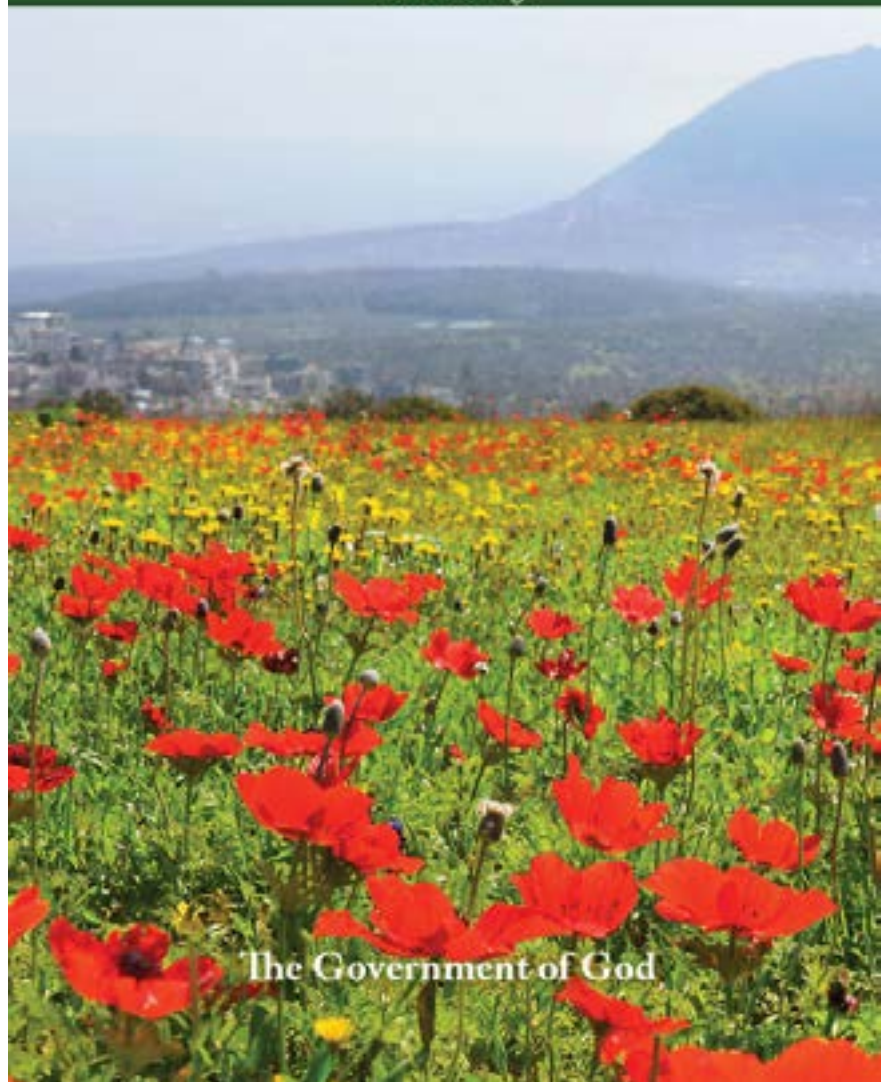


# Joel Explained & Applied 29

Ger de Koning



The Government of God



# **The Book of Joel**



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Ger de Koning

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## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

### **New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of general format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS [ ]** are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS < >** are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS \*** are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

# The book of Joel

## **Introduction**

### **Preface**

Someone who is somewhat familiar with the Bible, knows that Joel is one of the Bible writers. It is also known then that he belongs to the twelve minor prophets whose books we can find at the end of the Old Testament. Despite that, it is still often difficult to find his book. Often it is easier to name the eleven players of your favorite football club, even with the place they occupy in the team, than to recall the names of the twelve minor prophets in the right order.

After all, we have only nine pages of Joel in the Bible. Out of a total of 1,268 pages my NASB counts, that is not much. No wonder you can easily overlook Joel if you do not know the books of the Bible by heart.

Yet the message that Joel passes on is fully worth our attention, which naturally applies to every Bible book. His book contains seventy-three verses. That is not much and it gives the impression that the content is limited. But we will see how rich the content is of what Joel on behalf of the LORD passes on to His people. We will also see how, after a description of all the misery he experiences in his days, he shows a magnificent view of the glorious future awaiting Israel.

Ger de Koning

Middelburg, May 2002 / revised March 2018 / translated September 2020

### **Who was Joel?**

Of Joel only his name and the name of his father are known. Joel got a name from his parents that means 'Yahweh is God'. In the NASB the name *Yahweh* is translated with 'LORD', written in capitals. In Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was originally written for the most part, it says 'JHWH' for this Name of God.

If his parents have consciously given him that name, we may be sure he grew up in a family that feared the LORD. The meaning of the name of his

father Pethuel is not certain. According to some it means 'young man of God' or 'the persuaded by God'; according to others he means 'sincerity of God' or 'simplicity of God'.

What we also know about Joel is that the word of the LORD comes to him with the purpose of speaking it to the people. That says something about his relationship with God and his relationship with the people. God does not just make His thoughts known to any member of His people. God says what concerns Him to people who live with Him and for Him. The meaning of the name Joel not only shows the faith of his parents, but also that Joel himself lives by the meaning of his name. He is a God-fearing loner amidst an apostate people.

### **The calling of Joel**

We do not know much about his calling either. A standard procedure, which you could consult to see how to act as a prophet, does not exist. But if we can rely on the meaning of his name and assume on that basis that he lives in fellowship with God, we can assume that at some point the Spirit of God has come over Joel.

The reason for his performance is to be found in the circumstances. He is born in need, called by the LORD. Suddenly he enters the public domain, but only after God has prepared him for his task. He shares in the grief of God about His people because they have become unfaithful to Him. With compassion he announces, on behalf of God, the judgment, but without rejoicing that God will judge His unfaithful people.

He does not throw the reproach at them: 'Had you only listened to God', but he calls for a return to the LORD. The impending judgment is the reason for him to bring the Word of God to the people at that moment, and also to call as intercessor to the LORD (Joel 1:19). With him is a burning love present for the LORD and also for the people of which he is a part.

### **Joel and Elijah**

With Joel we find some things that remind us of Elijah. First of all, there is the meaning of his name. The name Elijah contains the same names of God as in Joel, to which the personal 'my' has been added. Only the order is different. Elijah means 'my God is *Yahweh*', which is the opposite of Joel.

Secondly, we see the connection between the name and the message that both bring. The name Joel, 'Yahweh is God', fits the message the LORD entrusts him with. Joel must by his preaching bring the people back to the acknowledgment that it is really true that the LORD is God. God Himself also points out that His people will know that "I, the LORD, am your God" (Joel 2:27; 3:17). Elijah, through his performance on Carmel, brings the people to the confession: "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God" (1Kgs 18:39).

A third similarity between the two prophets is the reason for their performance. The occasion of Joel's preaching is a natural disaster. This is also the case with what Elijah does at Carmel, because the reason is a drought. The testimony of Elijah on that mountain, a testimony for the Name of the LORD, puts an end to three and a half years of drought. Elijah asked God for this drought (Jam 5:17a), so that the people may return to God through it.

In addition to the similarities in the meaning of their name, their message and the reason for their performance, there is a fourth similarity between these prophets. In both cases 'the day of the LORD', the *yom JHWH*, plays a role. In Joel there are five references to this day. In Malachi Elijah is also mentioned in connection with the day of the LORD (Mal 4:5). What that day means, we will see in the continuation of our study of this prophet.

### **The occasion of his preaching**

As said before, the occasion of Joel's preaching is a natural disaster. In fact, there are two: locusts and drought. In these disasters, experienced as plagues, the voice of God must be heard. He speaks to His people to lead them to return to Him (2Chr 7:15; 1Kgs 8:37). The purpose of Joel's appearance is that the people will understand the message of God through these disasters and will convert to Him.

We will also see the relationship Joel makes between the natural disasters of his days – the plagues of locusts and drought – and the future day of the LORD. By pointing out the disasters as a harbinger of or a reference to the coming day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls upon his contemporaries not only to see the "signs of the times", but also to take them to heart. As a

preacher of the day of the LORD, Joel is a prophet who confronts his hearers with the approaching judgment.

In a general sense, this also applies to us Christians. We too must confront people with this: “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2Cor 5:11). Joel thus insists – and we too must do so – on a drastic decision: that of conversion to God.

### **Repent of what?**

We do not hear from Joel’s mouth which sins Israel should repent of. Joel does not mention serving idols or committing and tolerating social injustice. The only sin he speaks of is drunkenness (Joel 1:5). If we include the call made in Joel 2 (Joel 2:12), we can say that the people live for their own pleasure. Judah has become a people who live for entertainment.

To what abuse of wine leads, we also hear from the mouths of other prophets. Hosea points out that excessive use of wine take away the understanding of the heart (Hos 4:11). Amos paints how the use of wine is an expression of a luxurious and decadent way of life (Amos 6:6). And when we listen to Isaiah, we hear how he describes the use of wine as a means that makes blind for “the deeds of the LORD” and “the work of His hands” (Isa 5:11-12).

It is Joel’s task to awake the people and that they focus again upon “the deeds of the LORD” which are visible in the disasters. Their heart is not fully devoted to the LORD. From a people delivered by Him from the power of the enemy, He might expect otherwise. He delivered them so that they would be His people, a people who serve Him with all that is in them and with all that they possess. If the people do not respond, He will leave no stone unturned to win them back for Himself. With that, He also has their happiness and well-being in mind. The human being who does not live completely for Him cannot be happy.

### **Difference with Hosea**

Unlike Hosea, who addresses the ten-tribal realm – although he also sometimes mentions Judah – Joel addresses only Judah and especially the Jews in Jerusalem. He often refers to Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 2:32; 3:1,17,18,20), to their inhabitants (Joel 3:6,8,19), to Zion (Joel 2:1,15; 3:17,21)



and her children (Joel 2:23; 3:6,8,20). He also mentions several times the temple or temple service with which he is very familiar (Joel 1:9,13,14,16; 2:14,17; 3:18).

The difference with Hosea is also expressed in the way of preaching. Hosea expresses himself in short and powerful statements, with sudden twists and many different actions. Joel is more even in his preaching; he has a rounded topic.

The language and style of this prophet show a strong ability to empathize with the condition of people suffering from the plagues of locusts and drought. His style is clear and fluent, linguistically beautiful.

### **The prophecy**

Joel announces the judgment of “the day of the LORD”. He mentions this day five times in his prophecy; therefore he could also be called “the prophet of the day of the LORD”. He also announces the final liberation of Judah and Jerusalem and Israel.

The performance of a prophet usually presupposes that the people of God, following their unfaithfulness to Him, have fallen into a state of decay. Prophecy is then God’s special intervention. In prophecy He shows how man has specifically sinned and why his judgment must come. But in prophecy there is also the testimony of a restoration that will take place by God’s grace and whereby there will be blessing for His people.

Joel brings God’s message to the people of Judah as a sharp observer of the time in which he lives. The words in which he does this provide many prophetic building blocks. This means that in his short prophecy there is a lot present through which we can gain insight into the events of the end times.

### **Subject of his preaching**

The theme around which his preaching moves is the invasion of the Assyrians. Joel 1 describes the invasion of locusts and the devastation that follows. This invasion and destruction are the announcement of that even more terrible invasion of the Assyrians and the destruction they will cause. This is described in Joel 2 (Joel 2:1-11). The hand of the LORD can be seen, both in the plague of locusts and in the invasion of the Assyrians.

Both invasions and the subsequent destruction are connected by Joel with the coming day of the LORD as a day when the judgment comes over His apostate people. But in the sequel of Joel 2 and in Joel 3 we see how this judgment also comes over the Assyrians and all peoples who have behaved hostile towards Israel.

Historically, we must place the invasion of the Assyrians in the time of King Hezekiah (2Kings 18-19). Prophetically it concerns the king of the north, who in the future will think he can destroy Israel, but who himself will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus (Dan 11:40-45).

### **When did Joel prophesy?**

Joel is one of the prophets about whom opinions regarding the dating are widely different. Joel does not mention any name or other event that has taken place that could give an indication about the time in which he prophesies.

Most likely, Joel prophesied in the days of Uzziah (792-740 BC). He then is a contemporary of Hosea and Amos, who both prophesied in the days of Uzziah (Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1). Joel would not have been given his place in the Old Testament canon between Hosea and Amos for nothing.

If Amos refers to the same plague (Amos 4:9) as Joel does in his first chapter, that would be an extra indication that Joel and Amos were contemporaries. In the time of Uzziah, Israel and Judah experience a time of great prosperity. A plague of locusts results in the destruction of all that prosperity in a short period of time.

Yet God has found it better not to make known the time in which he prophesied. This puts even more emphasis on the timelessness of his message. We will see that his prophecy is also very important for the time in which we live.

