*ḥāraș*) is cut or sharpen, so the title coheres with the way the coming action has been described in v. 13. Yahweh’s day is here explicitly mentioned for the first time since 2:31-32 [3:4-5]; Joel is spelling out the nature of the day that was announced there. The precise expression “a day of Yahweh is near” is the same as 1:15, so “A day of Yahweh” is still a fair translation, but the nature of what will happen marks this day as an ultimate event, closer to “*the* Day of Yahweh” in popular thinking.

The cosmic imagery and the talk of Yahweh’s voice (vv. 15-16a) recur from 2:10 and 2:31-32 [3:4-5]. The frightening unnatural darkness is a symbol of the devastating event that is taking place. It is the precursor to the terrible sound of Yahweh roaring: v. 16 takes up Amos 1:2 in order to apply its implications to the nations and not just to Ephraim, and then also recalls the introductory reference to the earthquake in Amos 1:1. Yahweh who dwells in the heavens has an earthly dwelling in Jerusalem, and it is from there that he roars.

**Joel 3:16b-17 [4:16b-17].** Whereas it’s going to be a devastating day for the nations, for Israel Yahweh is a shelter (v. 16b), like a crag in whose shadow one can hide from the burning sun (e.g., Ps. 62:7-8 [8-9]; Isa. 30:2) or on which one can take refuge from an enemy (e.g., Ps. 91:2, 9), or like a mother bird’s wings under which one can take refuge (e.g., Ps. 91:4; Ruth 2:12). He is a stronghold, more reliable than the physical ones in which human beings seek safety (Isa. 17:9-10; 23:4, 11, 14).

So Israel will have reason to acknowledge Yahweh (v. 17) on the basis of both his act of judgment and his protection of his people, with the nuance that Yahweh is the one who dwells on Zion. The claim that it is his sacred mountain is an implausible one. How can it be made of this little town in the Judahite mountains? But it will be proved by these ultimate events. And the defiling of his sacred mountain by strangers will be terminated. The idea is not that other nations will simply be kept out—at least, that would contrast with the rest of the First Testament. It is rather that the hostile feet of people who despise Yahweh and despise his people will not defile it any more. The strangers are the people who have imposed foreign subjection on Israel. They will not be seen anymore.[[142]](#footnote-142)

**Joel 3:18-21 [4:18-21].** It would perhaps have been fine for the scroll to end at v. 17, but Joel has one more double picture, which rounds the scroll off nicely because much of the imagery corresponds with that from the scroll’s beginning and reverses its threats. It’s thus marked by “restraint” compared with what has gone before, as well as by beauty.[[143]](#footnote-143)

On that day (v. 18), the day of Yahweh, nature in Judah will flourish rather than fail. The mountains will flow with newly trodden juice, the equivalent of Nouveau Beaujolais (see 1:5). The hills will flow with milk as the country was stereotypically supposed to do (e.g., Deut. 6:3; 11:9) and the channels of water will flow rather than dry up (see 1:20). Much more miraculously, a fountain will come out from the temple and water a wadi down by the Dead Sea, as in Ezekiel’s vision. Again, Acacias Wadi isn’t a place on the map, and part of the point of the name may be that acacias grow only in dry places, though the name recalls events at the place called Acacias (Shittim) which was the starting point for Israel’s entry into Canaan (Num. 25; Josh. 2:1; 3:1; Mic. 6:5).

The transformation doesn’t mean that desolation will be abolished (v. 19). Rather it will be transferred to where it belongs, into chastisement for Judah’s assailants. Egypt’s enmity goes back to the beginning of Israel’s story. Edom’s enmity begins with the exile and characterizes the Second Temple period; in Joel’s day Edom had occupied much of southern Judah. The implication of v. 19bβ is perhaps that there had been incursions and bloody clashes between Egyptian and Edomite forces on one hand and Judahites on the other in the Persian period, events that could not be seen as chastisement for Judah’s waywardness. But we have no accounts of such conflicts.

