

Joel

1

Summary: *Joel 1 opens with a devastating locust plague that has stripped the land bare. The prophet calls the elders and all inhabitants to witness an unprecedented catastrophe — nothing like it has been seen in living memory or in the memory of their ancestors. Four stages of locusts have consumed everything: grain, wine, and oil are gone. Joel calls for national mourning, for the priests to lament, and for a sacred assembly to be called. The chapter climaxes with the prophet's own cry to God as fire and drought compound the locust devastation.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Joel's four-stage locust description (v. 4) — gazam, arbeh, yeleg, chasil — may represent four species of locust, four developmental stages of the same species, or four successive waves of invasion. The effect is literary totality: what one stage leaves, the next consumes. The locusts are compared to a nation (goy) invading the land (v. 6) — an army with lion's teeth that strips the vine and bark from the fig tree. The destruction is so complete that the daily grain and drink offerings in the temple have ceased (v. 9) — the entire sacrificial system has collapsed because there is nothing left to offer. Even the animals groan (v. 18).*

Translation Friction: *The date of Joel is disputed more than perhaps any other prophetic book — proposals range from the 9th century to the 4th century BCE. The book contains no explicit historical references. We do not assign a date in the rendering. The four locust terms in verse 4 have been debated since antiquity. Whether the locust plague is literal, metaphorical (representing invading armies), or apocalyptic is also debated. We render the text as describing a real locust plague while noting the metaphorical dimensions.*

Connections: *The locust plague connects to the eighth plague of Egypt (Exodus 10:1-20), establishing Joel's theme that the Day of the LORD can fall on God's own people. The mourning call echoes Amos 5:16-17. The cessation of temple offerings anticipates the eschatological disruption of Daniel 9:27. The four-stage locust destruction provides the backdrop for the army metaphor in chapter 2.*

¹The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel. ²Hear this, you elders! Pay attention, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or in the days of your ancestors? ³Tell your children about it, and let your children tell their children, and their children the next generation. ⁴What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust ate; what the swarming locust left, the hopping locust ate; what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust ate. ⁵Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you wine drinkers, over the sweet wine — for it has been cut off from your mouths. ⁶For a

nation has come up against my land — powerful and beyond counting. Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness. ⁷It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree. It has stripped them completely bare and cast them aside; their branches have turned white. ⁸Grieve like a young woman dressed in sackcloth, mourning for the husband of her youth. ⁹The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests, the ministers of the LORD, mourn. ¹⁰The fields are devastated; the ground mourns. For the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up, the olive oil fails. ¹¹Be dismayed, you farmers! Wail, you vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley — for the harvest of the field is lost. ¹²The vine has withered, the fig tree has wilted. The pomegranate, the date palm, the apple tree — all the trees of the field have dried up. Surely joy has dried up among the children of humanity. ¹³Dress in sackcloth and lament, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God — for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴Consecrate a fast; call a sacred 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. ¹⁵What a day! For the day of the LORD is near — it will come as devastation from the Almighty. ¹⁶Is not the food cut off before our very eyes — joy and gladness from the house of our God? ¹⁷The seeds shrivel beneath the clods. The storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down, for the grain has failed. ¹⁸How the livestock groan! The herds of cattle wander in confusion, for there is no pasture for them. Even the flocks of sheep suffer. ¹⁹To you, LORD, I cry out! For fire has consumed the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have scorched all the trees of the field. ²⁰Even the wild animals cry out to you, for the streambeds have dried up and fire has consumed the wilderness pastures.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription provides only the prophet's name and patronymic — no historical setting, no king, no date. This absence has made Joel the most chronologically disputed of the prophets. The name Joel (Yo'el) means 'the LORD is God' — a theologically programmatic name for a book concerned with the LORD's sovereign action in history. Pethuel is otherwise unknown.
2. The rhetorical question demands a negative answer — nothing comparable has occurred within living memory or in oral tradition. The appeal to elders (zeqenim) and to all inhabitants creates a universal audience. Joel positions the locust plague as an unprecedented event that breaks the normal pattern of agricultural difficulty.
3. The chain of transmission — children to grandchildren to great-grandchildren — establishes the event as worthy of permanent collective memory, like the Exodus itself (cf. Exodus 10:2, where the plagues are to be told to children and grandchildren). The locust plague must be remembered because it reveals God's character and power.
4. The four Hebrew terms — gazam ('cutter'), arbeh ('swarmer,' the most common word for locust), yeleq ('hopper/licker'), and chasil ('destroyer/consumer') — may represent four species, four developmental stages of one species (egg, larva, pupa, adult), or four successive swarms. The literary effect is totality: each stage consumes what the previous stage missed. Nothing remains. The KJV's 'palmerworm, locust, cankerworm, caterpillar' reflects the uncertainty — we render with descriptive English terms that capture each Hebrew word's root meaning.
5. The drunkards are addressed first — those most immediately affected by the loss of wine. The verb haqitsu ('wake up') is both literal (they are in a drunken stupor) and metaphorical (they are spiritually asleep). The asis ('sweet wine, new wine, fresh grape juice') has been destroyed at the source — the vines themselves are gone. The phrase nikrat mippikhem ('cut off from your mouths') makes the loss physical and sensory.
6. The locusts are called a goy ('nation') — the same word used for invading armies. This personification bridges the literal locust plague and the metaphorical army of chapter 2. 'My land' (artsi) — the speaker is either the prophet or God; both claim the land. The lion imagery (aryeh / lavi) describes the locusts' destructive capacity: they strip vegetation the way a lion tears flesh. The fangs (metall'ot) of a lioness emphasize the ferocity — the female lion is the primary hunter.
7. The vine (gaphen) and fig tree (te'enah) are Israel's premier agricultural products and symbols of prosperity (cf. 1 Kings 4:25). The verbs describe systematic destruction: laid waste (sam leshammah), splintered (liqtsaphah), stripped bare (chasoph chasaphah), and cast aside (hishlik). The white branches are bark-stripped limbs — the locusts have eaten not just leaves and fruit but the bark itself, leaving skeletal white wood. This level of devastation goes beyond normal insect damage.
8. The simile compares the nation's grief to the most poignant personal loss: a young bride mourning her husband's death. The betulah ('young woman, virgin') has lost the ba'al ne'ureha ('husband of her youth') — she is widowed at the beginning of her married life, before the relationship could mature. The sackcloth (saq) is the standard mourning garment — rough fabric worn against the skin as a sign of grief.
9. The minchah (grain offering) and nesekh (drink offering) were daily temple rituals requiring flour and wine (cf. Exodus 29:38-42, Numbers 28:3-8). The locust plague has made the daily sacrifice impossible — the agricultural foundation of worship has been destroyed. When the priests mourn, it signals that the institutional relationship between God and people has been disrupted at its most basic level. The phrase mesharetei YHWH ('ministers of the LORD') emphasizes the priests' role as servants, not masters, of the worship system.