### **Purpose of the locust plague**

An unprecedented plague of locusts has struck Judah, destroying the entire harvest. This has disrupted the entire economy of the country. But not only that; worst of all is that because of this agricultural loss it is no longer possible to bring the grain offering and the drink offering into the temple (Joel 1:13). In these catastrophic circumstances Joel recognizes God's judg-

ment on Judah. Although God has blessed Judah abundantly in the days of Uzziah, the people have taken His blessing for granted.

After Damascus was destroyed by Assyria in 802 BC, Uzziah comes to power. He builds a powerful army and promotes trade relations. Jerobeam II is in power in the north. He conquered several areas that had previously fallen into Syria's hands. These circumstances are the reason why a golden period is now dawning for Judah and Israel, which can only be compared to the period of King Solomon.

Economically it is going well, but the luxury and excess have weakened Judah and Israel inwardly. There is no question of any gratitude to the LORD. Their faith has become a hollow form, the performing of purely religious acts. Their life is aimed at satisfying their own needs. Guided by God's Spirit, Joel tells the people that the plague of locusts is a warning for a greater judgment that arises. This can only be avoided if they repent and return to full fellowship with God.

Like most other prophets, we can also assume that Joel uses an actual event as the occasion for his prophecy. He does this to awaken the people's conscience at the time of the event. He does it even more to use that event as a picture of even more dramatic events that will take place in the last days, to be precise: at the dawn of the day of the LORD. The Spirit of God warns of the judgment to come at a time when such disasters are affecting land and people. The people should heed this.

### **God's voice in disasters**

In natural disasters God shows His omnipotence. He has "the power over these plagues" (Rev 16:9). God does not randomly send such disasters or other catastrophes. He always has a specific goal in mind, namely that man should convert from his evil and unholy way (Rev 16:8-9).

God's actions can often not be checked out by people. It is therefore certainly not right to judge in the sense that whoever is affected by a disaster is wrong, and to whom it bypasses is good. The Lord Jesus warns of such an unchristian view (Lk 13:1-5). The Lord makes it clear that the events that are news at that time do not give the victims the right to judge, but that they contain a call to conversion to all who hear about them.

For the Netherlands we can compare this with the fireworks disaster on May 13, 2000 in Enschede and a café burnt in Volendam during the turn of the year 2000 to 2001. Nothing needs to be added to the date of September 11, 2001 and the name World Trade Center, nor to the tsunami of December 26, 2004. National and international, all those who have heard of it are shocked by these events. To this can be added the disaster that took place during a review of this comment, that with flight MH17, on July 17, 2014. And what more imaginative disasters will happen after the publication of this comment?

In Enschede, as a result of the explosion of a fireworks factory, a residential core was completely wiped out. Dozens of people died; others suffered permanent physical and/or mental damage. In a Volendam café, on New Year's Eve a sudden sea of flames caused death and destruction and irreparable physical and mental harm to partygoers, mostly young people. In New York thousands of people died. More than two hundred thousand people died in the tsunami. Two hundred and ninety-eight people died in the disaster that struck flight MH17.

The idea that all those people somehow 'deserve' the disaster that hit them is reprehensible. What is good, however, is that everyone who hears about it realizes how relative life is. What you have not thought possible, can suddenly enter your life. The consequences are dramatic. The question everyone should ask themselves is: 'If a disaster strikes *me*, how do *I* stand before God?' God-fearing people suffer from disasters and accidents just as much as the wicked suffer, just as the wicked benefit from God's goodness on earth.

### **Division of the Book of Joel**

After these introductory remarks we are ready for a division of this Bible book. The book can be divided into seven parts.

1. Locust plague, drought and call for penance (Joel 1:1-20)
2. Invasion of the Assyrians (Joel 2:1-11)
3. Renewed call to repentance and penance (Joel 2:12-17)
4. The LORD's answer to penance (Joel 2:18-27)
5. Pouring out of the Spirit in the end times (Joel 2:28-32)

6. Judgment over the enemies of Israel (Joel 3:1-16)

7. Blessing for Israel (Joel 3:17-21)

Van Leeuwen gives an interesting division in his commentary *De Prediking van het Oude Testament (The Preaching of the Old Testament)*. This is almost entirely in line with the division just given. The interesting thing is the structure that Van Leeuwen sees, the so-called concentric structure, and the explanation of it.

A The land destroyed by locusts and drought (Joel 1:4-20)

...B The advancing army on the day of the LORD (Joel 2:1-11)

.....C Call for conversion (Joel 2:12-14)

.....D All called together for penance (Joel 2:15-17)

.....C Hearing by the LORD, blessing and salvation (Joel 2:18-32)

...B The advancing nations and the day of the LORD (Joel 3:1-17)

A The land fertile and safe (Joel 3:18-21)

Explanation: Here we see that calling together to a day of fasting and prayer is at the center (D). Furthermore we see that the letters C, B and A below the center are the counterparts of those letters above the center. With (D) the turn from judgment to salvation for God's people enters. So the construction is: first there is judgment for God's people through plagues and enemies (A - C), but through repentance and penance (D) there is blessing for God's people and judgment over the enemies (C - A).

# Joel 1

## **Introduction**

Jerusalem and Judah are called to take to heart the locust plague that has struck the land (verses 2-4).

1. The prophet first calls upon the drunkards to lament this calamity (verses 5-7).
2. Then he calls on all those directly affected by the plague, the farmers and vine dressers, to mourn (verses 8-12).
3. Finally, he makes the same call to the priests, to whom he also commands to summon the people to humble themselves before the LORD (verses 13-18).

In verses 19-20 the prophet himself sets the example and calls to the LORD.

## **Joel 1:1 | The Word of the LORD to Joel**

| *1 The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:*

The book of Joel contains no word of men, but “the word of the LORD”. This is how also the books of Hosea, Jonah, Micah and Zephaniah begin. The book should be read as a Divine revelation. It is the word that comes from God, He has spoken it and it must be passed on by His command.

The word that comes from God is more than just that God speaks. Speaking of God is more than just saying words. Speaking of God is an act, an act that works something. In the speaking of God is strength, His Word does what pleases Him and never returns empty (Isa 55:10-11). Joel is one of the men whom Peter refers to when he writes: “For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2Pet 1:21).

As with Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi, there is no mention of the time or place of origin of the prophet. See also the introduction under ‘Who was Joel?’ and ‘When did Joel live?’

**Joel 1:2 | Back in the Past**

*2 Hear this, O elders,  
And listen, all inhabitants of the land.  
Has [anything like] this happened in your days  
Or in your fathers' days?*

With the calls “hear this” and “and listen” Joel draws attention to his message. The “elders” are the most responsible ones. They are the leaders of the people, men who have become wise through a long life experience. Their memory also goes furthest back. They must understand that the disaster that has struck them is not an accidental coincidence. Nor may they give any scientific explanations for it, as if a combination of physical factors has caused the large number of locusts to settle in Judah at precisely this moment in time. It is precisely these old, wise men who must realize that this disaster is a warning from God.

But also the ‘ordinary’ people are told that in what has happened they have to acknowledge the actions of God. If they go back in memory and even further in history, they will have to admit that never before has anything like this happened in their country. The plague that now afflicts them is greater than any previous plague that has afflicted them. Why? Because they are even greater sinners than their fathers.

Every natural disaster or other kind of disaster, for example sickness or war, is a happening through which God wants to speak to people’s conscience. If men do not obey His Word, He will speak by more powerful means. The well-known writer C.S. Lewis remarked somewhere: ‘God whispers through His Word, He roars through disaster.’ After an address entitled ‘God is there and He speaks’, a woman came to me and said: ‘I am thankful that God has roared against me because I did not listen to His Word.’

Even today God still speaks to a people and to the individual through events. The goal is to listen to Him. The same was true for the man who told his little son who believed in God that God should just tap him on his shoulder if He existed. Some time later he toppled over with his car. He was miraculously preserved. Only his shoulder was damaged. His son then said: ‘Daddy, wasn’t that the tapping of God on your shoulder?’ The

man saw that God had spoken to him. He converted to God and came to faith in the Lord Jesus.

### Joel 1:3 | The Lesson for the Future

*3 Tell your sons about it,  
And [let] your sons [tell] their sons,  
And their sons the next generation.*

Not only do we have to dig in the past, we also have to think about the future. Future generations must not forget what God has done to them. The fathers must tell their children what judgment struck them, how God had to punish them. They must not conceal this, they must be honest with it. Their children have to pass it on again. In the same way, the wonders that God did in liberating His people from Egypt were passed on to the next generations (Jdg 6:13a).

This transmission of God's chastisement should serve as a warning and not as a fun story to entertain the audience. We are capable of telling stories from the past without going into what we should learn from them. God does not want 'teaching', His dealings with a deviant people, to be handled in that way. He wants His performance to be passed on, so that the children will not fall into the same evil and they will learn to fear the LORD.

Telling 'about' it is more than just telling 'it'. Tell 'it' can mean that only the mere fact, the event itself, is passed on. But God wants more to be passed on. He also wants the cause of the plague and its consequences to be mentioned and the next generation to learn the right lessons from it. It is not just a question of telling what happened, but of pointing out how God acted.

The passing on of the historical lessons continues until the fourth generation. With this Joel emphasizes that what happened must be passed on to all generations (cf. Pro 4:1-4). In this context, it is worth looking at Psalm 78. That psalm is a teaching poem by Asaph, in which he, like Joel, teaches the lesson of history to the people. Asaph also starts with the call to hear and then he urges to pass on the heard to the next generation:



“A Maskil of Asaph.

Listen, O my people, to my instruction;

Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings of old,

Which we have heard and known,

And our fathers have told us.

We will not conceal them from their children,

But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,

And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done” (Psa 78:1-4).

In his teaching, Asaph also recalls the locusts in Egypt, which they used there: “He gave also their crops to the grasshopper And the product of their labor to the locust” (Psa 78:46). It is of great significance to tell our children and grandchildren happenings of a shorter or longer past, which shows the actions of God in our lives or those of others. With this we give our children a good tool in their hands so that they get to know the will of God better.

It is to be feared that quite a few parents can hardly tell their children anything about what the Lord has done in their lives because they hardly ever live with Him. Busy, busy, busy with all kinds of things, but no time to talk to the children about God’s guidance in their lives.

There is also little knowledge of what God has done in the lives of other committed Christians. It is difficult for us to encourage our children to read a good book about experiences men and women have had with the Lord if we are not interested in it ourselves. Moses calls upon Israel, just before the people enter the promised land, to speak with their children about the deeds and words of the LORD (Deu 4:9; 6:6-7,20-25).

### **Joel 1:4 | The Locusts**

*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.*

The starting point for Joel's prophecy is a plague of locusts that has recently plagued the country. That this plague is a punishment from God will be clear to those who have an ear to hear. This was also the case when the LORD sent this plague in Egypt over the oppressors of his people (Exo 10:12-15; Psa 78:46; 105:34). Just like the plague in Egypt, the plague in the days of Joel is unprecedented.

If both Egypt and Israel are hit by an unparalleled plague of locusts, it can only mean that Israel has become spiritually equal to Egypt (cf. Rev 11:8). God also warns His people several times that they will be punished with the plagues and diseases of Egypt when they are disobedient (Deu 28:38,42,60). For both Egypt and Israel, this plague is a chastisement from God to incite penance and prayer (cf. Amos 4:9; 1Kgs 8:37-40).

A single locust is insignificant, does not mean anything, makes no impression at all, can be stepped on just like that. The Israelites in their unbelief feel so opposed to the giants in Canaan (Num 13:33). But in large numbers they are overwhelming and devastating (Jdg 6:5; 7:12). The weaker the instrument is, the clearer it becomes by using such an instrument and what it does, that God stands behind it and that He uses it.

The four names with which Joel mentions the locusts seem to indicate that they are different types of locusts, each with its own name that have successively plagued the country.

1. The name of the first, "gnawing locust" (or 'gnawer') is in Hebrew *gazam*, this is a young, wingless locust;
2. the second, "swarming locust" (or 'multiplier') is called *arbèh*, this is the fully developed, winged locust (this is also the name of the locust that God once used as a plague over Egypt);
3. the third, called "creeping locust" (or 'jumper'), is called *yélek* and is a different type of locust;
4. the fourth, "stripping locust" (or 'exterminator') is called *chasil* and is yet another species.

The Bible mentions nine kinds of locusts, of which the four that Joel mentions are the most dangerous and harmful.

Because a swarm of locusts eats everything and leaves nothing, “left” will mean “what has sprouted again” after all had been eaten. This is also in line with the idea that the country was successively visited by four species of locusts.

