

Introduction to the Book of Joel
Dr. Steven R. Cook

Author: Joel, whose name means “Yahweh is God” - Yahweh is Elohim. The same meaning can be derived from the name Elijah – Elohim is Yahweh.

Audience: Judah – Southern Kingdom (Joel 3:1, 6, 8).

Date of ministry:

Dating the book of Joel is difficult because, unlike Hosea and Amos, there’s no reference to rulers or historical events (Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1). We know from Joel 1:13 and 2:17 that the temple was functional, but this could have been Solomon’s temple that was standing before the exile in 586 B.C. or Zerubbabel’s temple after the exile in 516 B.C. Four dates are possible:

1. 872-796 B.C. – (Obadiah, Jonah)
2. 792-740 B.C. – (Hosea, Amos, Micah, Isaiah)
3. 597-587 B.C. – (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah)
4. 515-500 B.C. – (Zechariah, Haggai)

I’m content to place the book of Joel during the reign of Uzziah between 792-740 B.C.

Purpose & Message:

Joel 1:1-2:17 presents God’s judgment upon Judah in the form of a drought and plague of locusts (Joel 2:25). Joel 2:18-3:21 focuses on the Lord’s restoration of Judah and the future judgment of her enemies. The prophet uses God’s judgment upon Israel to mention a future time of judgment which he calls “the day of the Lord” (Joe 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). His message involves a national call to humility and repentance (Joel 1:13-16; 2:12-14).

Joel 1:1-20

The word of the LORD [divine revelation] that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: ² Hear this, O elders [Israel's leaders], and listen, all inhabitants of the land [Israelite citizens]. Has *anything like* this happened in your days or in your fathers' days? [think back into history] ³ Tell your sons about it, and *let* your sons *tell* their sons, and their sons the next generation [don't let the following generations forget what happened]. ⁴ What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten [four waves of destruction]. ⁵ Awake, drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth. ⁶ For a nation [of locusts] has invaded my land, mighty and without number; its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness. ⁷ It has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away; their branches have become white. ⁸ Wail [Israelites] like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. ⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD [i.e. the produce necessary for temple sacrifices; Ex. 29:40; Lev. 6:14–18; 9:16–17]. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD [because worship cannot happen without these provisions]. ¹⁰ The field is ruined, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails. ¹¹ Be ashamed, O farmers, wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field is destroyed. ¹² The vine dries up and the fig tree fails; the pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field dry up. Indeed [as a result], rejoicing dries up from the sons of men. ¹³ Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* and lament, O priests [spiritual leaders]; wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God [Joel identifies with their pain], for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴ Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD [i.e. a call for national repentance; cf. Neh. 9:1–2; Jer. 36:9; 2 Chron. 7:14]. ¹⁵ Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near [cf. Joel 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14], and it will come as destruction from the Almighty [Joel uses the current situation to prophecy about a future time of judgment]. ¹⁶ Has not food been cut off before our eyes, gladness and joy from the house of our God? ¹⁷ The seeds shrivel under their clods; the storehouses are desolate, the barns are torn down, for the grain is dried up. ¹⁸ How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer. [God's judgment on Israel affects the animals] ¹⁹ To You, O LORD, I cry [Joel is not guilty of the sin that led to judgment, but he's still affected by it and cries out to the Lord for a solution]; for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. ²⁰ Even the beasts of the field pant for You; for the water

brooks are dried up [because of a drought] and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Summary:

The book of Joel opens with the prophetic statement, “The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel” (Joe 1:1). Joel’s audience includes the elders and inhabitants of Israel (Joe 1:2, 14), drunkards (vs. 5), priests (vs. 9, 13), farmers and vinedressers (vs. 11). Joel asks his audience if anyone can remember a plague of locusts like the one they’d just experienced (Joe 1:2), and instructs them to tell it to the generations that follow so that no one forgets (Joe 1:3). Joel describes four kinds of locusts that had ravaged the land and left it bare (Joe 1:4), and calls for the drunkards to weep because there’s no more wine for them to drink (Joe 1:5). The locusts are described as “a nation” that had invaded the land of Israel and wrought destruction upon the grapevines and fig trees (Joe 1:6-7). Other passages in Joel reveal that God had sent them for His purposes (Joe 2:11, 25). As a result of this damage, the people were to weep like a young bride who had lost her bridegroom (Joe 1:8). The priests mourn because the people have no grain or drink offerings to bring to them (Joe 1:9-10, 13). “The result was that the priests and the whole nation mourned. It was bad enough that the people did not have food and drink for their own enjoyment, but it was worse that they could not worship Yahweh.”¹ Because of the damage to the wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranate, palm and apple trees, “rejoicing dries up from the sons of men” (Joe 1:12-13). The joy of the Israelites was directly tied to the Lord’s blessings (Deut. 28:1-14), and judgment upon the land was an indication of their violation of the covenant agreement (Deut. 28:15, 38-40). Joel calls upon the inhabitants of the land to embark in national repentance, saying, “Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD” (Joe 1:14; cf. Neh. 9:1-2; Jer. 36:9; 2 Chron. 7:14). Joel compares the current locust plague of judgment to a future time of judgment, stating, “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joe 1:15; cf. 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). This future “day of the Lord” refers to a time when God intervenes in the world to judge mankind. Joel then switches back to address the destruction of his day and the damage of food crops which resulted in the loss of “Gladness and joy from the house of our God” (Joe 1:16-17). Apparently there was a drought that kept seeds from germinating, and eventually the storehouses were emptied. Even the cattle and sheep groaned because there was nothing to eat (Joel 1:18, 20). The prophet himself is impacted by what’s happening in his day, and he states, “To You, O LORD, I cry; for fire has devoured the pastures of the

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Joe 1:8.

wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field” (Joe 1:19). Though Joel was not personally guilty of the sin that led to the Lord’s judgment, he still suffered because of their actions and cried out to the Lord to intervene.

The Day of the Lord
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The phrase “the day of the Lord” appears twenty three times in Scripture.² It appears eighteen times in the Old Testament (Isa. 13:6, 9; 58:13; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joe 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5)³ and five times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:7-14).⁴ In Scripture, the “day of the Lord” is used both in a local and future sense. The phrase was first presented by the prophet Joel (assuming he prophesied during the reign of Uzziah), who stated, “Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joe 1:15; cf. 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). The argument that there is a “day of the Lord” relevant to Joel’s audience which is rooted in the historical context of the book in which the prophet wrote to the elders, citizens and the priests in Israel (Joel 1:2, 9, 13). To them, Joel describes the “day of the Lord” within the context of local judgments his audience experienced upon their crops (Joel 1:15). However, there are other biblical passages that describe a future “day of the Lord” which is global and filled with wrath. Some Bible scholars see the “day of the Lord” both as a time of wrath and blessing (Constable & Phillips); whereas other scholars see it strictly as a time of wrath pertaining to the seven year Tribulation (Fruchtenbaum & Wiersbe). The following four quotes respectively demonstrate the view of both camps.

The day of the Lord is a term that appears frequently in the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets. It refers to a day in which the Lord is working obviously, in contrast to other days, the day of man, in which man works without any apparent divine intervention...The eschatological day of the Lord that the prophets anticipated includes both judgment (in the Tribulation) and blessing (in the Millennium and beyond).⁵

The day of the Lord is a long period that begins right after the rapture, runs through the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon, and continues into the millennium. This day, which embraces both judgment and glory, is the subject of

² Old Testament writers use the Hebrew phrase יוֹם יְהוָה *yom Yahweh*, and New Testament writers use the Greek phrase ἡμέρα κυρίου *hemera kuriou*.

³ The day of the Lord appears twice in Amos 5:18 and Zephaniah 1:14.

⁴ Other references include (Isa. 2:11-21; 4:2; 11:10; 13:13; 19:23-24; 24:21; 27:12-13; 30:25; 61:2-4; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:0; 36:33; 38:14-19; Hos. 2:16-21; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 1:8-10, 14-15; 2:2-3; 3:8; Mal. 3:2, 17; 4:1-3; Matt. 10:15; 11:22-24; 26:29; Luke 10:12; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:5; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:4; 2 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 4:17; Rev. 6:19).

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Joe 1:15.

extensive Old Testament prophecy, where it is also called “that day,” “a day of wrath,” “the day of vengeance,” and so on.⁶

In the Old Testament, the most common name for the Great Tribulation is *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the Lord* found in various passages... There are some who use the Day of the Lord to include the Millennium as well as the Tribulation period, based upon 2 Peter 3:10. But as will be shown later in this chapter, this verse is best seen as applying to the Tribulation only, rather than including the events following it. In every passage of the Scriptures that the term *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the Lord* is found, it is always and without exception a reference to the Tribulation period. This is the most common name for this period in the Old Testament, and it is also found in various passages of the New Testament. While the phrase *that day* is used both negatively and positively and therefore many times it does apply to the Millennium, the phrase *Day of Jehovah* or *Day of the Lord* is always used negatively and never included the Millennial Kingdom.⁷