The future of Judah and Jerusalem is therefore secure (vv. 20-21). Judah has been subject to invasion and is now partly occupied by Edom, and Jerusalem has often been subject to attack: that cycle of experiences will no longer obtain. But what will happen when Judah and Jerusalem go wrong, as they are surely bound to do? The final and most remarkable note of grace is that Yahweh will look the other way even more than he has in the past. When Joel 2:13 took up the description of his love in Exodus 34:6-7 it stopped before the assertion that Yahweh certainly doesn’t treat people as free of guilt. Joel knows that Yahweh has often worked by that principle in the past; the fall of Jerusalem and the exile is the great expression of it. But Joel declares that Yahweh’s love for Judah and Jerusalem will in the future indeed mean that he treats them as free of guilt, even when they are not. It is Joel’s equivalent to Jeremiah’s promise that Yahweh will pardon Israel’s waywardness and no longer keep its wrongdoing in mind (Jer. 31:34). It will be the price that he will pay for dwelling in Zion; or it will be the fruit of his dwelling in Zion. Joel ends in the same way as Ezekiel (Ezek. 48:35). “May it come to pass that we arrive there through Christ, through whom and with whom be glory to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit forever.”[[144]](#footnote-144)

## Theological Implications

1. The reality of “a day of Yahweh” happening from time to time is complemented by the reality of “the day of Yahweh.” While the Holocaust, the Nakba, and the demise of the church in Europe, may be seen as examples of “a day of Yahweh,” they may also draw our attention to the coming of “the day of Yahweh.” The fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. does so, as Jesus’s comments suggest; he associates cosmic phenomena such as the ones Joel describes with that final day (Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; cf. Rev. 6:12; 9:2).
2. Peter declares that the pouring of God’s breath of which Joel speaks was what happened at the first Christian Pentecost; he makes explicit that it happens “in the last days” (Acts 2:16-21). As is commonly the case with the “fulfillment” of First Testament prophecies, there is overlap rather than identity between the two. The New Testament does not speak of sons and daughters, elderly and young, or male and female servants in this connection, and in the church it is not characteristic for these different groups to prophesy, have dreams, or see visions. Joel therefore might invite us to await something great that God will still do. In Israel it was particular people such as priests and prophets who were responsible for teaching, as it is in the church. On Yahweh’s day it will not be so. His promise parallels the encouragement to envisage God’s people not needing to teach one another (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Isa. 54:13; taken up in John 6:45).[[145]](#footnote-145) Perhaps Joel speaks hyperbolically.[[146]](#footnote-146) But I hope not.[[147]](#footnote-147)
3. On the other hand, the New Testament recognizes that the pouring out of God’s spirit is a dangerous and frightening event. John the Baptizer declares that Jesus is to baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire, which fits the correlation of these two in Joel, and John adds reference to burning and unquenchable fire, with harvest imagery as in Joel (Matt. 3:11-12). Where the Western church has experienced the phenomenon of prophecy over the past century, this prophecy has usually been encouraging and consoling. It is not clear that it was Joel’s expectation of the prophesying of which he speaks.

After Pentecost Christian baptism, in distinction from that of John, carries a heightened emphasis on God's judgment inasmuch as it now takes place in retrospect of the Judge who had come and the judgment which He had executed…. He who had come as Judge allowed Himself to be judged and executed as the One condemned and rejected in place of all the rest. He allowed that which all the rest had merited to be visited on Himself. In so doing, however, he did not cease to be the Judge; He became the Judge in truth. Nor did baptism in His name cease to be the baptism of the most disturbed and radical conversion; it became this with a precision it could not yet have in its form as John's baptism. "Repent" is still the basic answer to the question: "What shall we do?" at the conclusion of Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 237)…. One may thus understand why it is that at the beginning of Peter's Pentecost sermon (Ac. 219f.) the prophecy of Joel which follows the intimation of the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh is not only not omitted but expressly quoted, namely, that signs of "blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke" will come from heaven to earth, and "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come"…. One thing alone is possible: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel 232; Ac. 221). This calling on the name of the Lord-in face of the ineluctable threat of judgment and consequently e profundis is at issue in Christian baptism…. There can be no Pentecost, no baptism with the Holy Ghost, unless one receives Him *hōsei puros* [like fire] (Ac.23). Hence after Pentecost there can be no baptism with water unless one is now more urgently and seriously conscious of the jealous No of God than in the baptism of John.[[148]](#footnote-148)