The number four is found in two other Scriptures which speak of punishments from God over the people (Jer 15:3; Eze 14:21). Four is the number of the earth. The earth has four wind directions (cf. Dan 7:2; Rev 7:1; 20:8). There are also four seasons that determine life on earth. The number four stands for something all-encompassing. Mentioning the names of four locusts indicates that it is a judgment that has spread across Judah, in all directions.

For a harvest-dependent people, a plague like that of locusts is a life-threatening disaster. The harvest feasts that are held each time indicate the importance of the harvest. Suddenly there is no more harvest to collect. Everything disappears in one go. There is no insurance covering the damage. All livelihoods have disappeared. The country is on the edge of the abyss. Therefore the message of Joel must be heard. Or are the people so far from God that they cannot be reached?

Among the people of God in our time, ‘locusts’ have systematically been busy robbing God’s people of their food. In God’s Word, locusts are associated with demonic powers (Rev 9:3). These powers are infiltrating Christianity more and more. They manipulate Christians who do not place themselves under the authority of the Word of God, but believe that they can serve God in their own way.

People who pretend to be leaders of God’s people tell the people that you should not take the Bible seriously. Or they tell you that the Bible is only true if you experience what it says. As if God’s truth depends on a person’s feelings about it, and not merely on the fact that God has spoken and that it is therefore only true, no matter how contrary that may sometimes be to certain human feelings. In that situation, prophets are needed to remind us of what we have lost and to point out the rich content and nutritional value of the Word of God.

## Joel 1:5 | Drunkards

*5 Awake, drunkards, and weep;  
And wail, all you wine drinkers,  
Because of the sweet wine  
That is cut off from your mouth.*

After having called upon the elders and all other inhabitants of the country to listen to him, Joel now speaks especially to the drunkards. Drunkards are people who abuse God's blessings. That he must urge them to wake up, despite the fact that they have nothing left to drink, shows how blind and insensitive they are to the expressions of God's discontent. They are still sleeping off their intoxication, while God speaks so seriously. Drunkards are apparently present in large numbers because they can be addressed as a group. Many Judeans still live on in a carefree daze.

Here, the carefree joy is especially denounced. Those who are not awakened by God's voice in His Word shall be awakened by His discipline. Those who do not come to a standstill by distant judgments, will experience them in the flesh. It is righteous that God takes away their luxury and excess. The more a person makes his happiness dependent on what satisfies him and what gives satisfaction to his feelings, the harder he experiences the judgment when it hits him in these things. Suddenly they will discover that all these blessings have not given real satisfaction, because they have been enjoyed apart from God to satisfy their own desires. They will cry and wail. Five times it is spoken about lamentations in this chapter (verses 5,8,9,10,11).

The only people for whom this judgment is not a punishment are the Nazirites. For they drink no wine; they have voluntarily renounced it (Num 6:1-4). The Nazirite is a beautiful picture of someone who, completely voluntarily, offers himself to the Lord to live alone for Him. In so doing, he renounces things that are not wrong in themselves – it was not wrong for an Israelite to drink wine – but that do carry the danger, that full devotion to Christ is hindered.

To renounce earthly blessings means that these things are given a subordinate place. It means: renouncing the right to spend your money and good, your time and capacities according to your own idea. You surrender every-

thing to Christ so that He has authority over it. Christians who voluntarily renounce the enjoyment of earthly blessings will not grieve if they miss those blessings suddenly.

Drunkenness is the only sin mentioned in this book in connection with Israel. Therefore, it seems that this sin in particular characterizes the state of the people. Drunkenness means that we take abundantly and separately from God the things He has given to man in His creation to enjoy. Every person who professes to be in connection with God, but in reality lives apart from Him, is not able to form a sober and thoughtful judgment about the things of life. He is clouded in his thinking.

Living apart from God means that we do not involve God in the things of life. We plan without consulting Him what He thinks of it. Planning is not wrong, but it is wrong to make plans without consulting Him and then accept His decision. Once the people of God have come to live in such a way, God must use drastic methods to awaken them out of 'their intoxication'. He wants to be involved in everything His people do. He cannot allow His people to pass Him by, not to consult Him.

### **Joel 1:6 | Locusts Invasion**

*6 For a nation has invaded my land,  
Mighty and without number;  
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion,  
And it has the fangs of a lioness.*

Among the four smallest animals on earth, but are exceedingly wise (Pro 30:24), there is also the locust: "The locusts have no king, Yet all of them go out in ranks" (Pro 30:27). Locusts are 'a nation' that, although they have no king, nevertheless go with wisdom. This wisdom comes from God; He governs this people. Locusts are powerful because they are countless. Moreover, they form a unity; there is no breach to be made in their ranks. They continue to form a closed front.

This is a nice application for the church now. If we leave aside the devastating effect, as does the above verse quoted from Proverbs 30:27, we see in these animals a wonderful characteristic of how God wants the church to function. It has no visible guidance either, but depends in everything on

the invisible, but no less real guidance of the Holy Spirit. If every member of the church places himself under the guidance of the Spirit, both in daily life and in the meetings, this will be expressed in the unified action of the believers. The enemy will not succeed to cause division.

It testifies of wisdom if the children of God submit to that invisible guidance. The Spirit of God makes clear through the Word of God how He wants to lead each member individually and all members together. If every member reads God's Word, it will also become clear what his or her function is in the whole and how that function can be exercised to serve the whole.

The locusts of which Joel speaks are called "a nation". This makes it clear that in these locusts an example can be seen of a nation on a war path. The mighty weapons at their disposal are their teeth, which are compared with the teeth of lion and the fangs of lioness (cf. Rev 9:8). The king of the animals grabs his prey and tears it with his teeth without letting go. The same destructive work do locusts with their teeth. They eat everything without leaving something. If these creatures can do such an evil, how much more will it be done by the hostile people, whose actions are described in detail in the next chapter (Joel 2:1-11).

This destructive power is released on what God calls "My land". That is why the chastening that God must bring over His land also affects Himself. We'll see this in verse 9, where it is said that no more sacrifices are brought to Him. This makes it clear that God does not send judgment from His high and exalted position without being involved in it Himself (Lam 3:33).

The land is entrusted to Israel to manage it for Him and to give Him the fruit of it. They are allowed to enjoy all the good of it. But if they consider the land to be their own, and plunder it, God must remind them by discipline of what He said: "For the land is Mine; for you are [but] aliens and sojourners with Me" (Lev 25:23b).

### **Joel 1:7 | My Vine, My Fig Tree**

*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.*

After God spoke of the land as “My land” in the previous verse, He calls Israel here “My vine” and “My fig tree”. Vine and fig tree are symbols of prosperity, peace and rest (1Kgs 4:25; Mic 4:4). Vine and fig tree are often mentioned together (Psa 105:33; Isa 36:16; Jer 5:17; Hos 2:11). The wood of these trees is worthless (Eze 15:1-5). The farmer with the vine and fig tree is not interested in the wood of them, but in their fruit. This fruit was not given to Him by His people, but used by themselves.

Therefore what is a gift from God to His people is now taken away from them. And how radical. The locusts not only eat all the green, but the trees are even stripped of their bark. That is why vines and fig trees no longer bear fruit. In a figurative sense, this applies to Israel. For a long time now, it did not deliver fruit for God. Everything is ‘stripped bare’ and dead. Only when the church has been raptured and God picks up the thread with Israel again new life will come, as Paul says: “What will [their] acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom 11:15).

### **Joel 1:8 | Sorrow for Loss of a Loved One**

*8 Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth  
For the bridegroom of her youth.*

The people are called upon to wail. Their sorrow must be shown by the wearing of a sackcloth. The misery that has come upon Judah and that must lead to sadness is compared to the misery that is caused by the breaking of a love relationship. The cause of the sorrow the prophet presents in the picture of a wailing bride whose beloved was torn out of life shortly before marriage. Both the unexpected and the intensely painful are drawn here.

The fate of Judah and Jerusalem is compared to the fate of a bride who has to do without the fellowship with her husband. Judah and Jerusalem also have no more fellowship with the LORD because of the emergency situation, as it was experienced before in the sacrificial service. The means of sacrifice are given to the people as a proof of their allegiance to the LORD.

Because all their hope is connected with earthly blessings, the loss of them can only have great sorrow as a consequence.

In a general sense we can connect to this the lesson that whoever works only for the food that perishes (Jn 6:27) will come out cheated in his work. All earthly prosperity can suddenly disappear. In that case, it is to be hoped, as here with Israel, that this grievous matter will bring about a sorrow that is in accordance with God and not just a sorrow for the blessings that have been lost (2Cor 7:10).

### **Joel 1:9 | No Grain Offering nor Drink Offering**

*9 The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off  
From the house of the LORD.  
The priests mourn,  
The ministers of the LORD.*

The first consequence of the destruction of the harvest is that no more grain offering and drink offering can be brought into the temple. It seems that the Judeans did bring offerings until the disaster came, because the removal of the offerings is attributed to the locusts. This could mean that until then the people have fulfilled their religious obligations to bring the prescribed offerings. But as they fulfill their duties to God, they also fill up the measure of their iniquity and God's judgment comes on it. A person can perform the external actions that are part of his religion with great care without his heart being involved.

The loss of offerings is a major disaster. Grain offering and drink offering are mentioned because they are vegetal and are therefore directly affected by the locust plague. A description of the grain offering can be read in Leviticus 2. Like all offerings, the grain offering is a picture of the Lord Jesus. Animal sacrifices are a picture of the work the Lord Jesus did on the cross. The grain offering is not a bloody offering. It therefore speaks of Him as Man on earth, Who in His life preceding His work on the cross has devoted Himself completely to God. The drink offering is a sacrifice of wine which is poured out over another offering, the main offering (Num 28:7,14; cf. Phil 2:17). It speaks of joy – of which wine is a picture – with which the Lord Jesus offered Himself to God.



The spiritual meaning is important to us. The disappearing of the mentioned offerings means that a situation could arise among the people of God, that they no longer realize Who the Lord Jesus is for God. There is no longer any awareness of the Lord Jesus' complete devotion to God, as presented in the grain offering. It is also no longer thought of the fact that it was His joy to do the will of His Father, as the drink offering shows.

It means that we stop telling God – that is what 'offering' means to us – how wonderful the Lord Jesus served Him and that He always did so with joy. There is no longer any fellowship with God. God, with Whom everything is about His Son – Who He is, what He did and how He did it – is wronged. What a great loss for God. He who wrongs God also wrongs himself. Anyone who does not know the Lord Jesus as the true grain offering and drink offering, doesn't know that his own life can be an offering. Someone who lives only for himself and his own pleasures knows nothing of the dedication to God and the joy it brings.

Priests who perceive such an attitude in God's people can only weep for it. Priests are people who are used to being in the presence of God. They know what is fitting, they know God's holiness, His love, and desires. They also share in His grief and the pain that causes the unfaithfulness of His people.

In Israel, only the descendants of Aaron are priests. In the church all believers are priests (1Pet 2:5). Yet there is a difference between *being* a priest and *behaving* as a priest or *serving* as a priest. Only believers who really live in fellowship with God will serve as priests and will sympathize with God. They know in what He is wronged when His people live only for themselves. In meetings where spiritual sacrifices are brought, that is, where God is honored, they will notice the nature and content of those sacrifices. They will notice whether sacrifices are brought that honor God, or that they are sacrifices that show only their own advantage.

### Joel 1:10 | Everything Is Great Misery

10 *The field is ruined,  
The land mourns;  
For the grain is ruined,*

*The new wine dries up,  
Fresh oil fails.*

“The field” is the area on which the crop stands. It shows the harvest, the result of all the effort that preceded it. But there is no harvest, because there is no crop in the field. “The land” represents more the area of which you can expect to be harvested after plowing and sowing. But all the cultivation of the soil has been in vain. The earth gives the appearance of a mourning one. The words “dries up” and “fails” indicate that there is not only a plague of locusts but also a drought (verse 17).

“Grain”, “new wine” and “oil” are the three main blessings of the land, that are often mentioned together in the Old Testament (Num 18:12; Deu 7:13; Hos 2:7). When these are taken away, it is as a result of a Divine punishment (Deu 28:51; Hag 1:11). They will be present again when the people have repented (Joel 2:19; Psa 65:10). The three products – grain, new wine and oil – successively represent reinforcement, joy and radiance (Psa 104:14-15).

### **Joel 1:11 | Poor and Rich Meet Each Other**

*11 Be ashamed, O farmers,  
Wail, O vinedressers,  
For the wheat and the barley;  
Because the harvest of the field is destroyed.*

The groups addressed here are those most directly affected in their livelihood security. Wheat and barley are the main grains from which bread is baked. We can think of two types of people: rich and poor. Barley bread is the bread for the poor, while people who are better off can buy wheat bread. Barley is used as food for horses (1Kgs 4:28) and as food for people if wheat is not available or payable.