The phrase “the day of the Lord” refers to that future time when God will pour out His wrath on the Gentile nations *because of their sins against the Jews* (see Joel 3:1–8). It will occur after the church has been taken to heaven (see 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9–10, and Rev. 3:10), during that period of seven years known as the Tribulation. It is described most fully in Rev. 6–19. This period will end with the Battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:9–17; Rev. 19:11–21) and Jesus Christ returning to the earth to establish His kingdom.⁸

I tend to favor the latter view that the future “day of the Lord” refers strictly to the seven year Tribulation. From Scripture we can say with certainty that the future “day of the Lord” follows the first coming of Christ, (Mal. 4:5), will come upon the entire world (Joel 2:1-11; 30-31; 3:12-15; Isa. 13:6-11; Ezek. 30:2-4; Obad. 1:15), will be inescapable (Amos 5:18-20), is a day of wrath and destruction (Zeph. 1:14-18), will come unannounced (1 Thess. 5:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:10), and will follow the coming of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1-4). The church will not experience this time of God’s judgment, for we are waiting for the return of Christ from heaven, “who rescues us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10; cf. 5:9).

⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring the Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; 2009), Joe 1:15–20.

⁷ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 172–173.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Joe.

Joel 2:1-17

Blow a trumpet in Zion [i.e. Jerusalem], and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! [i.e. the temple mount] Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; surely it is near [i.e. another wave of locust-judgment if His people don't repent],² a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; there has never been *anything* like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations.³ A fire consumes before them and behind them a flame burns [complete destruction]. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them.⁴ Their appearance [i.e. the locusts] is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run.⁵ With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle.⁶ Before them the people are in anguish; all faces turn pale [at the prospect of another wave of locusts].⁷ They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths.⁸ They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path; when they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks.⁹ They rush on the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief.¹⁰ Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness [because the swarm blocks the light].¹¹ The LORD utters His voice before His army [see Joe 2:25]; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?¹² “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning;¹³ and rend your heart and not your garments.” [a call for national repentance; cf. 2 Chron. 7:12-14] Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness [cf. Ex. 34:6] and relenting of evil [רַחֵם *raah* – evil, distress, calamity].¹⁴ Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent [i.e. change His mind concerning judgment; cf. Jonah 3:9] and leave a blessing behind Him, *even* a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? [i.e. bring agricultural blessing if they repent]¹⁵ Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly,¹⁶ gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants [who can add to the national cry to the Lord]. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her *bridal* chamber [even newlyweds not exempt; see Deut. 24:5].¹⁷ Let the priests, the LORD'S ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they among the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’”

Summary:

Joel 2:1-11 is generally understood three ways: 1) an invasion of a human army from the north such as the Assyrians, 2) an eschatological event describing a future judgment, or 3) a threat of another locust invasion like the one described in chapter one. The last view makes the most sense because of the use of military similes in verses 4-7 and the specific reference to locusts in verse 25. This last view would understand the “day of the Lord” in Joel 2:1-2 as a threat of local judgment upon the generation of Joel’s day. Joel describes the swarm of locusts as a consuming fire (Joe 2:3), and as an invading army of war horses, chariots and people (Joe 2:4-5), who instill fear among the Israelites (Joe 2:6). This army of locusts crosses over the city walls, breaks through its defenses and enters homes (Joe 2:7-9). The swarm is so vast it causes the ground to tremble and even blocks out sunlight (Joe 2:10). This invading army is “His army”, sent by the Lord upon His people (Joe 2:11). It is proper to understand God’s judgment as a manifestation of His righteous character in which He punishes those who fail to conform to His good laws. However, God is never quick to judge, and His threat of punishment is temporarily suspended as He calls His people to national repentance, saying, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments” (Joe 2:12-13a). God’s offer to avoid judgment is born out of His good nature, as He declares, “Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil” (Joe 2:13b). Some argue that God cannot change and understand the offer to “relent” as an anthropathism. Though it is true that God does not change with regard to His essential nature, He can change His course of judgment into blessing, if His people turn back to Him. In fact, the whole of Deuteronomy chapter 28 is predicated on a plain understanding that blessing and cursing is promised to Israel, His covenant people, dependent on their obedience or disobedience to His just laws. With the call to repent Joel states, “Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, *even* a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” (Joe 2:14). Agricultural prosperity would signify God’s blessing rather than judgment, and this blessing would allow them to resume normal religious functions. God’s call to national repentance was to be led by Israel’s priests (Joe 2:17), who were to “Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, and gather the children and the nursing infants” (Joe 2:15-16a). Even newlyweds, who were normally exempt from public functions (Deu 24:5), are called to participate (Joe 2:16b). The priests were to “weep between the porch and the altar” at the temple, crying out to the Lord, saying, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they among the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’” (Joe 2:17). The national cry not only displayed humility before God, but sought to protect His

reputation among the nations who might see Israel's destruction as an indication their God was too weak to protect them.