1. It is as well, therefore, that Joel offers reassurance concerning the coming of Yahweh’s day.

God declares that the invocation of his name in a despairing condition is a sure sign of safety. What the prophet had said [in vv. 30-31] was certainly dreadful…. What therefore he says now is the same as though he declared, that if men called on the name of God life would be found in the grave. They who seem to be even in despair, and from whom God seems to have taken away every hope of grace, provided they call on the name of God, will be saved, as the Prophet declares, though they be in so great a despair, and in so deep an abyss…. Since then God invites here the lost and the dead, there is no reason why even the heaviest distresses should preclude an access for us or for our prayers; for we ought to break through all these obstacles. The more grievous, then, our troubles are, the more confidence we ought to entertain; for God offers his grace, not only to the miserable, but also to those in utter despair.”[[149]](#footnote-149)

1. Romans 10:13 takes up this promise to Israel in 2:32 and applies it to the Gentiles. Even if Joel was not thinking in these terms, it fits the context in the First Testament in which “the blessing in the seed of Abraham had been promised to all nations,” given that “what he said of the state of the world, that it would be full of horrible darkness, undoubtedly refers, not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles.” [[150]](#footnote-150) Acts itself implicitly involves a further revisionist reading of Joel insofar as it envisages the preaching of the gospel to the nations rather than their destruction.[[151]](#footnote-151)
2. In this connection, “No vague theism is acceptable.”[[152]](#footnote-152)

As deliverance is promised to all who shall call on the name of God, his own power is taken from God, when salvation is sought in any other but in him alone: and we know that this is an offering which he claims exclusively for himself. If, then, we desire to be delivered, the only remedy is, to call on the name of Jehovah.[[153]](#footnote-153)

1. “For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as Jehovah hath promised.”

The Prophet here intimates, that though the people might seem apparently to have been destroyed, yet God would be mindful of his covenant so as to gather the remnant. Such, indeed, was the slaughter of the people, that no hope whatever, according to the flesh, remained; for they were scattered through various parts of the world…. That scattering then was, as it were, the death of the whole nation. But God, by Joel, declares here, that… “there shall yet be a restoration, and I will again gather a certain body, a Church, on mount Zion and in Jerusalem.” This is the substance.

We learn from this place, that however much God may afflict his Church, it will yet be perpetuated in the world; for it can no more be destroyed than the very truth of God, which is eternal and immutable. God indeed promises, not only that the state of the Church shall be perpetual, but that there will be, as long as the sun and moon shall shine in heaven, some people on earth to call on his name…. And this truth deserves a careful attention; for when we see the Church scattered, immediately this doubt creeps into our minds, ‘Does God intend wholly to destroy all his people,—does he mean to exterminate all the seed of the faithful?’ Then let this passage be remembered, ‘In mount Zion there will be deliverance.’”[[154]](#footnote-154)

1. Joel makes a neat collocation of God calling people and people calling God. He describes “the renewal of the covenantal relations between YHWH and the people: the people will accept YHWH as God and YHWH will accept the people as His people.”[[155]](#footnote-155) While Paul quotes 2:32a [3:5a] in Romans 10:13, Peter alludes to 2:32b [3:5b] and also to people thereby “saving themselves” (Acts 2:39-40) and also notes how the promise extends from his audience to their children (compare 2:28 [3:1]) and to the “all flesh” (again compare 2:28 [3:1]) of the Jewish people all over the world.
2. As a locust epidemic and a military invasion can be images of each other because they are both aspects of God’s activity in bringing calamity, in nature and in history, so a military victory and a natural transformation are both aspects of the ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose.

According to the ecology in the Book of Joel, Yahweh's activity cannot be comprehended in either historical or natural categories. Nor can Yahweh's activity in human history be divorced from his participation in the history of nature. As the creator, Yahweh acts in the whole creation to achieve hispurposes. He can manifest his purposes equally in the infestation of a locust plague or in the destruction of human armies. His acts of salvation and judgment encompass the whole creation. As a result, Yahweh's judgment of the nations on his day has ramifications throughout the created world. The land of Judah is devastated by locusts, with the result that people and beasts alike suffer and lament. The creation begins to collapse; the cosmos trembles, and the peoples writhe. But the day of Yahweh is also a day of salvation for the people of Yahweh. The land will be regenerated and will abound with fertility, and the people will dwell secure from oppression. Yahweh's redemption of his people is only a part of his redemption of the entire created order. According to the Book of Joel, the day of Yahweh is God's activity in the history of creation.[[156]](#footnote-156)