From 2 Kings 7 it appears that barley costs half of wheat (2Kgs 7:1,16). The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in his book *The Fall of Jerusalem*, mentions the same in his description of one of the sieges of Jerusalem: ‘Many rich gave all their wealth for a measure of wheat, the more poor for a measure of barley, after which they locked themselves in a hidden corner of their house and kneaded the grain or ate it ungrounded.’

In Revelation 6, the price of barley is one third of the price to be paid for wheat (Rev 6:6). But if both are no longer available, it does not matter if you are rich or poor. Rich and poor meet in the misery of hunger (Pro 22:2). When both come to the acknowledgment that they are to blame for the chastisement God had to bring because they did not recognize Him as their Maker, He has achieved His goal with that chastisement.

### **Joel 1:12 | All Trees Are Gone**

*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, rejoicing dries up  
From the sons of men.*

It is not only the farmers and vineyards who suffer. The whole people, all “sons of men”, share in the disaster. The five tree species, together with the wheat and barley of verse 11, are seven in total. This indicates the total extent of the devastation. The palm tree is the date palm. The statement that “all the trees” have been withered, after a number of trees have already been named, completes the picture of desolation.

Trees are given by God at creation as a blessing for man. He was allowed to eat free of all trees, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). For the Jew, for whom these crops belong to the blessings of the land (Deu 8:6-10), taking them away is a disaster and also a judgment.

In addition to their economic value, the trees mentioned are also symbols of spiritual food and refreshment and of joy and fruit in the life of the faithful believer (Psa 92:13; Song 2:3). The full joy that could have characterized their lives as people of God has fled. Nothing is left of it.

### **Joel 1:13 | Call to the Priests**

*13 Gird yourselves [with sackcloth]  
And lament, O priests;  
Wail, O ministers of the altar!  
Come, spend the night in sackcloth*

*O ministers of my God,  
For the grain offering and the drink offering  
Are withheld from the house of your God.*

In verse 9 it is said of the priests that they mourn. There they are in connection with the LORD and with the house of the LORD. LORD or *Yahweh* is the Name of God that indicates that He has a special relationship with His chosen people Israel. *Yahweh* is the Name of the God of the covenant with Israel. But the people have broken the covenant with Him. If God now calls the priests to lament and wail, to spend the night in sackcloth, He does so as the One for Whom man must account for his unfaithfulness.

God is the three times holy God, Who is not to be mocked. That is why we speak here of “ministers of my God” and “the house of your God”. The priests must be the first to be able to realize how great the dishonor that has been done to God is. After all, they may be expected to know what is due to God and that it is a great shame that God does not receive what is due to Him. As “ministers of the altar” they are now unemployed. There is nothing to bring to the altar. Grain offering and drink offering come from the harvest of wheat and grapes and those harvests are destroyed.

Joel called the priests “ministers of my God”. He presents himself as the prophet of his God, on behalf of Whom he could say that God will hear when they come to Him. It seems that this means that it is no longer the priests who stand for God as mediators on behalf of the people, but that the prophet is now as a loner the mediator through whom God speaks to the people.

He speaks to them of “your God” when he speaks of the house of God. That is the confession they hold in respect of the temple. He joins this when he speaks in verse 16 of “the house of our God”. He now calls them, of whom one of the duties is to sing in the temple, to lament. Spending the night in sackcloth is done as a sign of great sorrow, but also as an intense and long lasting act of humiliation before the LORD (1Kgs 21:27; 2Sam 12:13-23).

### **Joel 1:14 | Consecration of a Fast**

*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.*

After the call to lament and wail as a result of the locust plague, it is said along which channel this should happen. This channel is called 'humbling and conversion to God'. The call is further elaborated in the following chapter (Joel 2:15-17). Fasting is needed (cf. Jona 3:7). It seems easy to fast in a time of famine, but this is very difficult. Hunger is gnawing. There is hardly any food and what there is may not be touched to turn to God. But with this fasting one joins God, Who in this time does not receive any 'food' either.

Fasting is usually accompanied by confession of guilt, but this is not mentioned here. It is often used as an expression of humiliation to obtain from God reconciliation of guilt or to avoid dooming. It serves to underline the power of prayer or intercession.

If we encounter special trials and events in our lives that bewilder us, we should withdraw from the ordinary course of life. Then we can expose our hearts completely before the Lord, to see what He has to say to us with those events. In such situations, you do not even think of eating. You focus all your attention on the Lord and learn to know His will in the circumstances He has sent.

As in verse 2, the elders and all inhabitants are also mentioned here. Everyone is called and involved. Everyone has to come to the temple to call out to the LORD. They have to cry out for deliverance from distress. The call to God must be a national call because it is a national disaster. In Nehemiah 9 we also find such a national fast (Neh 9:1-3). Here, too, it is a matter for the whole people. If this call is answered, will the LORD not hear and give restoration? He hears and answers every sincere call. Only we must leave it to Him how and when He answers.

### **Joel 1:15 | The Day of the LORD**

*15 Alas for the day!*

*For the day of the LORD is near,*

| *And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.*

The day of the LORD is a theme woven throughout the whole prophecy of Joel. It is therefore good to pay some extra attention to this day. It is a special day. The day of the LORD is not a day of twenty-four hours, but covers the period of time from the moment the LORD arises and intervenes in the world events up to and including His realm of peace. The dawn of that day is the turning point in world history, where man no longer rules openly, but He takes over the government. Now it still seems that man has everything to say on earth, but when the day of the LORD comes, He will take over the world reign.

He will do so in a way that is visible to everyone. The LORD appears, becomes public. The book of Revelation describes all that is connected with it. First He will let His judgments come upon the earth and cleanse the earth of iniquity in that way (Revelation 6-19). He will perform the last judgments Himself, when He comes from heaven (Rev 19:11-21). Then He shall establish His realm of peace, and reign for a thousand years in a manner that shall be a blessing to man, even to all creation (Rev 20:1-6).

The day of the LORD begins with His judgments and ends with the realm of peace. After that, eternity begins (Revelation 20:7-21:8), which is also called "the day of God" (2Pet 3:12), for then "God will be all in all" (1Cor 15:28). With the day of the LORD the main thought is that the Lord Jesus will no longer remain hidden, but that He will act clearly, perceptible to everyone. "Day" refers to light, which means that it is no longer a matter of judging in secrecy or acting in providence, as it happens in the time in which we live.

The expression "the day of the LORD" is common in the Old Testament (Isa 2:12; 13:6,9; Jer 46:10; Eze 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Oba 1:15; Zep 1:7,14; Mal 4:5). In the Old Testament the day of the LORD is always connected with the special place Israel has on earth because of the special connection with God, Who has revealed Himself only to this people as the LORD. The first mention and description of this day (Isa 2:12-22) gives a clear picture of what this day means.

It is the day when only the LORD will be exalted (Isa 2:17). Then the situation will come to an end, as it has been since Eve listened to the tempter,

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resulting in the fall into sin. Since that time man has started to do his own will and has always wanted to exalt himself above God and his neighbor. All that pride will be judged.

The day of the LORD indicates the direction with which He will intervene decisively in history. God will do so through Christ on a day He has appointed (Acts 17:31). This is the day on which man will no longer be allowed to hinder, thwart, or frustrate God's purpose, and on which God will no longer work in secret. Then He will bring down evil and then spread and maintain what is good.

That 'day' refers to the Divine judgments that will be carried out by Christ as *Yahweh* God of Israel, when He appears in glory, but also to the whole millennial period. The day of the LORD means the judgment for Babylon (Isa 13:9), for Egypt (Jer 46:10), for Israel and Assyria (Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14), for Israel (Amos 5:18,20; Zep 1:7) and for Edom (Oba 1:15). Where sin and iniquity are, there will be judgment, whether it be heathen nations or God's own people.

From Amos 5 we might get the impression that the Israelites expect the day of the LORD as salvation (light) for them and judgment for the enemies (Amos 5:18-20). But Amos and other prophets have contradicted this expectation. Israel, unfaithful to the LORD, will also undergo the day of judgment itself as 'darkness', as a day of wrath of the LORD (Lam 1:12).

In the New Testament the day of the Lord – the same as the day of the LORD in the Old Testament – is also mentioned (Acts 2:20; 1Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2Cor 1:14; 1Thes 5:2; 2Thes 2:2; 2Pet 3:10). A clear distinction must be made between the day of the Lord and the rapture of the church. Both events do not take place at the same time. The coming of the Lord consists of various stages.

The Lord Jesus comes first to rapture the church (1Cor 15:51-52; 1Thes 4:15-18). When He comes for His church, He will not come to the earth, nor will He be visible to people on the earth. The church meets Him in the air (1Thes 4:17). Also, all Old Testament believers who have died will then be raised up and meet Him. This truth is found only in the New Testament and is a comfort for the believers.

The day of the Lord is different. At that phase of His coming He appears on earth, visible to all (Rev 1:7), to deliver His people, that is the faithful remnant of Israel, from their distress. And He will judge the unbelievers and establish His realm of peace. The book of Revelation provides us with detailed information about all the events associated with the Lord's coming to earth. All texts about the Lord's day show that people who then live on earth will be in great fear because of the judgments.

When we see the distinction between the rapture of the church, the meeting the Lord in the air, and the Lord's coming to earth, we hold the key to understanding the first part of 2 Thessalonians 2 (2Thes 2:1-12).

There are other 'days'. Thus we read about the "day of God" (2Pet 3:12). This day describes the eternal state. This day should not be confused with "the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev 16:14), which corresponds to "the day of the LORD". Related expressions are: the day of the LORD's wrath (Zep 1:18), a day of vengeance (Isa 34:8), the day of the LORD's sacrifice (Zep 1:8), a day of wrath, of clouds and thick darkness (Zep 1:15). 'Day' here is not a time indication, but stands for the character of powerful events and their effect. All emphasis is placed on what is happening, the punitive intervention of the LORD, in which the aspect of being 'public' is especially important. All events take place under His control and in His light.

The day of the Lord is in opposition to the day, or the judgment, of man (1Cor 4:3). Now man still has the say; however, when the day of the Lord comes, the period in which the will of God is done "on earth as it is in heaven" begins (Mt 6:9-10).

From a spiritual point of view, the day of the Lord begins in the life of every human being when he acknowledges the full authority of the Lord over his life. This happens when he sees his life in God's light and starts thinking about it like God. That is the moment of conversion. When conversion has taken place, from that moment on it can be said of the believers that they are "sons of light and sons of day" (1Thes 5:5; 1Thes 5:8-9; cf. Rom 13:13).

### **Joel 1:16 | No Gladness and Joy**

| *16 Has not food been cut off before our eyes,*



| *Gladness and joy from the house of our God?*

It was God's intention that His people should rejoice in His presence. He has said that, for example, when offering the first fruits (Deu 26:10-11). But instead of gladness and joy there is now the threat of the disaster that will erupt with the coming of the day of the LORD. After all, they have seen the harbinger and experienced the consequences.

Here the prophet explains *why* he fears that the day of the LORD is coming. The disasters that accompany this day are present: the harvest and all the greenery have been destroyed. They are witnesses to it, they see it before their eyes, they look at it with horror and powerlessness. When there is no harvest and therefore no food anymore, also the gladness and joy are gone from the house of the LORD. After all, there can be no first fruits of the harvest, no peace offerings, and soon, because the cattle die of thirst, there will be no more burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin.

**Joel 1:17-18 | Desolation Everywhere**

*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.*

The prophet sees how creation sighs (Rom 8:22). The consequences of unfaithful and wicked acting by a human race that has turned away from God are visible in creation. A man never goes alone on a path that leads away from God. Even what has been entrusted to him, he always carries with him in suffering and judgment. The 'groaning of creation' can be heard in the 'groaning of the beasts', as we have seen in verse 10 the mourning of the land.

What is said in these verses is the result of drought and not of the plague of locusts. The harvest has been destroyed by the locusts, but the drought means that there also is no new harvest to be expected. The situation is

hopeless. It is as if the prophet seeks for words to show this hopelessness in full measure: ‘shriveled’, ‘desolate’, ‘torn down’, ‘dried up’, ‘groan’, ‘wander’, ‘no pasture’, ‘suffer’. For Joel, the drought of the land mainly reflects the barrenness and decline that is present in the hearts of the people (cf. Jer 14:1-6).

### Joel 1:19 | The Call to God

*19 To You, O LORD, I cry;  
For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness  
And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.*

Joel uses the words “fire” and “flame” to name the scorching heat and drought. They are caused by the sun and the east wind and have a devastating effect. The “pastures of the wilderness” are the important finding places of food for the beasts. The Hebrew word *midbar* means that it is a wilderness suitable for small livestock farming, like for example the wilderness of Judea. “All the trees of the field” provide fruits for the people to use.