10. The land itself mourns (avelah adamah) — personification that connects ecological disaster to spiritual reality. The triad of grain (dagan), new wine (tirosh), and olive oil (yitshar) represents the full range of agricultural produce and the Deuteronomic covenant blessings (Deuteronomy 7:13). All three are gone simultaneously — a total reversal of the covenant promise of abundance.
11. The ikkarim ('farmers, plowmen') and koremim ('vinedressers') are the agricultural workforce now left with nothing to harvest. Wheat (chittah) and barley (se'orah) — the staple grains — are both destroyed. The verb avad ('perished, is lost') indicates complete, irrecoverable loss. This is not a partial crop failure but a total wipeout.
12. The catalogue of destroyed trees expands from the vine and fig tree (v. 7) to include pomegranate (rimmon), date palm (tamar), and apple tree (tappuah). The comprehensive list leaves no tree standing. The final clause makes the connection between agricultural and human devastation: ki hovish sason ('joy has dried up') uses the same verb (hovish, 'dried up') applied to trees — human joy and agricultural life wither together. When the land dies, the people's spirit dies with it.
13. The priests are commanded to continuous mourning — wearing sackcloth day and night (linu basaqqim, 'spend the night in sackcloth') rather than changing into it only for public ceremony. The phrase 'ministers of my God' (mesharetei Elohai) uses the intimate first-person 'my God,' identifying Joel personally with the crisis. The temple worship has ceased not because of enemy conquest but because of natural disaster — even the raw materials of worship are gone.
14. The verb qaddesh ('consecrate, sanctify') applied to a fast means to set it apart as a holy act — not merely skipping meals but entering a sacred state of communal repentance. The atsarah ('sacred assembly') is a formal convocation of the entire community (cf. 2 Kings 10:20, 2 Chronicles 7:9). The gathering location — beit YHWH ('house of the LORD') — centers the response at the temple. Even when offerings cannot be made, the temple remains the place of petition.
15. The exclamation ahahh ('alas, woe') is a cry of distress. The 'day of the LORD' (yom YHWH) is a major prophetic concept appearing in Amos 5:18-20, Isaiah 2:12, Zephaniah 1:14-18, and Malachi 4:5. The wordplay keshod miShaddai ('like destruction from the Almighty') is a paronomasia — the similar sounds of shod and Shaddai create a literary link between divine power and devastation. The preposition 'from' (mi) indicates Shaddai as the source — this destruction comes from God.
16. The question is rhetorical — the answer is painfully obvious. The 'food cut off before our eyes' (neged eineinu okhel nikhrat) makes the crisis visible and undeniable. The loss extends from the physical (food) to the spiritual (joy and gladness in God's house). The temple, normally a place of celebration during harvest festivals, has become a place of mourning.
17. The agricultural devastation extends underground — even the planted seeds have died before germination. The Hebrew of this verse is among the most difficult in Joel, with rare words: aveshu ('shrivel, dry up'), perudot ('seeds' or 'dried fruits'), and megrepotehem ('clods' or 'shovels'). The storehouses (otsarot) and granaries (mamgurot) stand empty and demolished — there is nothing to store and no reason to maintain the storage facilities.
18. The suffering extends to the animal kingdom — the livestock (behemah) groan (ne'enchah), the cattle are bewildered (navokhu), and the sheep suffer (ne'eshamu). The verb navokhu ('are confused, wander aimlessly') suggests animals searching desperately for food that does not exist. The inclusion of animal suffering expands the scope of the disaster beyond human concerns — all creation is affected.
19. Joel shifts from prophetic speech to personal prayer. The 'fire' (esh) may be literal (drought-induced wildfires) or metaphorical (the scorching effect of the locust plague, which leaves the land looking burned). The pastures of the wilderness (ne'ot midbar) are the last refuge — even the uncultivated grazing lands have been destroyed. The prayer is raw and direct: elekha YHWH egra ('To you, LORD, I cry') — there is nowhere else to turn.
20. The chapter's final verse expands the prayer to include the wild animals (bahamat sadeh) who also cry out to God. The verb ta'arog ('cry out, pant, long for') is used in Psalm 42:1 of the deer panting for water — Joel applies it to all wild creatures desperate for survival. The dried streambeds (aphiqei mayim) represent the complete failure of the water supply. The repetition of 'fire has consumed the wilderness pastures' from verse 19 frames Joel's personal prayer with the universal groaning of creation.