1. Yahweh’s Day will involve a battle and a court scene and a harvest. Each is a metaphor, and the text requires that we note the force of each metaphor, though also its limitations. The metaphor of battle asserts that God has power in the entire cosmos and is prepared to use it. God is not averse to using force and violence, though the Scriptures assume that there is a distinction between proper and improper violence. This assumption links with the metaphor of the court, which asserts that God has authority as well as power. He has the proper right to make decisions for the world when he chooses. He does not make such decisions often, but he will do so at the End. The metaphor of harvest suggests that there is something timely about God’s decision-making. The framework of thinking is a little like that in Genesis 15:16 where God declares that the waywardness of the Amorites must be allowed to reach its full measure before it is appropriate to act in judgment against them.[[157]](#footnote-157)
2. War is designed to be a means of executing judgment on the wrongdoing of nations. Of course that is not usually the reason nations make war. And in Joel, at least, the idea is not that Israel will be God’s means of executing judgment on these other nations, though they will be involved in its aftermath. Rather it is that nations undertake war for their own reasons (perhaps with a claim to doing the right thing) and it becomes God’s way of bringing judgment on them. In practice, making war is an ordinary activity like working or eating. By declaring that war is to be sanctified, God indicates that war is not itself holy, but that it can be made holy if it is a war that he commissions as an act of judgment on wrongdoing.
3. Revelation 14:14-20 takes up the image of harvest, and there as in Joel “there is no engagement, as in the words of the prophets themselves, with the political realities of international affairs.” The nations are cardboard cutouts.[[158]](#footnote-158) In Revelation, at least, however, the cardboard cutouts are people who not only threaten but take the lives of people, and in Joel, at least, people wondered when God would ever act in judgment on oppression. Joel promises that the time will come, and Revelation 6:9-10 takes up the kind of plea that they would make and also promises that the time will come. In this sense Revelation “had not lost faith in history as the sphere of divine redemption,”[[159]](#footnote-159) and neither has Joel.
4. Joel is thus “a prophet between calamity and hope”[[160]](#footnote-160) who takes his readers “from the depths of despair to the promise of presence.”[[161]](#footnote-161) Like other prophetic scrolls, in the end the Joel scroll declares “that God ‘wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but he heals.’”[[162]](#footnote-162)

