

Joel

1 ¹ The Lord sent a message through Joel, son of Pethuel.
² Listen to this, elders; pay attention, everyone who lives in the land. Has anything ever happened like this before in your experience, or that of your forefathers? ³ Tell your children about it, and have your children tell it to their children, and their children tell the next generation.

⁴ What the cutting locusts left, the swarming locusts have eaten; what the swarming locusts left, the hopping locusts have eaten; what the hopping locusts left, the destroying locusts have eaten.^a

⁵ Wake up, you drunks, and weep! Howl you wine-drinkers, because the new wine has been suddenly taken away from your mouth! ⁶ A nation has invaded my land: powerful and too many to count. Their teeth are like lion's teeth, their fangs like those of a lioness. ⁷ It has ruined my grapevines and destroyed my fig trees, stripping them completely and reducing them to stumps, white and bare. ⁸ Mourn like a bride dressed in sackcloth, mourning the death of her husband-to-be.^b ⁹ Grain and wine offerings have stopped in the Temple.^c The priests who minister before the Lord are in mourning. ¹⁰ The fields are devastated, the earth mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, the olive oil fails.

¹¹ Be ashamed, farmers, and wail in sorrow, keepers of vineyards, over the wheat and the barley, for the crops from the fields are ruined. ¹² The vines are shriveled, the fig trees are withered; the pomegranate, the palm, and the apricot^d trees—all the fruit trees have dried up, and at the same time the people's happiness has also dried up.

^a**1:4.** Whether these terms for locusts refer to different species or different stages of the locust's life-cycle is uncertain.

^b**1:8.** The image is of a woman betrothed to a man who dies before the marriage is consummated.

^c**1:9.** Literally, "house of the Lord."

^d**1:12.** This fruit is more likely than apple as is usually translated.

¹³ Dress in sackcloth,^e you priests, and mourn; weep, you who minister before the altar! Go and spend the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the grain and wine offerings have stopped in the Temple. ¹⁴ Proclaim a fast; call a sacred assembly. Have the elders and all people of the land gather in the Temple, and cry out to your God, to the Lord. ¹⁵ What a terrible day! For the day of the Lord is near, it will come as destruction from the Almighty. ¹⁶ Haven't we seen our food taken away from us, right before our eyes? There is no joy and happiness in God's Temple. ¹⁷ Seeds planted in the ground shrivel up; the storehouses are empty, the barns are torn down because the grain has dried up.^f ¹⁸ The farm animals moan with hunger. The herds of cattle wander everywhere because they can't find grass to eat; the flocks of sheep are suffering. ¹⁹ To you, Lord, I cry out!^g For fire has destroyed the pastures in the wilderness; flames have burned up all the orchards. ²⁰ Even the wild animals long for you because the streams have dried up, and fire has destroyed the pastures in the wilderness.

2 ¹ Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all who live in the land tremble for the day of the Lord^h is coming—it's definitely near! ² It's a gloomy day of darkness, a day of thick clouds and heavy shadows. Like the dawn spreading over the mountains, an army appears,ⁱ so large and powerful that there has never ever been anything like it before, nor will there ever be anything like it again. ³ Fire blazes in front of them, behind them flames are burning. In front of them the land looks like the Garden of Eden, behind them is a desert of total desolation: not a single survivor remains. ⁴ They have the appearance of horses; they charge like cavalry. ⁵ Listen to the sound: they are like rumbling chariots leaping over the mountain tops, they are like crackling flames burning stubble, they are like a mighty army marching in formation

^e1:13. The traditional sign of mourning.

^f1:17. The Hebrew in this verse is obscure. The Greek Septuagint for the first part of the verse reads “the heifers leap at their mangers.”

^g1:19. Joel makes it clear he is calling on Yahweh, while many of his fellow-countrymen would be calling on Baal, the fertility god, for help.

^h2:1. The day of the Lord is the time of God's judgment.

ⁱ2:2. While the initial focus in Joel is on a devastating plague of locusts, what follows in chapter 2 morphs into a picture of an invading human army.

into battle. ⁶ Terror seizes all those in their path; all the people's faces grow pale. ⁷ They attack like mighty warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march as one, never breaking ranks. ⁸ They do not jostle one another, they stay on track; and even if some are cut down, they are not stopped. ⁹ They rush to and fro in the city; they run along the walls;^j they climb into houses, entering through the windows like thieves.

¹⁰ The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, the stars stop shining. ¹¹ The Lord shouts his commands at the head of his army. His camp his immense, and those who carry out his orders are powerful. The day of the Lord is totally terrifying—who can stand it?

¹² “Yet even now,” says the Lord, “Come back to me while there is still time. Come to me with all your heart, with fasting and prayer. ¹³ Repent in your minds, and not by tearing your clothes.”^k Come back to the Lord your God for he is gracious and kind. He is slow to get angry and full of faithful love, and changes his mind about sending punishment. ¹⁴ Who knows? Maybe he will change his mind, leaving behind a blessing so that you will be able to make grain and wine offerings to the Lord your God.