2

Summary: Joel 2 is the theological center of the book, moving from judgment to mercy to eschatological promise. The chapter opens with the alarm trumpet sounding as the Day of the LORD approaches — a vast army (the locust horde described in military terms) sweeps the land. Then comes the great turning point: 'Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD your God' (v. 13). God responds to repentance with restoration, promising to drive away the northern army and restore the years the locusts have eaten. The chapter culminates with the promise of the Spirit poured out on all flesh — young and old, male and female, slave and free — followed by cosmic signs preceding the great Day of the LORD.

What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 13 — 'Rend your hearts, not your garments' — is one of the most quoted prophetic lines in Scripture, a call to internal transformation rather than external religious performance. God's self-description in that verse echoes the Exodus 34:6 formula: 'gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love.' The Spirit outpouring prophecy (vv. 28-29) is quoted by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21) as fulfilled in the early church. The universality of the Spirit — sons, daughters, old men, young men, male servants, female servants — breaks every social barrier. Joel's vision of the Spirit democratizes prophecy: no longer limited to designated prophets but available to all.

Translation Friction: The Hebrew versification differs from English starting at verse 28: English 2:28-32 = Hebrew 3:1-5. We follow English versification and note the Hebrew numbering. The 'northern army' (v. 20) is debated — does it refer to the locust swarm (which typically comes from the south in Palestine, making 'northern' unusual) or to an eschatological invading army (Babylonian, Assyrian, or apocalyptic)? We render as written while noting the tension. The relationship between the literal locust plague (ch. 1) and the military/apocalyptic imagery of chapter 2 is the central interpretive question of the book.

Connections: V. 13's divine self-description quotes Exodus 34:6-7. Vv. 28-29 are quoted in Acts 2:17-21. The cosmic signs (vv. 30-31) appear in Jesus's eschatological discourse (Mark 13:24-25, Matthew 24:29) and Revelation 6:12. 'Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved' (v. 32) is quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13. The 'teacher of righteousness' (v. 23) has connections to the Qumran community's Teacher of Righteousness.

1Blow the ram's horn in Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming — it is near! **2**A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and dense fog — like dawn spreading over the mountains, a vast and powerful army! Nothing like it has ever been, and nothing like it will come again for ages to come. **3**Before it, fire devours; behind it, flames scorch. Before it, the land is like the Garden of Eden; behind it, a desolate wilderness. Nothing escapes it. **4**They look like warhorses; they charge like cavalry. **5**With a sound like chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like the crackling of fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. **6**Before them, peoples writhe in anguish; every face turns pale. **7**They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. Each one marches in formation — they do not break ranks. **8**They do not jostle each other; each advances on his own path. They plunge through defenses without breaking stride. **9**They swarm over the city; they race along the walls. They climb into houses; they enter through windows like thieves. **10**Before them the earth quakes and the heavens tremble. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars withdraw their light. **11**The LORD thunders at the head of his army — his forces are beyond counting, and mighty is the one who carries out his command. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible — who can endure it? **12**"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart — with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." **13**Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and he relents concerning disaster. **14**Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him — enough for a grain offering and a drink offering to the LORD your God. **15**Blow the ram's horn in Zion! Consecrate a fast; call a sacred assembly. **16**Gather the people; consecrate the assembly. Bring together the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. **17**Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, 'Have pity on your people, LORD! Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"' **18**Then the LORD became zealous for his land and had compassion on his people. **19**The LORD answered and said to his people, "I am about to send you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied with them. I will never again make you an object of scorn among the nations. **20**I will drive the northern army far from you and push it into a parched and desolate land — its front ranks into the eastern sea and its rear guard into the western sea. Its stench will rise; its foul smell will go up, for it has done terrible things." **21**Do not be afraid, O land! Rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done great things. **22**Do not be afraid, wild animals, for the wilderness pastures are turning green. The trees bear their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their abundance. **23**Children of Zion, rejoice and be glad in the LORD your God! For he has given you the autumn rain in righteousness — he has poured down rain for you, both autumn rain and spring rain, as before. **24**The threshing floors will be full of grain, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. **25**I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust ate —