Joel 2:18-32

Then the LORD will be zealous for His land [to protect His name; cf. Joe 2:17; [Eze 20:9; 39:25](#)] and will have pity on His people [or “he had compassion on his people” NET].¹⁹ The LORD will answer and say to His people [or “The LORD responded to his people” NET], “Behold, I am going to send you grain, new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied *in full* with them; and I will never again [in this way] make you a reproach among the nations.²⁰ “But I will remove the northern *army* [of locusts; [see vs. 25](#)] far from you [perhaps by a strong wind; [see Exo 10:19](#)], and I will drive it into a parched and desolate land, and its vanguard into the eastern sea [probably the Dead Sea], and its rear guard into the western sea [Mediterranean Sea]. And its stench will arise and its foul smell [of the decaying locusts] will come up, for it has done great things [i.e. great judgment according to God’s will].”²¹ Do not fear, O land, rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done great things [God cares about the land].²² Do not fear, beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, for the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full [God cares about the animals].²³ So rejoice, O sons of Zion, and be glad in the LORD your God; for He has given you the early rain for *your* vindication. And He has poured down for you the rain, the early and latter rain as before [as a sign of His blessing; [see Deut. 28:12](#)].²⁴ The threshing floors will be full of grain, and the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil [renewed abundance with the ability to worship with sacrifices].²⁵ “Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you [God sovereignly controls creation for His own ends].²⁶ “You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; then My people will never be put to shame.²⁷ “Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame. [Joe 2:28-32 forms another chapter in the Hebrew Bible (BHS) and marks it 3:1-5]²⁸ “It will come about after this [time of local judgment] that I will [in the distant future] pour out My Spirit on all mankind [all - without distinction, not exception; i.e. all classes of people]; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.²⁹ “Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days [Like the prophet Joel, more of God’s people will benefit from His Spirit, know His will and walk in it].³⁰ “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke.³¹ “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.³² “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Summary:

The main idea of the passage is that God restores Israel's prosperity after they return to Him and then pronounces a future day of the Lord scenario. The NASB translates Joel 2:18-19 in the future tense, but other translations render it in the past tense, as "He had compassion on his people" (Joe 2:18 NET) and "The LORD responded to his people" (Joe 2:19 NET; cf. ESV, CSB, NIV). "The Hebrew verb forms used here are preterites with *vav* consecutive and are most naturally understood as describing a *past* situation...It appears from the verbs of vv. 18–19 that at the time of Joel's writing this book the events of successive waves of locust invasion and conditions of drought had almost run their course and the people had now begun to turn to the Lord."⁹ As a result of Israel's returning to God, the Lord restored their agricultural blessings in accordance with His promise (Joe 2:18-19; cf. Deut. 28:12). Furthermore, He promised to remove the locusts which were destroying the crops (Joe 2:20). God even spoke kindly to the land and animals, assuring that green vegetation would return (Joe 2:21-22). To His people, God would send rain upon the land and they would again enjoy grain, wine and oil (Joe 2:23-24). The Lord would make up for the years of devastation produced by the locusts, which He calls "My great army which I sent among you" (Joe 2:25). From these events Israel was to know God was in their midst, and He controlled blessing and cursing, and that lifting the curse was a sign His relationship with His people had been restored (Joe 2:26-27). Joel 2:28-32 begins a new chapter in the Hebrew Bible and marks it 3:1-5 (BHS). This means Joel chapter 3 in the English translation is chapter 4 in the Hebrew Bible. Joel then prophesied about a distant future time in which God would pour out His Spirit upon all classes of people without regard to age, gender, or social classification (Joe 2:28-29). This bestowal of His Spirit and outpouring of divine revelation indicated God's blessing upon believers. However, there is also a picture of judgment, in which God "will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes" (Joe 2:30-31). This judgment most likely describes the seven year Tribulation which falls upon unbelievers (see Rev. 6:12-13). Though God is judging unbelievers during the Tribulation, there is still grace, for "it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (Joe 2:32). Paul gave this verse spiritual meaning in Romans 10:13. Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 when explaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). Peter did not mean that Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled on that day, but that what Joel described—especially concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—was analogous to

⁹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Joe 2:18.

what God was doing among believers at the beginning of the dispensation of the church age.