After describing the all-encompassing destruction and his call to go to God, Joel himself resorted to the only One Who can help. In the few words “to You, O LORD, I cry” lies a sea of misery which the prophet pours out before Him. It does not seem that the call he made in verses 13-14 has found much response. We only hear his voice here. The prophet Amos occupies the same position (cf. Amos 7:1-6). For God it is sufficient if there is only one righteous one.

Here Joel is a picture of the Lord Jesus Who goes to God as Advocate and Mediator for the people. Joel not only represents the whole people, but is also the example that calls for imitation. He does not call for something he does not do himself. Whether or not God’s servants manage to convince others of God’s judgment and bring them to an action and attitude that are appropriate, it is clear that a call to others must at least have that effect in their own lives. If they cannot persuade others to call to God, they have to do it themselves in the awareness that it is really necessary.

It is remarkable that the only time the prophet tells something of himself, it is about his calling to God. It shows us something of his inner life and of

his trust in God. He is a great example in this to us, worth to be followed by anyone who suffers from the aridity that reigns among the people of God. It is to be hoped that more such intercessors will be found for God's people!

### **Joel 1:20 | The Animals Pant for the LORD**

*20 Even the beasts of the field pant for You;  
For the water brooks are dried up  
And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

After the prophet has called, here is the calling of the animals. The prophet sees how the animals pant for God. The animals also suffer because of man's unfaithfulness. God hears their cry (Job 38:41; Psa 104:21,27). With their panting for Him, the animals are an example to people.

The care of God also goes out to the animals. When the curse of creation in the realm of peace is removed, the animals also share in its blessing: "O LORD, You preserve man and beast" (Psa 36:6c). After Jonah's preaching, the animals must share in the humiliation proclaimed by the king of Nineveh; they too are not allowed to eat or drink anything (Jona 3:7). God also involves the animals when He spares Nineveh after humiliation: "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know [the difference] between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jona 4:11).

## Joel 2

### **Introduction**

Joel pointed out in chapter 1 the devastating plague of locusts and why it was sent by God. In Joel 2 he follows this up with the announcement that God, if the people have not converted, will send a new plague. No literal locusts this time, but soldiers. Although there are many similarities between the locusts and the hostile soldiers, Joel 2 is not about what that people 'eat', but about that people themselves.

Joel points to the day of the LORD that comes, a day in which the Lord Jesus comes back. It is literally His day, as He comes with His judgments. That day casts its shadows forward. It is a day that no one can endure who is not at peace with God.

But that is not the only message Joel has. That day has not yet arrived and judgment can still be averted. It is still the day of salvation (cf. 2Cor 6:2). That is why he calls for conversion. This is possible on the basis of Who is God, that is to say, on the basis of His grace and mercy. The consequences of their repentance and conversion are a great blessing for the people.

This blessing has two aspects. It is expressed in an abundant yield of the once devastated land. That refers to the external circumstances. The people will live in prosperity and abundance. It also appears in an outpouring of the Spirit. This refers to an inner relationship with the LORD and a life in peace and rest, without fear of hostile nations.

### **Joel 2:1 | The Day of the LORD Is Near**

*1 Blow a trumpet in Zion,  
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
For the day of the LORD is coming;  
Surely it is near*

The spiritual eyes of Joel perceive a new plague. A new danger threatens. The plague, in which literally locusts play the leading role, is over. The

plague, in which an army of people will play the leading role, presents itself here. Joel foresees and predicts that a hostile people will destroy the land of Israel. In order to do so, an alarm must be sounded. The destruction that is about to erupt is a foreshadowing of what will happen to Israel in the last days, just before the return of Christ.

Joel calls for the trumpet to be blown, but he does not say who should do it. Since this is often the task of priests, we should probably think about it here too. The alarm blowing here recalls the alarm blowing with the silver trumpets when the enemy is in the land (Num 10:9). Then the LORD will think of them.

The trumpet is blown again in our chapter, in verse 15. There it is about calling the people together to appear before the LORD. Here it is meant as an alarm because the enemy comes (cf. Hos 5:8; 8:1). As mentioned earlier, the word ‘day’ means to be revealed. Joel presents “the day of the LORD” as near. It is not in the far future, so that people could think: ‘After us the flood.’ Hence the alarm signal. They must realize how near that day is!

Wherever there is talk of judgments, it is clear that they will take place soon. “Time has been shortened” (1Cor 7:29). “It is the last hour” (1Jn 2:18). “The Judge is standing right at the door” (Jam 5:9). “The time is near” (Rev 1:3).

### Joel 2:2 | The Assyrians

*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.*

The plague of locusts is taken as an occasion and also as an example for the arrival of an enemy army. This army is yet to come. The army Joel speaks about is the Assyrian army, which comes from the north (verse 20). Assyria is called by God “the rod of My anger” (Isa 10:5; Mic 5:4-5). The invasion of the Assyrians is seen as a cloud of locusts that obscures the sun (cf. Zep

1:15-16; Isa 60:2a; Eze 34:12; Amos 5:18). This invasion also takes place with the speed and irresistibility of the dawn that spreads over the mountains.

The plague of locusts is a sign of the times for the people (cf. Mt 16:2-3). And when Joel therefore speaks of an even more abominable enemy, he can compare the coming of the enemy with the dawn of the coming day of the LORD. But that day will not bring light and prosperity to the apostate people, but darkness and a devastating storm.

### Joel 2:3 | Paradise and Wilderness

*3 A fire consumes before them  
And behind them a flame burns.  
The land is like the garden of Eden before them  
But a desolate wilderness behind them,  
And nothing at all escapes them.*

After the sudden and massive rise of the enemy, its all-consuming effect is now described. Everything the enemy encounters on the way is totally destroyed by him. Fire in the Bible is often the expression of God's judgment. It is also the designation of a power that consumes everything in nature.

Look at a field where the locust has not been yet. It looks like the garden of Eden, the paradise, the pride and glory of the country. Look at that field the next day when the locust has been there and it looks like a desolate wilderness, where there is no memory of the wealth and beauty that the field had the day before. All the actions of the Assyrians resemble what is caused by a plague of locusts. There is no escape from that enemy by fleeing from it or hiding from it, just as there is no escape from God's judgment on the day of the LORD.

"The garden of Eden" is an indication for a paradisiacal, extremely flourishing area, the opposite of a wilderness (Eze 28:13; 31:9-18). This contrast between paradise and wilderness, but then vice versa – the wilderness becomes a paradise – is also found in Isaiah 51 and Ezekiel 36 (Isa 51:3; Eze 36:35).

### Joel 2:4 | Locusts and Horses

*4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;*

| *And like war horses, so they run.*

Although this is about the army of the Assyrians, about men, and no longer about locusts, the comparison between this army and the locusts is still made. There are similarities between the locust and the horse (Job 39:23; Rev 9:7). The comparison can refer to the animals themselves. The enlarged locust looks like a horse, especially because of the shape of its head. The comparison can also have to do with the way of storming up, the speed and jumping ability of the locust, which is also present in a horse.

### Joel 2:5 | A Tremendous Noise

| *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.*

Not only the sight of this army is impressive and frightening. This also applies to the sound of the armed forces. This goes through the bone. The image of the horses is all about seeing, the sight of which is reminiscent of locusts. The comparison with the two-wheeled chariots is about hearing the sound that also characterizes an approaching swarm of locusts.

When the swarms approach in the distance over the mountain tops, it sounds like the dull roar of war chariots “leaping” over uneven mountain paths between the sound-enhancing mountain walls. As the swarm approaches, the sound becomes more intrusive and more like the crackling of “a flame of fire consuming the stubble”. In the same way, the rumbling of judgement can be heard from afar as a warning that it is fast approaching.

### Joel 2:6 | Fear and Trembling

| *6 Before them the people are in anguish;  
All faces turn pale.*

The impression of this “mighty people” (verse 5) is so overwhelming, that wherever it appears, whole nations shrink together in fear and the faces turn pale. In verse 1 the fear is still limited to Judah and Jerusalem. Here other peoples are also captivated by the fear for the Assyrians. In verse 10, fear encompasses the entire universe.

### Joel 2:7-9 | How the Army Advances

*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.*

Lively, with short, emphatically sounding sentences, Joel reports how the army is advancing, storming the city walls, invading the city and invading the houses. You see it before you. Unstoppably, they move forward. Nothing can stop them (cf. Isa 33:4). They are invulnerable and therefore irresistible, for those who cannot be wounded cannot be stopped either. There are no openings in their ranks.

To enter, they go the way of the thief. This also belongs to the day of the Lord (1Thes 5:2). A thief comes unexpectedly and unwelcome, but only for those who do not take it into account. Once warnings have preceded the coming, you can no longer maintain that it is unexpected. Nevertheless, we must always be reminded how suddenly the predicted event will take place.

For us, Christians, the rapture of the church precedes the Lord's day. That fact is not meant that we should not worry about that day. Certainly, we do not have to be afraid of the judgment that is related to that day. But when we see the signs of the times and the proximity of that day, the Lord's coming for His church is even closer.

That should encourage us to look forward to Him and to a great dedication to Him. It should encourage us to warn people to repent and believe in Him before it is too late. The imperturbability and speed with which



the Assyrians work should also characterize the Christian in his work and struggle for the Lord.

### Joel 2:10 | Earth and Heavens Impressed

*10 Before them the earth quakes,  
The heavens tremble,  
The sun and the moon grow dark  
And the stars lose their brightness.*

With the mention of earth and heavens is indicated the most extensive environment that this army impresses. The celestial bodies even ceased their normal functions while beholding this terrible judgment.

### Joel 2:11 | The Army of the LORD

*11 The LORD utters His voice before His army;  
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?*

Here is the explanation of the success of this army: the LORD Himself is at the head of it. In the storming up army appears none but the furious LORD Himself. The hostile army is "His army", which He uses to discipline His people (Isa 10:5). That is the most terrible of all and at the same time the only source of hope for anyone who believes. Whoever acknowledges that it is *God's* judgment can resort to Him in accordance with His love for His people. Continuing to count on His love is the true character of faith throughout all times. Faith submits to the dealings of God and finds in them his salvation. He who resists God's dealings signs his own death sentence.

The people are not called upon to resist this enemy. This enemy executes the word of the LORD – and "His word runs very swiftly" (Psa 147:15). That is why any resistance to this army is nothing but revolt against Him. The fact that this army "carries out His word" does not mean that it fulfills a previously pronounced prophecy. It only means that this army carries out His will, His commands (cf. Psa 103:20).

God does not want us to desperately resist His discipline and seek solutions to evade it. He always wants us to bow before Him and acknowledge the instrument He sends, whoever or whatever that instrument may be (Mic 6:9; cf. 1Kgs 12:24). This applies both to personal life and to communal life.

The answer to the question “who can endure it?” (cf. Rev 6:17; Nah 1:6; Mal 3:2; Jer 10:10), that is, “the day of the LORD”, is enclosed in the question. The answer is that no one can bear that day. Yet escaping is possible. The following verses show this.

### Joel 2:12 | A Call

*12 “Yet even now,” declares the LORD,  
“Return to Me with all your heart,  
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;*

Through the words “yet even now, declares the LORD”, the hope is shining that the judgment that has been announced can still be averted. “Return to Me” indicates that this is a return that leads to a new connectedness with the LORD. It is not only about a turn in the direction of, but also about a real coming to the LORD. Hence “with all your heart”, that is, with all that life is directed toward, all thoughts and will (cf. 1Sam 7:3; 1Kgs 8:48).

The LORD makes a serious appeal to the people to convert to him, and to do so radically, without any restraint. The first thing that matters is the heart, the whole heart. Half-heartedness is an abomination to God. A real conversion does not go without discernible expressions. “Fasting”, “weeping” and “mourning” will become visible and audible to someone who turns to God with all his heart.

Joel does not say what concrete sin(s) the people must repent of. For example, we do not hear of idolatry, social injustice, reliance on their own military power or alliances with neighboring countries. It can be a conversion from a superficial, confident, ritualistic religion to a new intense listening and living to the Word of God.

If the whole life is placed in the presence of God in the knowledge that He knows and judges it all, it has consequences. On the one hand it will make us shrink because of the holiness of God because we see how sinful our

lives are. On the other hand, we will rise up from relief because of the love of God, because we see that He answers repentance with forgiveness of our sins. He can forgive the sins of anyone who repents because the Lord Jesus poured His blood on the cross for penitent sinners (Heb 9:22b).

### **Joel 2:13 | No Outward Appearance**

*13 And rend your heart and not your garments."  
Now return to the LORD your God,  
For He is gracious and compassionate,  
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness  
And relenting of evil.*

There is a saying that reads: 'The eyes of the Lord go through the garments.' That certainly applies here. The people can show certain signs of mourning with outward piety. Rending the garments is such a sign. But if the heart is not rend, the outward sign has no value whatsoever to God. God "desires truth in the innermost being" (Psa 51:6,17; Isa 57:15). It is a conversion to "the LORD your God", with which the prophet emphasizes that the LORD is not a strange God, but the God of the covenant with His people.