the hopping locust, the destroying locust, and the cutting locust — my great army that I sent against you. ²⁶You will eat abundantly and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. My people will never be put to shame. ²⁷Then you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God — there is no other. My people will never be put to shame. ²⁸After this I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female servants I will pour out my Spirit in those days. ³⁰I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth — blood, fire, and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ³²And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved, for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said — among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The shofar ('ram's horn') blown in Zion is a military alarm, not a liturgical call. The 'holy mountain' (har qodshi) is Mount Zion/the Temple Mount. The imperative to tremble (yirgezu) indicates the day of the LORD is not a day of comfort but of dread — even for God's own people. The double assertion 'is coming...is near' (va...qarov) creates urgency: the day is not distant but imminent.
2. The four terms for darkness — choshekh ('darkness'), aphelah ('deep darkness'), anan ('clouds'), and araphel ('thick fog') — create an overwhelming atmosphere of cosmic disruption. The simile 'like dawn spreading over the mountains' (keshachar parus al heharim) is paradoxical: dawn normally brings light, but this dawn is a dark army covering the hills like spreading shadow. The uniqueness claim echoes 1:2 — this is unprecedented and unrepeatable.
3. The contrast is devastating: Eden before the army, wasteland after it. The Garden of Eden (gan Eden) reference is the only time Joel uses this image, and it depicts the pre-plague land as paradisiacal — rich, fruitful, beautiful. The army transforms paradise into desert in a single pass. The phrase gam peleitah lo haytah lo ('nothing escapes it') means total devastation without remainder — no survivors, no remnant.
4. The military metaphor now describes the locusts explicitly as an army. The comparison to horses (susim) is apt — the head of a locust, seen up close, resembles a horse's head (in several languages, locusts and horses share etymological connections). The verb yerutsun ('they run') describes the rapid, disciplined advance of cavalry.
5. Three auditory similes describe the sound of the locust swarm: chariots rattling over rough terrain, fire crackling through dry straw, and the organized noise of an army in formation. Anyone who has witnessed a locust swarm confirms the accuracy — the sound of millions of wings and mandibles creates an overwhelming roar. The phrase erukh milchamah ('drawn up for battle') describes military formation — this is not a chaotic mob but a disciplined force.
6. The verb yachilu ('writhe, tremble') is the word for labor pains — the approaching army causes contortions of fear. The phrase kibbetu pa'rur ('faces gather paleness/blackness') describes the draining of color from faces in terror. The Hebrew pa'rur may mean 'glow' (flushing) or 'pallor' (draining) — we render as 'turns pale' since fear typically blanches the face.
7. The military discipline of the locust swarm is its most terrifying feature — each individual moves in coordination with the whole. The verb ya'aletun chomah ('they scale walls') describes siege warfare — no fortification stops them. The phrase lo ye'abbetun orchotam ('they do not break their paths/ranks') depicts perfect tactical discipline. Unlike human armies that break formation under pressure, this force maintains absolute order.
8. The locust-army maintains order without crowding — each one has its assigned lane. The final clause — falling through shelach ('weapons/defenses') without being stopped (lo yivtsa'u) — means conventional weapons are useless against them. Swords cannot stop a locust swarm; arrows are futile against millions. The invulnerability completes the portrait of an unstoppable force.
9. The invasion penetrates every space — city streets, walls, houses, windows. The comparison to thieves (kaggannav) entering through windows captures the violation of personal space — no home is safe. The relentless advance from open field (vv. 3-5) to city (v. 9) to individual dwelling tracks the locust swarm's actual behavior — they fill every space, leaving no refuge.
10. The cosmic disruption moves the description from locust plague to eschatological Day of the LORD. The darkening of sun, moon, and stars is a standard prophetic image for divine judgment (cf. Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7, Amos 8:9). Literally, a massive locust swarm can indeed darken the sky — but Joel's language exceeds the literal to reach the cosmic. The trembling of heaven and earth (ragezah erets, ra'ashu shamayim) collapses the distinction between natural disaster and divine intervention.
11. The locust army is identified as God's own army (cheilo, 'his army') — the LORD himself commands the swarm. God 'gives his voice' (natan qolo) before the army like a commander issuing battle orders. The question 'who can endure it?' (umi yekhi'lennu) is rhetorical — no one can withstand the Day of the LORD by their own strength. This question sets up the answer that follows: only repentance can avert the coming devastation.
12. The phrase vegam atah ('yet even now') is the pivot of the entire book — despite the devastation described in 1:1-2:11, there is still time. The window has not closed. The verb shuvu ('return!') echoes the prophetic call throughout the tradition. The three accompaniments — fasting (tsom), weeping (bekhi), and mourning (misped) — describe the full physical expression of repentance. But the key phrase is bekhoh levavkhem ('with all your heart') — external acts without internal transformation are insufficient (as v. 13 will make explicit).