1. Jörg Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for Reading the Twelve,” in Albertz and others (eds.), *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, 77-87 (78); cf. Peter Weimar and Barbara Schlenke, “Zu Struktur und Komposition von Joel,” *BZ* 53 (2009): 1-28, 212-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See e.g., Strazicich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. But Aaron Schart sees Joel as preceding Jonah; “Jonah ridicules Joel” (“The Jonah-Narrative within the Book of the Twelve,” in Albertz and others (eds.), *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve*, 109-28 (112). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Prinsloo, *Theology of the Book of Joel*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On the study of Joel in the context of the Twelve, see Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve, in *Society of Biblical Literature 1999 Seminar* Papers (Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 570-95; Ronald Troxel, “The Fate of Joel in the Redaction of the Twelve,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13 (2015): 152-74; Seitz, *Joel*, 1-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. LXX has *Bathouēl*, the name of Rebekah’s father. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Seitz, *Joel*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. If the next colon referred to the young, one would infer that *zəqēnîm* denoted the elderly (e.g., Exod. 10:9; Josh. 6:21); but the parallel mention of the people as a whole suggests the elders (cf. Josh. 8:33; 9:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The subsequent reference to children and grandchildren suggests that *’ābôt* are parents rather than ancestors . [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. MT’s linking “on account of the treading” with the next colon is jerkier. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Strictly, *lābî’* is simply another word for lion, though possibly an Asian lion as opposed to an African lion (see *HALOT*). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For *ḥāśap* LXX suggestively implies *ḥāpaś* “totally searched it out” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The feminine singular imperative assimilates to the noun *bətûlat*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Over against *’almāh,* it’s not clear whether *bətûlāh* specifically means a virgin; thus while it might not be applicable to a married woman, it could apply to a girl who was not actually married but was betrothed and thus more-or-less married (cf. Deut. 22:23-24), and therefore had a husband (see v. 8b). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Not (necessarily) the husband of her youth—she is indeed young, but the absolute noun applies to him. Joel uses the word *ba‘al*, the technical word for a husband as an owner or master, rather than the more common *’îš* “man.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. LXX implies imperative *’iblû* for MT *’ābəlû*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The paronomasia in the first colon (*šuddad śādeh*) and the rhyme in the second (*’ābəlāh ’ădāmāh*) underline the clash between how things should be and how they are. On sound patterns and other aural features of vv. 10-12, see further Elias D. Mallon, “A Stylistic Analysis of Joel 1:10-12,”*CBQ* 45 (1983): 537-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Hôbîš* could come from *yābēš* “be dry” (so LXX) or from *bûš* “be shamed” (so Vg); this verb form or related forms recur in vv. 11, 12a, 12b, and 17 (see GK 78). In addition, *yābēšû* (which must be from *yābēš*) occurs in vv. 12 and 20, but in terms of meaning “be shamed” is required in v. 11, notwithstanding LXX; there are no other examples of *yābēš* with a personal subject. Context as well as semantics suggests that all the other occurrences should be translated “dry up.” But Joel can personalize nature (in vv. 9 and 10 both the priests and the ground mourn) and he seems to be trading on the ambiguity of the verb forms in his use of *yābēš* and *bûš*. Vg consistently treats *hôbîš* and its variants as from *bûš* and *yābēšû* as from *yābēš*. LXX translates all the occurrences as from *yābēš* except v. 12bγ. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Taking this verb and the next as qatal rather than imperative, with Vg, Aq (and LXX for the first, though it has imperative for the second), in light of the qatals in vv. 9 and 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Tappûaḥ* is traditionally rendered “apple,” but First Testament references to color and succulence point rather to the apricot (Prov. 25:11; Song of Songs 2:3, 5; 7:9; 8:5). Both are first known from Turkey or Armenia in Second Temple times. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. LXX has “God,” simplifying the relationship to the next line with its reference to “your God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “Is cut off, isn’t it” is presupposed from v. 16a. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Pərudôt* comes only here; *pārad* means “divide,” on the basis of which “granules” is a guess. 4QXIIc has *pwrwt* “heifers” (Fuller, “The Twelve,” 248); cf. LXX. Vg connects the word with *pirdah* “she mule.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Gārap* means “sweep” or “shovel,” and thus *megrāpāh* means “shovel” in later Hebrew (*DTT*,730), but “something shoveled or swept” fits better in the context: see the discussion in Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:628-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. LXX, Vg imply the more familiar *bākû* “have cried” for *nābōkû*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Ne’šāmû* is the only example of the niphal of *’āšam*; while it may invite listeners to think in terms of the sheep “suffering punishment” or “making restitution,” I take it that the primary idea derives from *šāmam* (cf. LXX, Tg), of which this is then a byform (see the note on Hos. 5:15; also 10:2; 13:16). See Anthony Gelston, “Some Difficulties Encountered by Ancient Translators,” in *Sôfer Mahîr* (Adrian Shenker Festschrift, eds. Yohanan Goldman and others; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 47-58 (55-57). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. In MT this colon has five stresses, but it is parallel to the next four-stress colon; one might (e.g.) hyphenate the opening *kî* as MT does in v. 12b. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Cf. Ronald L. Troxel, *Joel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 64; also the caveats about reifying Joel or reading Joel referentially in Ferdinand E. Deist, “”Parallels and Reinterpretation in the Book of Joel,” in W. Claassen (ed.), *Text and Context* (F. C. Fensham Festschrift; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 63-79 (75), and in James R. Linville, “Bugs Through the Looking Glass,” in Timothy H. Lim and others (ed.), *Reflection and Redaction* (A. G. Auld Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 283-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Victor A. Hurowitz, “**Joel's** Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 597-603. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See especially Assis, *Book of Joel*, 47. Pablo R. Andiñach (“The Locusts in the Message of Joel,” *VT* 42 [1992]: 433-41) argues that Joel is simply describing a foreign army. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The occurrence of the tricolon also supports Seitz’s treating v. 3 as the end of a subsection, and thus letting v. 4 syand alone (*Joel*, 120). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Seitz, *Joel*, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cf. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cf. Matthew J. Lynch, “Neglected Physical Dimensions of ‘Shame’ Terminology in the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblica* 91(2010): 499-517. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See e.g., Theodoret’s comments on 1:15 and 2:1 in *Twelve Prophets*, 88-90, Rashi’s comments in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passages, and Luther’s comments on 2:1 in *Minor Prophets* 1:90. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. That is, *yôm lyhwh* as opposed to the construct *yôm yhwh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Jeremias, “The Function of the Book of Joel for Reading the Twelve,” 81; cf. Seitz, *Joel*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 46-47.. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:161. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Theodore, *Twelve Prophets*, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Twelve Prophets*, 105. Josef Lössl surveys such patristic interpretation of the verse in “When Is a Locust Just a Locust,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (2004): 575-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cf. Laurie J. Braaten, “Earth Community in Joel 1-2,” *HBT* 28 (2006): 113-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ronald A. Simkins, “‘Return to Yahweh,’” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 41-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. While *bā’* could be qatal (“has come”), the comparison and contrast with the yiqtol in 1:15 and the subsequent “is near” suggests it is a participle. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. NRSV “blackness” would imply *šəḥôr* for MT *šaḥar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. I take v. 2b as extrapolated phrases within which this colon and the next line are unmarked relative clauses. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. With is a neat contrasting deftness these two lines work abca’b’c’ and abcc’b’a’. The word order of the second mirrors the reversal of which it speaks. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Taking *lô* to refer to the beneficiary of the escape as in Exod. 10:5, despite the gender of the suffix (*’ereș* is usually feminine); to signify escape from the attackers, one would expect *min*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. While the parallelism suggests a reference to steeds, *pārāšîm* is more likely a metonym; it actually means horsemen. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. On *pā’rûr* see Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Translations such as “swerve” (NRSV) depend on somewhat tentative emendation and/or somewhat tentative philological arguments. That *‘ābaṭ* has its usual meaning is supported by the use of another monetary term, *bāsa‘*, in v. 8 (cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:163; and see the discussion in Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:633-35). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. While *šelaḥ* usually refers to a weapon such as a pike, in Neh. 3:15 it denotes the Jerusalem water channel or pool referred to as *Šilōaḥ* in Isa. 8:6. Joel may be hinting at an allusion to it if his picture is an allegory of an actual army attacking Jerusalem by this route: cf. v. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. I.e., hurl themselves (cf. Josh. 11:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Cf Tg; translations such as “without breaking ranks” (TNIV) depend on giving an idiosyncratic meaning to *bāsa‘*. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The company mentioned in vv. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Here and in the next two cola introduced by *wə*, the subjects come before the verb, suggesting circumstantial clauses. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. I take all three occurrences of *kî* in v. 11 as asseverative; a threefold “because” looks clumsy and a mixture of “yes” and “because” looks arbitrary. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. LXX, Vg, Tg, Sym translate with a plural, correctly assuming that the colon refers to the army. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Anatomically the heart: see the note on Hos. 2:14 [16]. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. The “straightforward meaning” of *məšolbām*, especially when followed by *bə* (Stuart, *Hosea –Jonah*, 248; cf. LXX, Vg, Tg); but given the parallelism, people listening to the prophecy might pick up an allusion to BDB’s *māšal* II suggesting “using them as an aphorism/taunt” (cf. Jer. 24:9). See James R. Linville, “Letting the ‘Bi-word’ ‘Rule’ in Joel 2:17,” *JHS* 5/2 (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cf. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. It is thus the grand-scale instance of what Wendland calls “recursion” (repetition with variation) in Joel (*Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature*, 223-363). Cf. also David Marcus, “Nonrecurring Doublets in the Book of Joel,” *CBQ* 56 (1994): 56-67; and Seitz, *Joel*, 147-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See Joel Barker, “One Good ‘Turn’ Deserves Another?” in Flesher and others (eds.), *Why?... How Long?*, 115-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:280. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Cf. Barton’s comments, *Joel and Obadiah*, 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Cf. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. But see e.g., Duane A. Garrett, “The Structure of Joel,” *JETS* 28 (1985): 289-97; Ronald L. Troxel, “The Problem of Time in Joel,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 77-95 (83-95); for the argument that the section directly describes Yahweh’s army. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cf. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Cf. James L. Crenshaw, “Who Knows What YHWH Will Do?” in Astrid B. Beck and others (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes that See* (D. N. Freedman Festschrift; Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1995), 185-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cf. Ibn Ezra in in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage; cf. Rosenberg, *Twelve Prophets* 1:100. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. For the argument that Jonah came first, see Joseph R. Kelly, “Joel, Jonah, and the Yhwh Creed,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 805-26; Thomas B. Dozeman speaks rather of “mutual relationship” (“Inner-biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character,” *JBL* 108 [1989]: 207-23 [208]). And theologically they have a reciprocal relationship (cf. Seitz, *Joel*, 65). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See R. W. L. Moberly, “Educating Jonah,” in *Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 181-210 (191-92). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Fretheim, *Reading Hosea-Micah*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Seitz, *Joel*, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Prinsloo, *Theology of the Book of Joel*, 48 (the first sentence is italicized). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Seitz (*Joel*, 86-93) includes a substantial treatment especially of Thomas Cranmer’s work in the Church of England *Book of Common Prayer*. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:164. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Cf. Norberto Saracco, “I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All People,” *CTJ* 46 (2011): 268-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Barth, *CD* II, 1: 407-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:61. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Barth, *CD* II, 1: 498. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:63. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Cf. Douglas Watson, “Divine Attributes in the Book of Joel, *JSOT* 37 (2012): 109-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Strazicich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Theod translates the verbs in vv. 18-19a as future (contrastLXX, Vg, Tg), but they are *waw­-*consecutive yiqtals and the future rendering is “grammatically indefensible” (Driver, *Joel and Amos*, 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. On this verb, see the note on Hosea 2:15 [17]. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The apparent jussive *wəta‘al* is “extremely difficult”; in fact, inexplicable (*TTH* 175, observation). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Tg, Vg correctly infer that “he” is the northerner, not Yahweh as in the next verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. More literally, “has shown bigness in acting”; so also in v. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. While the masculine plural imperative is not unusual before a feminine subject (JM 150a), it does encourage the metonymy to which the comments refer. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. LXX implies a word for “food,” perhaps assimilating to 1:16. Vg, Tg, Theod translate “teacher [of/in righteousness]”; the collocation of *hammôreh* with *șədāqāh* recalls Hos. 10:12, where see the note. V. 23aγb is repetitive and MT might be an expansive version (LXX is shorter), perhaps brought about through the ambiguity of *hammôreh* and the later *môreh*. But the expansiveness with its suggestive ambiguity might be original (see Strazicich’s discussion, *Joel’s Use of Scripture*, 184-97). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Yahweh’s faithfulness rather than Judah’s faithfulness (NRSV). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. For MT *bāri’šôn* “in the first [month]” (e.g., Exod. 12:18; cf. Tg), LXX “as at the first” would require *kāri’šônāh* (e.g., Isa. 1:26). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. The term usually refers to a receptacle for the juice from grapes, but here it also covers a receptacle for the oil from olives. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Here Joel begins with the most familiar word for locust, which is the immediate subject of the singular verb; the lack of *waw* after swarmer then suggests that the next colon enlarges on this one to fill out the parallel with 1:4, though the way the cola work doesn’t suggest it’s a later expansion (so Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. The five-word colon would reformat as a four–stress colon by hyphenating *’ăšer* as in v. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Literally, “you will eat to eat,” that is, “you will continue to eat”; *wəšābôa‘* then continues the construction (cf. GK 113s). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. The five-word colon would reformat as a four–stress colon by hyphenating *kî* as in vv. 21 and 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence*, 196-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Strazicich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture*, 201 [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. B. Sota 3a; cf. Rashi, in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Cf. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Cf. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 1:172. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ana Langerack, “Joel 2—New Creation,” *Mission Studies* 10 (1993) 78-82 (79). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. The regular word for a palm tree is *tāmār*; here and in Song 3:6 *tîmārāh* denotes a palm-tree like column, perhaps spreading out at the top (cf. BDB) like a mushroom cloud. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. LXX nicely has “the people who have good tidings preached,” implying a form of the verb *bāśar* rather than one from *bə* plus the root *śārad*; it would have been a neat version for Peter to quote in Acts 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. JPSV “everyone who invokes the LORD” is grammatically possible, but it assimilates the translation to v. 32a [3:5] where the construction is different; contrast LXX, Vg, Tg. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. “Captivity” (LXX) would require a form such as *šəbî* for MT *šəbā’yim*; Aq, Sym, Theod presuppose MT. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. On the verb *‘ûš* which comes only here, see *DCH*. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. On the verb form, which recurs in Isa. 43:9, see John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40—55* (London: Clark, 2006) 1:284-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. *Hanḥat* is the only instance of the hiphil of the rather rare verb *nāḥat* (see GK64h) and it caused trouble to LXX, Vg, and Tg;further, the address to Yahweh is unexpected and LXX has a quite different version of the line. See the discussion in Barthélemy*, Critique Textuelle* 3:638-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. LXX, Tg “I will avenge” perhaps implies the verb *nāqam* instead of the verb *nāqāh;* but see Gelston, BHQ, 78\*. TNIV turns the clause into an unmarked question (cf. GK 150a), but the context hardly impels the reader in this direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Cf. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:105. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See especially Assis, *Book of Joel*, 27-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Thus Assis (*The Book of Joel*, 161) sees the whole of 2:18—3:17 as Yahweh’s response to the prayer in 2:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Against Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:91. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Tova Ganzel, “The Shattered Dream,” *JHS* 11/6 (2011): 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Cf. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Cf. Rashi’s comment (in *miqrā’ôt gədôlôt* on Amos 1:6), that the lion’s roar is a way of describing the holy spirit coming on a prophet to declare judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Cf. Ronald L. Troxel, “Confirming Coherence in Joel 3 with Cognitive Grammar,” *ZAW* 125 (2013): 578-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. See Seung Ho Bang, “For Whom the Plowshares and Pruning Hooks Toil,” *JSOT* 39 (2015): 489-512 (501-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See the comments on Hos. 2:19 [21]. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Seitz, *Joel*, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Appian, *Anabasis* 2:24-27; cf. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Thus vv. 4-8 do resemble prophetic responses to a protest psalm, but they aren’t responses to the protests indicated in Joel 1—2 (so Graham S. Ogden, “Joel 4 and Prophetic Responses to National Laments,” *JSOT* 26 [1983]: 97-106). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. See Robert M. Good, “The Just War in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 104 (1983): 385-400. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Cf. Hans Walter Wolff, “Swords into Plowshares?” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 12 (1985): 133-47; Clause F. Mariottini, “Joel 3:10 [H 4:10],” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 (1987): 125-30; Will Kynes, “Beat Your Parodies into Swords, and Your Parodied Books into Spears,” *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011): 276-310. James Brenneman seems to miss the irony in seeing Joel as encouraging “universal war” (*Canons in Conflict* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 133). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Seung Ho Bang, “For Whom the Plowshares and Pruning Hooks Toil,” *JSOT* 39 (2015): 489-512 (512). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Crenshaw, *Joel*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Cf. Pablo R. Andiñach, “Latin American Approaches: A Liberationist Reading of the ‘Day of the Lord’ Tradition in Joel,” in Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards (eds.), *Method Matters* (D. L. Petersen Festschrift; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 423-40 (437). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Cf. James L. Crenshaw, “Freeing the Imagination,” in Yehoshua Gitay (ed.), *Prophecy and Prophets* Atlanta: Scolars, 1997), 129-47 (143). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Cyril, *Twelve Prophets* 1:317. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Cf. Luther, *Minor Prophets* 1:106-7. Having trouble with prophets, he declares that what Joel speaks of should not be expected to be a reality in the church; such signs were no longer necessary once the gospel had been preached around the world and once the Scriptures exist. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. So Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:94. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. On approaches to “fulfillment” in Acts 2, see Daniel J. Trier, “The Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32,” *JETS* 40 (1997): 13-26, and on the significance of 2:28-32 within Pentecostalism, see Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Barth, *CD* IV, 4:78-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:105, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:107. Strazicich surveys the allusions to Joel 2:32 [3:5] in *Joel’s Use of Scripture*, 289-334. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See Huub Van Der Sandt, “The Fate of the Gentiles in Joel and Acts 2,” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 66 (1990): 56-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:107-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:109. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Assis, *The Book of Joel*, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Ronald A. Simkins, “God, History, and the Natural World ¡n the Book of Joel,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 435-52 (451-52). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Cf. Calvin, *Minor Prophets* 2:131-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (London: SPCK; New York: Crossroad, 1982), 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. The subtitle of Assis, *The Book of Joel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. See Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)