The impending disaster will affect the whole nation and therefore there is a call for national humiliation. In general, there is room for a national commemoration in case of national disasters, but not for national humiliation. Some events cause a shock to all sections of the population and sometimes there is great general indignation. And often rightly so. Just think of terrorist attacks, or the abuse and then murder of children. Protest and commemoration marches, protest and commemoration meetings are organized, in which masses of people participate. Unfortunately, however, the protest only focuses on the crime, the excess, the event.

The call is: 'This may never happen again and the perpetrator(s) must be found and punished.' That call is understandable. In the group one finds each other in the feeling of powerlessness. Together they want to make a fist to the uncontrollable. But where is the general humiliation? Where is the general call to God for His mercy? Where is the common call for His grace and compassion to save us more of the misery? Where is the common

prayer: “Deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13b)? [While I read this commentary again because of the translation in English, covid-19 pandemic plagues the world. We also can apply the above mentioned reactions to this plague.]

Of course, only under the reign of Christ during the thousand year realm of peace the world will be really free from the dramatic events that regularly stir up entire masses of people. Yet all these events are just as many calls to man to repent to God and live for Him.

As Moses did after the events around the golden calf, so does Joel. He calls upon the features of God. Again and again we are impressed when we remember that in God there are sources that can be tapped if the situation in man is hopeless. Therefore, after the people have sinned with the golden calf, by which they have lost their right to exist, Moses can still appeal to God (Exo 34:6-9). That is why Joel, while the people deserve the judgment that is already announcing itself in a threatening way, can also make a call to God here.

In his appeal to the LORD Joel mentions five features of Him (cf. Jona 4:2; Psa 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17).

1. “Gracious” is He in Himself because He comes to deeds of goodness when all the right to blessing is lost.
2. “Compassionate” is He because He is quickly moved to pity when He sees how miserable His people are.
3. He is “slow to anger” in His actions toward this sinful people and
4. “abounding in lovingkindness” because all kinds of favor and goodness are present with Him, including forgiving guilt.
5. Finally, we read of Him that He is “relenting of evil”. This means that when He sees conversion, He withdraws the announced or already partially executed punishment.

When talking of repentance of God, this is a human way of speaking. If God repents of anything, it does not mean that He returns to an earlier decision because it would have been wrong. God makes no mistakes. God’s repentance has to do with an intention to which He returns if man’s behavior gives cause to do so.

If a man repents, God will not carry out the promised punishment. If a person behaves differently towards God, God also changes His way of acting towards that person. A strong example of this is the postponement of the judgment on Ahab and his house following the (temporary) humiliation of Ahab (1Kgs 21:27-29).

### **Joel 2:14 | Who Knows ...**

*14 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?*

The prophet has just given a brilliant description of some of God's features. He does not speak of God in theological terms, but presents Him as He knows Him. Yet in his reliance on God's grace he does not allow himself to be tempted to make statements as if he can dispose of God's goodness. That is why this verse reads "who knows?" Divine sovereignty remains guaranteed.

The question "who knows?" is not an expression of doubt about God's goodness, but shows above all human humility and modesty towards the sovereign God, Who has every right to carry out His judgments. Penance and repentance do not mean automatically being entitled to God's grace. Joel speaks so that his hearers, as someone has said, 'should not despair by the greatness of their sins, but also that the greatness of grace should not make them careless'. With conversion, there is reason to hope that He turns away from judgment.

But there is more. Not only does the judgment depart – which is already a great grace, though negative –, but the prophet knows his God so well that he knows that God, after the conversion of his people, also has a blessing for them. With this blessing the people can honor Him again. The blessing can refer to the restoration of the field crop that will be given by the LORD, so that again "a grain offering and a drink offering" can be brought.

The goal of every work of salvation that He accomplishes is that He will be honored. Whether it is an earthly salvation, as with Israel delivered from its enemies, or spiritual salvation, when a man is delivered from the power

of Satan and sin, the ultimate goal will always be to glorify God and His Christ.

### **Joel 2:15 | The Trumpet Blown for the Second Time**

*15 Blow a trumpet in Zion,  
Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly,*

Here the trumpet is blown for the second time. The first time this happens in verse 1. There it is to warn that the enemy is coming. Now it happens to call the people together (cf. Num 10:7). In the trumpet the voice of God sounds. He calls to come to Him. In everything that has already happened to the people (Joel 1) and in everything that will happen to the people in the future, it is good that they realize that it has to do with *God*. Therefore the people must come together before His face.

When the people come into the presence of God, it means first and foremost that they will humble themselves. There is every reason to do so. Is not the enemy coming to them because of their unfaithfulness to the LORD? At the same time, and given the seriousness of the situation, the body's needs will have to be abandoned. There must be fasting so that all can focus on what God has to say, without being distracted by everyday food and drink.

Besides, what will a person worry about eating and drinking when his life is at stake? How closely fasting and humbling oneself are connected is shown by the instructions for the Day of atonement (Lev 23:27,29,32). The word 'humble' used there can also be translated as 'fasting'.

The last part of the verse is word for word equal to Joel 1:14a. The fact that there are two calls for fasting and meeting shows the urgency of the call.

### **Joel 2:16 | Everyone Should Come**

*16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation,  
Assemble the elders,  
Gather the children and the nursing infants.  
Let the bridegroom come out of his room  
And the bride out of her [bridal] chamber.*

The whole people, with no exception, are called upon to a solemn assembly. No excuses for the elders, the small children should not be forgotten, even the nursing infants should be gathered. All classes of society, political, religious or families, are expected to express their feelings regarding the sin committed against God.

If there is sin before God, there is no distinction. Everyone is guilty of punishment. Judgment will affect all, therefore all are involved in the call to come to God. Children and infants also have to deal with the sins of the people and the consequences thereof (cf. Lam 4:4; Jona 3:5; 4:11).

In the general call we also have an indication to take our children as young as possible to the meeting. It is good to take them to all places where believers are together. This applies to meetings of all kinds. They can be involved at a young age in everything that has to do with the life of the church of God.

The Lord Jesus says to the religious leaders who blame children for honoring Him: "Have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF?'" (Mt 21:16). He appreciates what comes from the mouths of children and infants. Although children have few and infants have no awareness of what they are expressing, God recognizes it as praise to Him, praise that He Himself has placed in their mouths. So it is with humility. Let the children be present.

The gathering of the church has its joyful, but also its sad causes and moments. It is therefore a reflection of everyday life. We should not polish our meetings into a shining experience when there is reason to humble ourselves. Nor do we have to submerge the meetings in sadness when there is reason to rejoice. Sometimes joy and sadness alternate within a meeting. Let the coming together of the believers really be the true reflection of what lives in the hearts of the believers who come together and let the children also have a part in it.

Bridegroom and bride, that is the newly married man and the newly married woman, are mentioned separately in this whole. They do not think of weeping and mourning and also fasting is not part of a wedding. But they too cannot escape the call to take their place before God. They renounce

their right to cheer, eat, drink, and even sexual intercourse, which they may enjoy as newly married to participate in common fasting and prayer. An appeal to the first year of exemption (Deu 24:5) is not possible. The excuse "I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come" (Lk 14:20) does not apply here either.

### **Joel 2:17 | Assignment to the Priests**

*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?'"*

When the whole people are called, the priests are told where to stand and told what to do and say. The priests represent the people before the LORD. In them the LORD sees all the people. A priest is supposed to know what is due to Him, what is appropriate for Him. He is not supposed to act according to his own insight – for he is "a servant of the LORD" – but must fully abide by the prescriptions the LORD has given. In doing so, his priesthood is to the satisfaction of the LORD and to the blessing of God's people.

In the New Testament, all believers are a spiritual priesthood and may bring spiritual sacrifices (1Pet 2:5). They too are expected to know God's thoughts about the condition of His people. From a spiritual point of view, they too would do well to take to heart the task of the priests in the book of Joel.

The priests take their place in the midst of the people, outside the sanctuary, to call together with the people to God with an appeal to His faithfulness. They have to stand "between the porch and the altar". This tells us that they can only take their place in the presence of the LORD, the porch, because the sacrifice is brought upon the altar. They can only exist before Him because He accepts them in the value of sacrifice. They themselves have nothing to sacrifice. But in taking that place it is as if they remind the LORD and also themselves of the sacrifice.



They are instructed to cry, which means that they repent of their unfaithfulness and realize that by doing so they have earned God's judgment. They have lost all rights to be accepted by Him. Then they have to open their mouths to pronounce what is said to them. Here the Spirit puts in their mouth what is to be spoken (cf. Hos 14:3), in order to move the heart of God to intervene for "Your people" and "Your inheritance".

They plead with God in view of Whom He has always been for His people and inheritance; at the same time they plead with God in view of His glory opposite the enemies. Moses also uses this second argument after the people sinned with the golden calf (Exo 32:12; Psa 42:3; 115:2).

### Joel 2:18 | The Comforting Answer

*18 Then the LORD will be zealous for His land  
And will have pity on His people.*

The "who knows" of verse 14, after what happened in verse 17, gets here his beautiful answer. Is it not touching, this verse? It is at least as touching as the LORD's reaction to the removal of the idols in the book of Judges: "And He could bear the misery of Israel no longer" (Jdg 10:16). People who show their humility and break with sin and thus go to Him, always experience His compassion. Then He will again act in favor of His land and His people.

There has always been a connection between land and people (Gen 13:14-18; 17:6-8). With 'land' the emphasis is on the LORD's relentless zeal for its well-being. With 'people', the emphasis is on His compassion, His tender feelings for them.

### Joel 2:19 | Two Promises

*19 The LORD will answer and say to His people,  
"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 make you a reproach among the nations.*

This verse contains two promises. The first is that there will be grain, new wine and oil again. They will be able to live from it, not just to stay alive, but they will be able to eat it until they are satisfied. When the LORD sends

anything, it is never scanty. He always gives in abundance (Mt 14:15-21; 15:32-38).

The second promise is the assurance that they will never again be made a reproach among the nations. This assurance is a great relief. Reproach gives an enormous spiritual burden, by which life can become extremely difficult. The opposite, to be praised, or simply appreciated in daily life, can give wings; it makes life easier and pleasant.

### **Joel 2:20 | A Third Promise**

*20 "But I will remove the northern [army] far from you,  
And I will drive it into a parched and desolate land,  
And its vanguard into the eastern sea,  
And its rear guard into the western sea.  
And its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up,  
For it has done great things."*

The LORD gives a third promise: He will chase away the enemy. This enemy comes from the north. It is Assyria. That enemy will be expelled in three directions, unlike with the locusts which have been expelled to the west, in the sea. Part of it is driven "into a parched and desolate land", probably referring to the wilderness area south of Israel. Another part, "his vanguard", is driven "into the eastern sea", which is the Dead Sea. The third part, "his rear guard", will be driven "into the western sea", that is the Mediterranean Sea.

This fate that strikes Assyria comes from the LORD because this enemy boasts that he has done "great things". That is, he acted with pride. He has spoken and acted arrogantly. Their countless bodies will decay, so that the stench will arise and its foul smell will come up and pollute the air (cf. Amos 4:10a). Smell and pollution is all that remains of it.

Once the discipline has done its job, it is removed. It is different with the plagues that have come over Egypt. There a plague stopped to make way for a new plague, because there was no conversion (Exodus 7-12).

### **Joel 2:21 | Great Things**

*21 Do not fear, O land, rejoice and be glad,*

| *For the LORD has done great things.*

“Do not fear.” What a word full of comfort! From this call or command that we often encounter in the Bible, many have drawn strength through the ages. How afraid we can be when we think of the future, near or far away. We do not have any grip on it. Many things happen without us being able to influence them. But he who trusts in God will be told: “Do not fear!”

Here this word is said just after the country suffered enormously, but is now blessed again by the LORD. The land again produces much fruit, until satisfaction. But precisely because it is so recent that it has sighed, through its own unfaithfulness, under the discipline of God, there is still the fear that things will go wrong again. The people think back and realize how fragile and vulnerable this blessing can be.

Then comes another encouragement: the land may rejoice and be glad, because the blessing no longer depends on *their* faithfulness, but because the LORD has done great things. In verse 20 it says that Assyria boasts of having done great things. But doing great things is only reserved for God. He has done great things in their salvation from the enemies.

And for us? If we think of the great work of the Lord Jesus on the cross ... How incredibly great that is! That gives all redeemed of all times every reason to always rejoice and be glad (cf. verse 23).