- 13.** The divine self-description formula originates in Exodus 34:6-7 and is quoted or echoed in Numbers 14:18, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Jonah 4:2, and Nahum 1:3. Joel omits the final element of the Exodus 34 formula ('who does not leave the guilty unpunished') — whether this omission emphasizes mercy over judgment or is simply a rhetorical choice is debated. The verb *nicham* ('relent, change mind, be comforted') applied to God is theologically significant — it means God's response to human repentance is genuine change, not predetermined outcome.
- 14.** The phrase *mi yodea* ('who knows?') expresses humble uncertainty — there is no guarantee that repentance will avert judgment, only the hope based on God's character (v. 13). The 'blessing left behind' (*berakhah*) would be enough grain and wine to resume the daily temple offerings (*minchah vanesekh*) that ceased in 1:9. The modest hope is not for abundance but for enough — enough to worship again. This humility is the appropriate posture before a sovereign God.
- 15.** The shofar that sounded the alarm in verse 1 now sounds the call to repentance. The same instrument announces both danger and the response to danger. The instructions repeat 1:14 but with heightened urgency — the threat has been fully described (2:1-11), the theology has been articulated (2:12-14), and now the practical response is commanded.
- 16.** The universality of the assembly is emphasized — no one is exempt. The elders (*zeqenim*), children (*olalim*), and nursing infants (*yoneqei shadayim*) represent every age. The bridegroom and bride leaving their wedding chamber (*cheder / chuppah*) is the most striking inclusion — even newlyweds, who were exempted from military service for a year (Deuteronomy 24:5), must join the national repentance. Nothing takes priority over returning to God.
- 17.** The priests stand between the *ulam* ('portico/porch') of the temple and the altar — the space of intercession between God's house and the place of sacrifice. Their prayer has two dimensions: concern for the people ('have pity on your people') and concern for God's reputation ('why should they say, where is their God?'). The argument that God's honor is at stake among the nations is a classic prophetic appeal (cf. Exodus 32:12, Numbers 14:15-16, Ezekiel 36:20-23) — if Israel is destroyed, the nations will conclude that YHWH was powerless to protect his people.
- 18.** The verb *vayyeqanne* ('became zealous/jealous') describes God's protective passion for what belongs to him. The land is 'his land' (*artsa*), the people are 'his people' (*ammo*) — God acts to defend what is his. The verb *vayyachmol* ('had compassion, spared') marks the turning point: judgment yields to mercy. From this verse forward, the chapter moves into restoration.
- 19.** God's answer (*vayya'an*) is a direct response to the priestly prayer of verse 17. The triad of grain, new wine, and oil (*dagan, tirosh, yitshar*) restores exactly what was lost in 1:10. The promise 'never again' (*lo...od*) an object of scorn answers the prayer's concern about national disgrace. The restoration begins with the most basic level — food — before moving to cosmic promises.
- 20.** The 'northern army' (*hatsephoni*) is unusual for a locust swarm, which typically approaches Palestine from the south or east. This has led some scholars to identify the enemy as a human army (Babylon/Assyria came from the north). We render the text as written. The 'eastern sea' is the Dead Sea; the 'western sea' (*hayam ha'acharon*, literally 'the hinder sea') is the Mediterranean. The army is driven into the ocean from both ends. The rising stench of millions of dead locusts is historically attested — decomposing locust swarms create an unbearable odor.
- 21.** The phrase *higdil la'asot* ('has done great things') deliberately echoes its use in verse 20, where it described the army's terrible deeds. The same phrase now describes God's great acts of restoration. The land (*adamah*) is addressed directly and told to stop being afraid (*al tire'i*, feminine) — the personified earth that mourned in 1:10 is now commanded to celebrate.
- 22.** The animals that groaned in 1:18 and cried out in 1:20 are now comforted. The wilderness pastures (*ne'ot midbar*) consumed by fire (1:19-20) are green again. The fig tree (*te'nah*) and vine (*gephen*) destroyed in 1:7 and 1:12 now yield their *cheilam* ('strength, full yield, abundance'). The restoration reverses every specific loss catalogued in chapter 1.
- 23.** The phrase *hammoreh litsedaqah* is ambiguous: *moreh* can mean 'teacher' or 'autumn rain' (the early rain that begins the agricultural year). 'Teacher of righteousness' (*moreh tsedaqah*) became an important title in the Qumran community. We render as 'autumn rain in righteousness' based on the agricultural context, but note the double meaning. The two rains — *moreh* ('autumn/early rain,' October-November) and *malqosh* ('spring/latter rain,' March-April) — are the critical rainfalls of the Palestinian agricultural calendar. Their return means the agricultural cycle can resume. The phrase *barishon* ('as before' or 'in the first month') indicates restoration to the original pattern.
- 24.** The threshing floors (*goranot*) that were empty (1:10-11) are now full. The vats (*yeqavim*) overflow (*heshiqu*, 'overflow, be saturated') with new wine (*tirosh*) and oil (*yitshar*). The restoration is not merely adequate but abundant — the vats overflow. This reverses the futility curses of Deuteronomy 28 and restores the blessing promises of Deuteronomy 28:1-14.
- 25.** The four locust names from 1:4 reappear, now identified as 'my great army' (*cheili haggadol*) — the same forces that devastated the land are acknowledged as divinely commissioned. The verb *vishillamti* ('I will repay, restore, make whole') is the language of restitution — God compensates for the loss he himself authorized. The phrase 'the years' (*hashanim*) indicates the loss spanned multiple seasons. God does not merely stop the damage but makes up for accumulated years of loss.
- 26.** The emphatic infinitive *akhaltem akhol* ('you will surely eat, eat abundantly') emphasizes the abundance of restoration. Eating and satisfaction (*savo'a*) fulfill the covenant blessing promise. The verb *lehaphli* ('to deal wondrously, to do extraordinary things') describes God's restoration as miraculous, not merely natural recovery. The closing promise 'my people will never be put to shame' (*lo yevoshu ammi le'olam*) directly answers the prayer of verse 17 — God's people will not be disgraced among the nations.
- 27.** The verb *vida'tem* ('you will know') uses the key prophetic knowledge term — through the experience of devastation and restoration, Israel will achieve the *da'at* ('knowledge') of God that they lacked. The phrase *beqerev Yisra'el ani* ('I am in the midst of Israel') echoes the covenant presence

theology — God dwells among his people. The exclusive claim 'there is no other' (ve'ein od) echoes Deuteronomy 4:35 and Isaiah 45:5-6. The repetition of 'my people will never be put to shame' from verse 26 creates an emphatic literary bracket.