Joel 3:1-21

“For behold, in those days and at that time [i.e. at the end of the Tribulation; cf. 2:28-32], when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem [during the millennial reign of Christ],² I will gather all the nations [גוֹיִם *goiim* – Gentile nations] and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat [Jehoshaphat = “Yahweh has judged”; cf. vs. 14]. Then I will enter into judgment [שֹׁפֵט *shaphat*] with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land.³ “They have also cast lots for My people [i.e. divided them up as spoils of war], traded a boy for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that they may drink [treated God’s people as cheap commodities].⁴ “Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? [Gentile nations] Are you rendering Me a recompense? [“Are you trying to get even with Me?” NET] But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head [dispense retributive justice].⁵ “Since you have taken My silver and My gold [i.e. robbed God], brought My precious treasures to your temples [as an offering to their pagan deities],⁶ and sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their territory,⁷ behold, I am going to arouse them from the place where you have sold them, and return your recompense on your head [i.e. repay the nations for their crime].⁸ “Also I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation [the punishment will fit the crime],” for the LORD has spoken [and surely it will come to pass].⁹ Proclaim this among the nations: prepare a war; rouse the mighty men! Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up!¹⁰ Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am a mighty man.” [i.e. get the Gentile nations psyched up for battle]¹¹ Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there [for the battle of Armageddon]. Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones [perhaps His angelic army].¹² Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great [Isa 63:1-6; Rev 19:15].¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision [the judgment of Christ at His second coming; see Rev 16:16; 19:11-21].¹⁵ The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.¹⁶ The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel.¹⁷ Then [after the Tribulation] you will know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain [i.e. the temple mount in Jerusalem]. So Jerusalem will be holy [living for God], and strangers will pass through it no more [and contaminate it with pagan values].¹⁸ And in that day [when the millennial kingdom begins] the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with

milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water [describing ideal conditions in the millennial kingdom]; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim [even barren places will be well watered].¹⁹ Egypt will become a waste, and Edom will become a desolate wilderness [an unproductive place], because of the violence done to the sons of Judah [a repayment for wrong], in whose land they have shed innocent blood.²⁰ But Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem for all generations.²¹ And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged [previously], for the LORD dwells in Zion.

Summary:

At the end of the eschatological Day of the Lord (which Joel prophesied about in 2:28-32), God promised to restore the fortunes of Israel (Joe 3:1) and to judge the surrounding nations for the years of hostility to His people, specifically for scattering them and dividing up their land (Joe. 3:2). These nations treated God's people so poorly they even traded a boy for a harlot and sold a girl for wine (Joe 3:3). God specifically names Tyre, Sidon and Philistia for their actions, and suggests their hostility is an act of unjustified revenge on their part (Joe 3:4a); however, God promises to repay them swiftly (Joe 3:4b, cf. 7). These Gentile nations stole God's treasures (Joe 3:5) and "sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their territory" (Joe 3:6). But God promised to rouse His people and return them back to the Promised Land (Joe 3:7), and will recompense the nations by selling them into captivity (Joe 3:8). God then challenges the nations to war with Him, even calling farmers to turn their instruments of work into weapons of war (Joe 3:9-11a). The phrase, "Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones" (Joe 3:11b) could allude to angelic warriors who will battle during the time of the Tribulation. God calls these nations to assemble at the valley of Jehoshaphat, a broad plain where He will render judgment upon them and destroy them (Joe 3:12-14; cf. Rev. 19:11-21). This will be a time of darkness for the nations (Joe 3:15) as "The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth tremble" (Joe 3:16a). But Israel will not be afraid, for "the LORD is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel" (Joe 3:16b). After His judgment upon the nations, Israel will know God is their Savior, and Jerusalem will become a place of holiness (Joe 3:17). The millennial blessings will begin to fall upon God's people, for "in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim" (Joe 3:18). In contrast, Egypt and Edom will become waste lands, "because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood" (Joe 3:19). But Judah and Jerusalem will be a safe dwelling forever (Joe 3:20), and God will avenge Israel's enemies and will dwell in Zion

(Joe 3:21). These future conditions will display God's judgment upon His enemies as well as His blessings upon those He loves.