### **Joel 2:22 | Again Plenty to Eat for the Animals**

| *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.*

From this verse the realm of peace comes into view. Under the reign of the Prince of peace, the whole of creation – land, animals and people – will be able to enjoy, in unprecedented peace and rest, all that God has given. The encouragement “do not fear” of verse 21 sounds here for the animals. In the same sentence, the call “rejoice and be glad” of verse 21 sound in verse 23 for the children of Zion.

The animals have suffered because of the sin of man. But when man, the people, have converted, the animals also share in the results of the atonement. Their longing for God (Joel 1:20) has been answered. They can eat plenty of what the field produces. They do not have to fear new scarcity.

Even in our time, cattle still sigh under the curse of man's sin that rests on creation. But if the curse is removed, the animals will be brought, though not in joy, in the freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:18-22). Thus God, when He spares Nineveh, also has an eye for the animals, for cattle also have fasted (Jona 4:11; 3:8).

### **Joel 2:23 | The Sons of Zion**

*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.*

The fact that the people are addressed with "sons of Zion" must sound like music to their ears. Zion is one of the mountains on which Jerusalem is built. Zion is often called 'the city of David'. He lived there. Once the true David, the Lord Jesus, will live there and reign from there, Mount Zion will be "the joy of the whole earth" (Psa 48:2). As with Mount Sinai the law is connected, so with Mount Zion the grace is connected (Heb 12:18-22). The "sons of Zion" are therefore "children of grace".

Therefore the cause of rejoicing and gladness is not in themselves, but in the LORD. They see Him as the cause of their joy. He has shown them mercy, while they have forfeited every right to blessing. They may rejoice once again in "the LORD your God", in which the consciousness of a renewed, restored relationship with the God of the covenant is included. On the basis of this new covenant, the rain currents of blessing will descend again. The early rain falls in October and November; the late rain falls in March and April and is indispensable for a good harvest. Rain first means rain as a natural blessing, but then also the spiritual blessing in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (verse 28).

“The teacher for righteousness” – as “the early rain for [your] vindication” also can be translated [see footnote NASB] – is no one else but the Lord Jesus. He will teach them in righteousness (Isa 53:11b). It may seem strange that in the midst of all the earthly blessings a Person suddenly comes forward. Yet this is not strange when we consider that, if the promised state of blessing is to be maintained, God’s people must also live in God’s way and according to His commandments.

Because Israel’s blessing is connected with keeping God’s commandments, it is of vital importance that the LORD also has those commandments taught as well. When, through the Teacher’s teaching, life according to God’s will is taken seriously again in Israel, the rain, coming as a blessing from God, may descend. In the past, righteousness was demanded, no one could meet it. Now that new life is present, there is also the desire to be taught in righteousness.

### Joel 2:24 | The Blessing

*24 The threshing floors will be full of grain,  
And the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil.*

The coming of rain is evidence of the blessing God has in His heart for them. He will give that rain if they obey His commandments. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses is a picture of the Teacher for righteousness (verse 23; Deu 11:13-14). Grain, new wine and oil, the three products of the land that together represent the full blessing, will be overflowing. All this thanks to the rain streams that the LORD will give, each at his appointed time.

### Joel 2:25 | Restoration

*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.*

That’s God! Once His people have converted to Him, He will compensate them for what they have missed all these years because of His discipline. God does not keep the blessing to Himself; He is the God Who distributes blessing, provided that the conditions He has set are met. He can only give

blessing where things happen according to His will. Even if a person or a people are stubborn, He is able to make them act according to His will. That is how God always does it.

It is in itself a blessing if, after a rebellious life, a person comes to the acknowledgment that God has to judge that rebellious life. This acknowledgment is sufficient for God to give new life. That new life is the life of God Himself. Then God shows how many blessings He has in His heart to give to those who are so connected to Him through new life. Everything that has been said and done in rebellion against God has only done harm. Conversion has put this to an end. After Israel's conversion in the future, they will be allowed to take possession of all the promised blessings.

How many years of our life have been consumed by locusts? Self-sufficiency, frivolity, waste of time, talent and opportunity, slowness, laziness, mixed and evil motives, hidden sin, they all played the role of locust. It made sure that there was no power to live for God and enjoy fellowship with Him. There was also no power to testify to those around us Who the Lord Jesus is for us. But God wants to forgive and give us a hopeful future again. Moreover, He wants to give back what the locust has eaten.

The Lord Jesus did the same with Peter. After Peter has denied the Lord (Mt 26:69-75) the Lord restored him and entrusts him with the care of His sheep (Jn 21:15-17). He also did it with Paul. After Paul caused devastation in the church of Christ and the Lord has met him, He makes him a builder of the church. Paul has built both in the preaching of the gospel and in teaching the doctrine (1Tim 1:12-14).

This is how the Lord wants to act in our lives. It begins with the removal from our lives of everything that is more important than Christ. We must condemn the things we do not do for Him, especially the confession and forsaking of sins (Pro 28:13) that we still cherish. Then we will see that we have access to "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" hidden in Christ (Col 2:3).

### **Joel 2:26 | Praise for the LORD**

*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.*

It is striking how, when it comes to the blessing of God, it is always spoken of abundance and satisfaction. If the damage suffered is made good by the LORD, subsequently His people have enough to eat again. Then they will express their gratitude by praising the name of the LORD, their God in worship. That is the ultimate goal of all God does with and for His people, both in Israel and in the church.

Every redemption, both of a person and of a people, will lead to the exclamation: "This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes" (Psa 118:23). This wonder could happen by the contents of the verse before it: "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner [stone]" (Psa 118:22). This is the cause of the worship of the wonder. The Lord Jesus was rejected by men, but made by God the basis for His work. The wonder of redemption is made possible by what the Lord Jesus did on the cross.

Also all the earthly blessings that Israel will receive are due to that work. The natural blessings will have a spiritual effect because one will honor and thank the LORD as the Processor of them.

### **Joel 2:27 | Knowing Where and Who the LORD Is**

*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.*

The "knowing" of this verse is a knowing by experience. They become aware, they notice, that the LORD is in their midst. The answer to the prayer of verse 17 and the answer of the LORD in the salvation from need can be seen in Israel's renewed relationship with the LORD. When God says "that I am the LORD your God", He shows the exclusive privilege of Israel. He became the LORD their God because He delivered them out of Egypt (Exo 20:2; Deu 5:6).

The addition "and there is no other" (Deu 4:35; Isa 45:5) emphasizes the previous statement. This is necessary because Israel, in its needs, often has

turned to other gods. In doing that they have always been ashamed and were made ashamed, something they have never experienced in their relation with God and that they will never experience forevermore. Then there will be no more room for the mocking question: 'Where is their God?'

### **Joel 2:28 | Blessing for the People**

*28 "It will come about after this  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;  
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
Your old men will dream dreams,  
Your young men will see visions.*

In the Hebrew Bible verses 28-32 form a separate chapter (Joel 3). Joel 3 in our Bible is there Joel 4. This division into four chapters is also maintained in other translations.

Until now it has been a material and, moreover a temporary blessing. It concerns the restoration of Israel in the enjoyment of the blessing of former days. This fact is based on grace, a grace that prevents the blessing from being lost again. Now the prophet is going to speak about the spiritual blessings that the Messiah, the Christ, will bring to His people. In this all nations, who have accepted Him, will share. For God will pour out His Spirit from heaven "on all mankind".

"Pouring out" refers to the abundantly rich extent with which the Spirit is given (Isa 32:15a). This will happen "after" the destruction of the Assyrians. The destruction of the last hostile powers of Israel and the outpouring of the Spirit are the last events recorded (Eze 39:29), before the prophet Ezekiel describes the temple and the land during the realm of peace (Ezekiel 40-48).

Peter quotes these verses in Joel 2 in Acts 2 without saying that it is the fulfillment of this prophecy (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21). This indeed is not the case. He refers to Joel 2 because what happens on Pentecost has the same character as what Joel announces. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is something reminiscent of what Joel said.

We can say that what happens on Pentecost is a pre-fulfillment of the prophecy, not the fulfillment itself. The fulfillment of what Joel says will



take place after what he prophesied in the preceding verses has been fulfilled. The word “after” in the first line of verse 28 shows that there is a chronological order with the preceding verses.

Peter’s main purpose in quoting this verse from Joel is to make it clear to the Jews that this wondrous event that takes place so suddenly in their midst is fully confirmed by what Joel said about the outpouring of the Spirit. But the outpouring that takes place in Peter’s days is not the full accomplishment of the event announced by Joel.

The Holy Spirit comes to earth on the day of Pentecost. Through His coming the church is formed which He will continue to form. This outpouring takes place to form a people for heaven. Therefore He is still on earth. What Joel writes about can only take place when the enemies of Israel are defeated and the people themselves dwell in their land.

“All mankind” does not mean ‘all people living then’. It indicates that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not an event limited to the Jews. Pentecost also makes that clear. It is not that God allows all the converted to speak the Jewish language, but He allows the Jews to speak the languages of those who are scattered among the Gentiles. This is a special testimony of grace that goes out to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are not incorporated into the Jewish people, but as Gentiles they participate in the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

All the different languages are the result of God’s judgment of the people because of their arrogant plan to form their own unity by building the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). But now the grace of God goes out to them as well and He lifts up the judgment of the confusion of languages by the wonder of speaking in languages. Language is no longer a barrier.

The working of the Spirit Who has been poured out manifests itself in prophecy. On the day of Pentecost this is shown in speaking in languages “of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:11). It seems that speaking in languages is a form of prophecy here, because through this speaking and the explanation given by Peter, people are touched in the heart and many repent (Acts 2:37,41).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit as a gift is reserved only for persons with a special place in God’s people, such as kings and prophets. That the whole

people will prophesy has remained a wish expressed by Moses (Num 11:29). This wish of Moses has become a promise of the LORD with Joel. Sons and daughters will prophesy. For this a life inspired by the Spirit is necessary. Only thereby one is receptive to divine revelations. This will be the case for all who will enter the realm of peace. Prophesying is speaking from the presence of God with knowledge of His will. God will make known His will to the elderly through dreams and to young men through visions.

The difference between ‘dreams’ and ‘visions’ is that in dreams things are seen in sleep, whereas with visions this may not be the case. Visions are also more about what is seen, the appearance. We find more often in Scripture that God makes His will known through dreams (Job 33:14-18; Gen 20:3,6; Mt 1:20; 2:12-22) and visions (Gen 15:1; 46:2; 1Sam 3:1,15). The connection between prophecies and dreams and visions is evident in what the LORD says to Aaron and Miriam after they spoke against Moses: “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream” (Num 12:6).

### **Joel 2:29 | The Spirit on All**

29 *“Even on the male and female servants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*

As has already been mentioned, in the Old Testament we do not see the Spirit generally using every member of the people. He performs His work mainly through kings, priests and prophets. This will be different in the future. Then all layers of the people, even male servants and female servants, receive this gift. There will be no distinction according to gender, age or social status. The elderly, whose strength is diminished or even gone, like the young, who have little or no experience in the things of God, will receive revelations from Him in dreams and visions.

### **Joel 2:30-31 | Wonders**

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.*

In the literal sense, the Spirit will eventually be poured out on all mankind the moment the Assyrians and all enemies are defeated and the LORD has placed His people back in His land. The wonders mentioned in this verse will precede that event. Although Peter does quote these verses in Acts 2, these wonders do not directly follow the outpouring of the Spirit. This is because Israel as a nation did not convert, but was (and still is) disobedient. If they had converted, “that great and awesome day of the LORD” would have come immediately. The LORD would have judged the enemies both inside and outside of Israel in favor of His people. His performance would have been accompanied by the phenomena mentioned here. Now that day is still to come. That is why these phenomena are still future. They will certainly take place after the church has been raptured (Rev 6:12-17).

Under the sixth seal mentioned in Revelation 6 judgments there are judgments that are very similar to what Joel says. All judgments that take place from Revelation 6 onwards are included in that “great and awesome day of the LORD”. They are paving the way for the return of Christ to the earth to establish His realm of peace and righteousness.

### **Joel 2:32 | Survivors**

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.*

In that time of great distress, in which what is mentioned in verses 30-31 takes place, salvation for everyone who sees his hopeless situation is only possible by calling upon the Name of the LORD. He who approaches Him in trusting faith does not perish, but is saved. In Romans 10 this verse is quoted and declared generally applicable for the proclamation of the gospel (Rom 10:13). With respect to the gospel there is no distinction

in judgment nor in the offering of salvation. It is available to everyone. Throughout all the centuries, salvation can only be found in faith in the Lord Jesus. He is the LORD.

Here in Joel, salvation is also connected to Jerusalem and Zion, for that is the place from which the Lord Jesus will reign (cf. Oba 1:17). There He dwells; with Him everyone is safe. All who are called by the LORD will go there. Here we find the remnant that is saved. A remnant is “a remnant according to [God’s] gracious choice” (Rom 11:5; 9:27). Both sides are true and needy. On the one hand there is the call to call upon the Name of the LORD to be saved. On the other hand, only those who are called by the LORD are saved.