- 28.** This verse is 3:1 in the Hebrew text. The phrase acharei khen ('after this') is a general temporal marker — 'after' the agricultural restoration and the defeat of the locust army. The verb eshpokh ('I will pour out') uses the image of liquid poured abundantly — the Spirit is not rationed but lavished. Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17-21) quotes this passage with one modification: he changes 'after this' to 'in the last days,' interpreting Pentecost as the inauguration of the eschatological age Joel envisions.
- 29.** This verse is 3:2 in the Hebrew text. The extension of the Spirit to avadim ('male servants/slaves') and shephachot ('female servants/maidservants') demolishes the final social barrier. In the ancient world, slaves had no religious standing; they were property. Joel's vision includes them as recipients of divine revelation. The emphatic vegam ('and also, even') stresses how radical this inclusion is. Paul echoes this leveling in Galatians 3:28: 'there is neither slave nor free.'
- 30.** This verse is 3:3 in the Hebrew text. The 'wonders' (mophetim) are the same word used for the signs and wonders of the Exodus (Exodus 7:3, Deuteronomy 4:34). Blood, fire, and smoke columns describe either volcanic/cosmic phenomena or the aftermath of battle — the imagery is apocalyptic. Jesus references these signs in his eschatological discourse (Mark 13:24-25). The timrot ashan ('columns of smoke') may evoke the pillar of cloud and fire from the Exodus (Exodus 13:21-22), now deployed in judgment rather than guidance.
- 31.** This verse is 3:4 in the Hebrew text. The cosmic signs — darkened sun, blood-red moon — signal the approaching Day of the LORD. These images appear in Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7, and are quoted by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:20), by Jesus in Mark 13:24, and in Revelation 6:12. The 'blood moon' phenomenon (lunar eclipse creating a red appearance) may be the natural basis for the image, but Joel's usage transcends natural explanation — the entire cosmic order convulses before the Day arrives.
- 32.** This verse is 3:5 in the Hebrew text. Peter quotes it at Pentecost (Acts 2:21) and Paul in Romans 10:13. In its original context, the promise is eschatological — survival through the Day of the LORD for those on Mount Zion who invoke YHWH's name. The phrase peleitah ('deliverance, escape, surviving remnant') connects to the remnant theology that runs through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Twelve Prophets. The double calling — humans calling on God, God calling the survivors — creates a theology of mutual seeking that resolves the Joel narrative: the people respond to God's call to repent (2:12-17), and God responds by calling them into deliverance.

3

Summary: *Joel 3 (Hebrew chapter 4) is the final chapter, presenting the eschatological judgment of the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. God will gather all nations to judge them for scattering his people Israel, dividing his land, and selling Judah's children into slavery. The chapter issues a counter-call to the nations: prepare for war! Beat your plowshares into swords (reversing Isaiah 2:4/Micah 4:3). The nations are summoned to the Valley of Decision (Jehoshaphat), where God sits in judgment. The chapter — and the book — ends with a vision of Judah's permanent restoration: a fountain flowing from the house of the LORD, the land perpetually inhabited, and God dwelling in Zion.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The most striking element is the reversal of Isaiah 2:4/Micah 4:3: where those prophets envision beating swords into plowshares (peace), Joel commands the nations to beat plowshares into swords (war). This is not a contradiction but a shift in perspective — Isaiah/Micah describe the eschatological peace after judgment; Joel describes the judgment itself. The Valley of Jehoshaphat (v. 2) means 'the LORD judges' — it is a theological concept more than a geographical location. The 'Valley of Decision' (emeq hecharuts, v. 14) contains a wordplay: charats can mean 'decision' or 'sharp/threshing' — the valley where God makes the final determination is also the threshing floor where the nations are winnowed.*

Translation Friction: *This entire chapter is Joel chapter 4 in the Hebrew Bible. We follow English versification (Joel 3) throughout while noting the Hebrew numbering. The Valley of Jehoshaphat has been traditionally identified with the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem, but the name is theological ('YHWH judges') rather than geographical. The selling of Judah's children to the Greeks (Yevanim, v. 6) may date the composition or may be a later addition. The fountain from the house of the LORD (v. 18) connects to Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Zechariah 14:8.*

Connections: *The Valley of Jehoshaphat connects to the Kidron Valley tradition and to Jehoshaphat's victory in 2 Chronicles 20. The plowshares-to-swords reversal relates to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. The fountain from the LORD's house parallels Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Zechariah 14:8 and is echoed in Revelation 22:1-2. The selling of children to distant peoples connects to the slave trade references in Amos 1:6-8. The final promise of God dwelling in Zion connects to Ezekiel 48:35 ('The LORD is there').*