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast; call a solemn assembly. ¹⁶ Gather the people together: the elders, the children, even the babies. Let the bridegroom leave his room; let the bride leave her room. ¹⁷ Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar of the Temple.^l Let them say, “Lord, please take pity on your people, and do not let your inheritance be disgraced, ruled over by foreign nations, so that the people of these nations could ask, ‘Where is their God?’”

¹⁸ Now the Lord is very protective^m of his land and takes pity on his people. ¹⁹ The Lord will reply, saying to his people, “Look! I am sending you grain and new wine and olive oil, and you will be satisfied. You will no longer be a disgrace among the foreign nations.

²⁰ I will remove from you the army from the north; I will drive them into the desolate wilderness—the front into the eastern sea, and

^j2:9. The fact that they can do this shows that the city's defenders are dead.

^k2:13. Tearing one's clothes was a sign of intense emotion, grief, and repentance.

^l2:17. “Of the Temple”: implied.

^m2:18. Or “jealous.”

the rear into the western sea. The stench of the dead armyⁿ will rise up—a real stink—for it has done terrible things.”

²¹ Don't be afraid, people of the land! Be happy and celebrate, for the Lord has done incredible things! ²² Don't be afraid, wild animals! For the pastures of the wilderness are turning green. The trees are fruiting again—the fig trees and the grapevines are producing a good crop.

²³ People of Jerusalem! Celebrate and be happy in the Lord your God because he has given you rain to show his goodness. As before he sends the autumn and the spring rains. ²⁴ The threshing floors will be full of grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and olive oil. ²⁵ “I will give back to you what you lost over the years to the swarming, hopping, destroying, and cutting locusts, this great army that I sent against you. ²⁶ You will have plenty to eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God who has done miracles for you. My people will never again be ashamed. ²⁷ You will know that I am in the midst of my people Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other. My people will never again be ashamed.

²⁸ After this I will pour out my spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will be my prophets, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. ²⁹ In those days I will also pour out my spirit on male slaves and female slaves. ³⁰ I will place wonders in the heavens and on earth: blood, and fire, and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun will turn dark, and the moon will turn red like blood at the coming of the great and fearful day of the Lord.” ³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, rescued from Mount Zion and Jerusalem, as the Lord has said—these are among the survivors the Lord has called.

3 ¹ At that time when this happens, when I bring back the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather together all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat^o and I will judge them there over my people Israel, my inheritance, whom they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land. ³ They cast lots for my

ⁿ2:20. “Of the dead army”: implied.

^o3:2. Meaning “the Lord judges.”

people; they traded boys in payment for prostitutes and girls to buy wine to drink.^P

⁴ Also, what have you got to do with me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you trying to get back at me? If you are trying to pay me back, I will quickly pay you back what you deserve for what you've done. ⁵ You stole my silver and my gold and my best treasures, and you put them in your temples. ⁶ You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks so they could be sent far away from their land. ⁷ But watch out! I will get them moving from the places you sold them to, and bring them back, and I will pay you back what you deserve for what you've done. ⁸ I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabaeans, a distant nation. I the Lord have spoken.

⁹ Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war!^Q Call up the mighty warriors! Let all the soldiers get ready and advance! ¹⁰ Hammer your plough blades and turn them into swords. Turn your pruning hooks into spears. Even the weak should say ‘I am a strong fighter!’ ¹¹ Hurry up and come, all nations from everywhere, and gather there.^f Bring down your warriors, Lord! ¹² Let the nations get ready, let them come to the valley of Jehoshaphat for there I will sit in judgment on all the nations.

¹³ Start swinging the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come and tread the grapes for the winepress is full and the vats are overflowing because their wickedness has become so great. ¹⁴ Huge mobs are in the valley of the Lord's verdict.^s For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of his verdict. ¹⁵ The sun and moon will become dark, and the stars will stop shining. ¹⁶ The Lord will roar from Zion, shouting in a loud voice from Jerusalem, shaking the heavens and the earth. But the Lord will shelter his people, protecting the people of Israel.

P3:3. The point being made here is the casual way the victims were treated, and how little they were valued: being traded to buy a prostitute's services or some wine to drink.

Q3:9. Literally, “Sanctify a battle.” Joel is presumably being ironic here. The same word is used in 1:14 for calling a sacred assembly.

f3:11. In the valley of Jehoshaphat, 3:2.

s3:14. The usual translation “in the valley of decision” suggests that these “multitudes” still are making their decision. However, this decision is that of God, and is the execution of that decision—in other words the verdict or sentence.

¹⁷ Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain, and Jerusalem will be a holy place forever, and no foreigners will ever march through her again.^t

¹⁸ At that time new wine will pour down the mountains, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the riverbeds of Judah will run with water. A spring will flow out of the Temple and will water the valley of Shittim.^u ¹⁹ But Egypt will become desolate, and Edom a desert wasteland, because of the violence they did against Judah, for in their land they shed innocent blood. ²⁰ Judah will be lived in forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. ²¹ Will I pardon and leave unpunished the shedding of innocent blood? The Lord lives in Zion!”

^t3:17. Referring to conquest by other nations.

^u3:18. Shittim means “acacia trees,” usually found in arid areas.