¹For in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment with them concerning my people, my inheritance Israel — whom they scattered among the nations and whose land they divided. ³They cast lots for my people. They traded a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for wine, which they drank. ⁴"And what are you to me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are retaliating against me, I will swiftly, speedily turn your retaliation back on your own heads. ⁵You took my silver and my gold, and you carried off my finest treasures into your temples. ⁶You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, to remove them far from their own territory. ⁷I am about to rouse them from the place where you sold them, and I will turn your retaliation back on your own heads. ⁸I will sell your sons and daughters into the hands of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans — to a distant nation. For the LORD has spoken." ⁹Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate yourselves for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the soldiers advance and march up! ¹⁰Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, 'I am a warrior!' ¹¹Hurry and come, all you surrounding nations — gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O LORD! ¹²Let the nations rouse themselves and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe! Come, tread the grapes, for the winepress is full — the vats overflow, because their wickedness is great. ¹⁴Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the Valley of Decision. ¹⁵The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars withdraw their light. ¹⁶The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth tremble — but the LORD is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the children of Israel. ¹⁷Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be holy, and foreigners will never pass through her again. ¹⁸On that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim. ¹⁹Egypt will become a wasteland, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah — because they shed innocent blood in their land. ²⁰But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem through all generations. ²¹I will avenge their blood — blood I have not yet avenged. And the LORD dwells in Zion.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse is 4:1 in the Hebrew text. The phrase *hashiv et shevut* ('restore the fortunes/captivity') is the same phrase from Hosea 6:11, Jeremiah 29:14, and throughout the prophets. It can mean 'bring back the captives' or more broadly 'restore the fortunes.' The temporal markers 'in those days and at that time' place the events in the eschatological future — the same time frame as the Spirit outpouring of 2:28-32.
2. This verse is 4:2 in the Hebrew text. The Valley of Jehoshaphat (*emeq Yehoshaphat*) means 'Valley of YHWH-judges' — the name is a theological statement, not primarily a geographical marker. King Jehoshaphat's name means the same thing. The verb *venishpatti* ('I will enter into judgment') uses the root *sh-p-t* ('judge'), creating a wordplay with the valley's name. The three charges: scattering God's people (*pizru baggoyim*), and dividing God's land (*artsi chillequ*) — these are crimes against divine property. Israel is 'my people, my inheritance' (*ammi venachalati*); the land is 'my land' (*artsi*).
3. This verse is 4:3 in the Hebrew text. Casting lots for people treats humans as objects to be distributed — prisoners of war divided as spoils. The dehumanization is total: a child's value is measured against the price of a prostitute's services; a girl's value equals a flask of wine. The casualness of the transaction — 'which they drank' (*vayyishtu*) — adds a dimension of callous indifference. These are covenant children reduced to the price of momentary pleasure.
4. This verse is 4:4 in the Hebrew text. God challenges Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia — the coastal peoples who traded in Judean captives. The rhetorical question 'What are you to me?' (*mah attem li*) dismisses them as insignificant. The verb *gemul* ('recompense, retaliation, payment') is used three times — God warns that any action against his people will boomerang back on the perpetrators.
5. This verse is 4:5 in the Hebrew text. The 'silver and gold' and 'finest treasures' (*machamadai hattovim*) are likely the temple vessels and sacred objects plundered from the Jerusalem temple. God claims these as 'my' possessions — the plundering nations have stolen from God himself. Their temples now house artifacts from God's temple — a sacrilege of the highest order.
6. This verse is 4:6 in the Hebrew text. The *Yevanim* ('Greeks, Ionians') are the people of Greece and Asia Minor. Selling Judean captives to distant Greeks ensured they could never return — the distance made the slavery permanent. The verb *leharchiqam* ('to remove them far') reveals the intent: not merely to profit from the slave trade but to permanently sever the people from their land and God.

7. This verse is 4:7 in the Hebrew text. The verb *me'iram* ('rousing them, stirring them up') depicts God awakening the exiled captives from their places of slavery and bringing them home. The principle of *lex talionis* (measure for measure) governs the judgment: what was done to Judah's children will be done to the perpetrators' children (v. 8).
8. This verse is 4:8 in the Hebrew text. The Sabeans (*Sheva'im*) were a people of southern Arabia (modern Yemen) — the most distant trading partners in the ancient Israelite worldview. The retribution mirrors the crime: as Judah's children were sold to distant Greeks, the perpetrators' children will be sold to distant Sabeans. The oracle formula *ki YHWH dibber* ('for the LORD has spoken') seals the pronouncement with divine authority.
9. This verse is 4:9 in the Hebrew text. The ironic call to the nations to prepare for war (*qaddesh milchamah*, literally 'consecrate/sanctify war') uses sacral language — war in the ancient world was a religious act requiring ritual purification. God is summoning the nations to their own destruction — they think they are preparing for conquest, but they are walking into judgment.
10. This verse is 4:10 in the Hebrew text. The command reverses Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, where swords become plowshares and spears become pruning hooks. Those prophets describe the eschatological peace after God's judgment; Joel describes the judgment itself, when even agricultural tools must become weapons. The ironic command to the weak (*hachalash*, 'the feeble one') to declare himself a warrior mocks the nations' pretensions — even their weakness is summoned to the battle they cannot win.
11. This verse is 4:11 in the Hebrew text. The nations are summoned to gather, but the prayer embedded in the verse reveals the true dynamic: *hanchat YHWH gibborekha* ('Bring down, LORD, your warriors'). God's warriors — angelic or divine forces — will descend to meet the gathered nations. The armies of the world assemble for judgment, not for victory.
12. This verse is 4:12 in the Hebrew text. The verb *eshev* ('I will sit') is the posture of a judge — God takes his seat on the judicial bench. The Valley of Jehoshaphat is thus a cosmic courtroom where all nations are brought before the divine judge. The phrase *kol haggoyim missaviv* ('all the surrounding nations') makes the judgment universal — no nation is excluded.
13. This verse is 4:13 in the Hebrew text. The harvest and winepress imagery depicts divine judgment as a reaping — the nations' accumulated wickedness has reached full maturity and is ready for harvest. The command to 'swing the sickle' (*shilchu maggal*) and 'tread' (*riddu*) are instructions to God's agents of judgment. The overflowing vats recall 2:24 where vats overflow with blessing — here they overflow with the 'wine' of judgment. Jesus echoes this imagery in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:39) and Revelation uses it extensively (14:14-20, 19:15).
14. This verse is 4:14 in the Hebrew text. The repeated *hamonim hamonim* ('multitudes, multitudes') creates an auditory image of vast, uncountable throngs. The *emeq hecharuts* ('Valley of Decision/Threshing') contains a wordplay: *charats* means both 'to decide, determine' and 'to cut, thresh.' The valley is where God makes his final decision about the nations, and it is also the threshing floor where they are cut down. The repetition of the Day of the LORD frames the scene — this is the climactic moment toward which the entire book has been building.
15. This verse is 4:15 in the Hebrew text. The cosmic signs repeat 2:10 almost verbatim, creating a literary bracket around the Day of the LORD theme. The darkening of heavenly bodies signals the disruption of the created order as God intervenes in judgment — creation itself responds to the divine action.
16. This verse is 4:16 in the Hebrew text. The verb *yish'ag* ('roars') is the lion's roar — God as the Lion of Zion (cf. Amos 1:2, which uses nearly identical language). The trembling of heaven and earth (*ra'ashu shamayim va'arets*) echoes 2:10. The 'but' (*vaYHWH*) creates the crucial contrast: the same God who makes the cosmos tremble is a *machaseh* ('refuge, shelter') and *ma'oz* ('stronghold, fortress') for his people. The Day of the LORD is both judgment for the nations and protection for Israel.
17. This verse is 4:17 in the Hebrew text. The knowledge formula *vida'tem ki ani YHWH* ('you will know that I am the LORD') echoes 2:27 and is characteristic of Ezekiel (cf. Ezekiel 6:7, 7:4, etc.). God's dwelling in Zion (*shokhen beTsiyyon*) fulfills the covenant presence promise — the divine *Shekhinah* inhabits its chosen mountain. Jerusalem becomes *qodesh* ('holy, set apart') — no longer violated by foreign armies. The promise that *zarim* ('foreigners, strangers') will never again pass through her envisions permanent security and sanctity.
18. This verse is 4:18 in the Hebrew text. The fountain from the temple parallels Ezekiel 47:1-12 (a river flowing from the temple that brings life wherever it goes) and Zechariah 14:8 (living waters flowing from Jerusalem). In Revelation 22:1-2, the river of the water of life flows from God's throne. The Valley of Shittim (*nachal haShittim*) is the acacia wadi — acacia trees grow in the driest desert environments, so watering this valley means even the most inhospitable terrain receives life. The verse moves from agricultural restoration to cosmic renewal.
19. This verse is 4:19 in the Hebrew text. Egypt and Edom represent the two traditional enemies of Israel — Egypt the former enslaver, Edom the hostile brother-nation (descended from Esau). Their desolation (*shemamah*) mirrors the desolation the locusts brought upon Judah in chapter 1, but this desolation is permanent. The charge — violence (*chamas*) against Judah and shedding innocent blood (*dam naqi*) — specifies the crime that brings the judgment.
20. This verse is 4:20 in the Hebrew text. The contrast with Egypt and Edom's desolation (v. 19) is absolute: they become wasteland; Judah endures forever (*le'olam*) and Jerusalem through all generations (*ledor vador*). The verb *teshev* ('will dwell, be inhabited') promises permanent settlement — the land will never again be emptied of its people. The phrase *ledor vador* ('from generation to generation') extends the promise into indefinite futurity.
21. This verse is 4:21 in the Hebrew text, the final verse of both the chapter and the book. The verb *niqqeti* ('I will cleanse/avenge') can mean either 'cleanse' (declaring innocent) or 'avenge' (holding accountable). The phrase 'blood I have not yet avenged' (*lo niqqeti*) means there remains innocent blood that has gone unpunished — God will settle all accounts. The book's final four words — *vaYHWH shokhen beTsiyyon* ('and the LORD dwells in

Zion') — are the theological conclusion of everything Joel has to say. Despite locust plagues, cosmic upheaval, and the judgment of nations, the ultimate reality is this: God is present. He dwells among his people. The book that began with devastation ends with divine habitation.