It is the same today. “God is now declaring to men that all [people] everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). This command should not be invalidated by saying that you cannot repent, but that God must do so and that it only happens when you are chosen. Then you simply put the Word of God aside and make any preaching of the gospel a useless activity. At the same time God is declared a liar. After all, He is Someone Who says things that are not true. He asks something of man that he cannot do. But God is not like that! When He asks something of man, He also gives the strength to do it. That’s God! At the same time, it is also true that someone who has converted can only say this because he is chosen.

You can compare it with an invitation above the door of a house. It says that anyone can come in and get something. Whoever actually does so, reads above the door on the inside: Chosen one. God knows who will actually accept His invitation to be saved. But these two sides of the truth must never be played off against each other. The gospel must be preached to all people without distinction, while the election is a truth that all believers may embrace with great gratitude.

## Joel 3

### **Introduction**

This chapter gives a complete picture of the events of the last days. First the LORD will deliver His people from their enemies. In a way only God can do, He will bring the enemies together and make them appear together before His judgment seat. He will ensure that every crime committed by Israel's enemies against His people will receive just retribution (verses 1-16a).

While the enemies are judged, the LORD will be a hiding place for His people. They will live safely with Him (verses 16b-17). After the exercise of punishment of the nations there will come a time of abundant blessing for Israel (verses 18-20). The center from which all blessing comes is the LORD Who will dwell on Zion (verse 21). This also ensures that the blessing will continue.

### **Joel 3:1 | The Fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem Restored**

*1 "For behold, in those days and at that time,  
When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,*

Over the centuries, Judah and Jerusalem have been trampled, languished and exterminated. Time and again other peoples have taken possession of them. Since May 14, 1948, the state of Israel has arisen, but the pressure of the nations is great and so is their dependence on the United States. It is not yet a people that expects it from the LORD. It still relies on its own strength and the strength of its allies.

This acting according to their own insight and the increased pressure will lead them to accept the Antichrist, who comes in his own name and presents himself as Messiah (Jn 5:43b). They will place their hopes in him. The deliverance is expected from him. However, it will be in vain. The nations will go to Jerusalem and besiege the city. The situation becomes totally hopeless, especially for the faithful. The faithful will be threatened in that

“time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer 30:7) by enemies from outside and also by their apostate contemporaries who are following the antichrist.

But then the Lord Jesus will come from heaven to set them free. With His appearance, the final turning point in the history of Judah and Jerusalem has arrived. The turn in the fate of Judah and Jerusalem is brought when the need is greatest. After that the time of peace and blessing immediately begins. The following verses show what the LORD is going to do to make that time dawn.

The captivity of Judah and Jerusalem and the scattering of the ten tribes still continues. The captivity of Judah and Jerusalem is understood to mean that although there is a state of their own, they are not really free. They are hand and foot tied to the support of the United States, and good relations with the European Union are also essential. Although the Israel of the ten tribes is not mentioned here, they too will share in the results of the Lord Jesus’ actions. They too will be brought back to the land.

### **Joel 3:2 | God Judges the Nations**

*2 I will gather all the nations  
And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.  
Then I will enter into judgment 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.*

In Joel 2, the plea for Israel is to ask the LORD to spare His people what the nations will say when He delivers them to reproach (Joel 2:17). They use the words “Your people” and “Your inheritance” there. Here the LORD takes over these words as it were and speaks of “My people” and “My inheritance”. What the nations have done to God’s people and inheritance is the charge against them here.

The scattering of God’s people and the division of God’s land is an affront to the property of God. The nations that have taken hold of His people and His inheritance are gathered together by the LORD. He will show them that He has not forgotten all the injustice done to His people and His inheritance. The nations will be requited according to what they have done

to God's people. We also see this in Matthew 25 where the criterion for judgment is also the attitude taken towards the brothers of the Lord (Mt 25:40,45).

The trial takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat. How God will get the nations there is described in verses 9-12. Jehoshaphat means 'Yahweh judges' or 'the scepter of Yahweh', or 'Yahweh pronounces justice' or 'Yahweh is Judge'. In the valley with that name, He takes legal action with the nations for His people who were scattered by them, and about His land they have divided.

Where the valley of Jehoshaphat lies is not known. It is unlikely that this is the valley of Beracah, where King Jehoshaphat defeated the enemy (2Chr 20:25-26). That is not near Jerusalem. Since the final judgment will be near Jerusalem, this valley must be somewhere near Jerusalem. Thought has been given to the Kidron Valley, which lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. That is narrow, but possibly it will be widened by the splitting of the Mount of Olives (Zec 14:4). A valley is more often the place where judgment takes place (Isa 22:1,5; Eze 39:11).

### Joel 3:3 | People as Merchandise

3 *"They have also cast lots for My people,  
Traded a boy for a harlot  
And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.*

Here we see another charge. The nations divided among themselves the Judeans who were taken captive in the occupation of Jerusalem by lot and treated them as merchandise (cf. Jdg 5:30; Oba 1:11; Est 3:7). In this way, the nations have treated Israel with appalling disregard for human dignity. They have not sold their 'slaves' to become richer through it, not to benefit from it, but only to fulfill their carnal desires.

The enemies of Israel have taken advantage of foreign domination by appropriating the riches and land of Israel. And the conquerors have handed the inhabitants over to the enemies in order to satisfy their lowest passions. They have taken what is God's in order to enjoy themselves. They have paid the services of a harlot with a Jewish boy.

What Joel describes here has taken place regularly throughout history, among other occasions after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70. Nearly one and a half million inhabitants of Jerusalem and the surrounding area died in that terrible battle. More than one hundred thousand Jews were captured.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus describes that Titus acted with these Jews as follows: 'All who were under the age of 17 were sold publicly; of the remaining, some were killed instantly, some were sent to the Egyptian mines to work there (which was worse than death), some were withheld to fight with wild animals as a public attraction in the main cities; only the greatest and most beautiful were spared to join the triumphant march to Rome.'

That was how it was then. Jews were sold for a bit of barley. That is how thousands were disposed of. And so the history of this people has been through the ages. Not so long ago they were transported en masse as beasts from all parts of Europe to concentration camps to be gassed there. And history is not over yet. The "time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7) is yet to come, a time that has not been there from the beginning of the world until then (Mt 24:21). But also the day will come when the LORD will avenge all the evil that has been done to His people.

### **Joel 3:4 | Israel, the Apple of God's Eye**

*4 Moreover, what are you to Me, O Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? Are you rendering Me a recompense? But if you do recompense Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your recompense on your head*

The neighboring peoples of Israel – Tyre, Sidon and Philistia – are the first to be mentioned. These traders are asked the question: "What are you to Me?" Perhaps a better translation would be: "What have you done to Me?" Thus, the calling to account of these peoples for what they have done to the LORD by acting in this way with Israel comes is clearly heard. It is a question that falls from heaven like a bomb on the exploiters of Israel. From this it becomes clear how much the LORD identifies Himself with His people. What has been done to them is done to Him. This is how Zechariah also speaks about it (Zec 2:8b). Here we see of how great significance this is to the LORD.



When Paul was still called Saul, the question also came to him from heaven: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). And what was he doing? Persecuting the church. Also there is the identification of the Lord in heaven with His people on earth. There has always been a connection between the Lord in heaven and His people on earth. That is the case in the Old Testament when it comes to the connection between the LORD in heaven and Israel as His covenant people on earth. This is also the case in the New Testament when it comes to the connection between the Lord Jesus as Head in heaven and the church as His body on earth.

If the nations then want to attack the apple of God’s eye, Israel, and thus God Himself, they will receive the right recompense. The evil done to Israel will end up on their own heads. What the nations show towards Israel is actually the ancient hatred of Satan against God. Satan always wants to destroy what is God’s and he wants to prevent God’s plans from being carried out.

His greatest hatred is Christ. Satan has always wanted to prevent Him from being born. The history of the book of Esther is a telling example of this. In that book we come across Haman, the hater of the Jews, who is out to kill all the Jews, to exterminate the race. Haman is pre-eminently a type, an example, of Satan and his intentions.

### **Joel 3:5 | The LORD Robbed**

*5 Since you have taken My silver and My gold, brought My precious treasures to your temples*

That taking away need not only refer to silver and gold and valuables from the temple, but can also refer to private property, the precious possessions of the Judeans. All possessions of the Judeans are as much as the land under the ownership of the LORD (Hag 2:9). Thus all that has been taken away from them is taken away from the LORD. The injustice affects Him personally.

### **Joel 3:6 | Far From Their Land**

*6 and sold the sons of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their territory.*

What Tyre and Sidon have done to the people is still valid. They are known to have had overseas trade relations with the Greeks. They are said to have traded with the Greeks in human beings (Eze 27:13). By acting in this way with God's people, they have not only made merchandise out of them. That is bad enough. But by transporting them so far away, they have also turned them into displaced, religious and socially uprooted people for whom it is practically impossible to return to their homeland.

### **Joel 3:7 | God Sees His Own Everywhere**

*7 behold, I am going to arouse them from the place where you have sold them, and return your recompense on your head.*

No matter how far the slave traders have taken them, the LORD has not lost sight of them. He will bring them back. This is a great encouragement for all the scattered. Wherever they are, the LORD sees them. This is also true for today. No matter how lonely a child of God may feel, the Lord knows where he or she is and He is with him or her. He achieves His purpose with every life that yearns to fulfill God's purpose with that life.

How He will bring the scattered back from the places where they were sold, is not mentioned here. But His promise is sufficient. Not only does He not lose sight of His own, He also does not lose sight of the enemies of His people – and therefore His enemies. He will, however, give them the recompense they deserve for the mistreatment of His people (cf. Jdg 1:7).

### **Joel 3:8 | The LORD Exercises Judgment by Judah**

*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," for the LORD has spoken.*

The LORD will deliver the hostile nations into the hand of His people. Through His people He will cause the same evil that has been done to His people, to come down upon those nations as a judgment. Because of this they will experience for themselves what they have done to others. That God will ultimately use His people, that is, the remnant that believes in the Messiah, to discipline their former enemies, we find in more places in Scripture (Oba 1:18; Mic 4:13; Zec 12:5-6; Psa 149:6-9; Est 9:1). Thus it

becomes clear how closely the LORD knows Himself connected with His people.

### Joel 3:9 | Prepare a War

*9 Proclaim this among the nations:  
Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men!  
Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up!*

The pagan nations are called upon to prepare for war, because war is declared. Once more the LORD mobilizes the pagan nations. One more time they may indulge their hatred of Jerusalem. At least that is what the nations feel with this call. In the past the LORD did this to discipline His people if they had deviated from Him. But now He calls the nations for the purpose of judging them. Thus the call to war is in reality a call to their own destruction.

That is why the call has something of secret irony. After all, this time the nations, with their great number and brute force, will only serve to make God's triumph even more glorious. His triumph will shine when they will be ruined just before Jerusalem (Mic 4:11-13). We see the same in Ezekiel 38-39, where the nations are preparing to go to battle against the LORD without realizing that the LORD is pulling them after Himself (Eze 38:4a). He does so in the same way as a peasant holds a bull in check and pulls it along on a ring through its nose.

### Joel 3:10 | Everything Used for the War

*10 Beat your plowshares into swords  
And your pruning hooks into spears;  
Let the weak say, "I am a mighty man."*

The peoples are called to a total war. Nothing else should be important anymore. The normal work is laid down and the tools they use must be converted into war tools (cf. Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3). We can compare this with what happened in the Second World War (1939-1945). At that time, utensils of various metals, especially copper, also had to be handed in for the manufacture of ammunition and other war weapons.

In the final battle for Jerusalem, all available time and materials will be used to bring the final blow to the city. Also the moral will be boosted. Everybody gets the impression that he is a man of steel, a hero, who is able to fight for a certain victory. Even the weakling, who usually avoids fighting, has to let himself be carried away by the enthusiasm of war psychosis. He will pull himself together and say: "I am a mighty man", and then take part in the war.

### **Joel 3:11 | God's Mighty Ones**

*11 Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations,  
And gather yourselves there.  
Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones.*

This verse contains two calls addressed to two different addresses. The first part of the verse is an additional exhortation to the nations to get ready and come to the place where God wants them. According to verses 2,12 this is in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

The second part of the verse seems to be a call from the prophet to God. When the prophet thus in spirit sees the enemies gathered just before Jerusalem, he cries out to the LORD that now the time has come to destroy with His mighty men that whole multitude of enemies. After all, God also has His mighty men. He can bring them down like this. With "Your mighty ones" angels are meant. To bring them down means that they come from heaven. Angels are called "mighty in strength" (Psa 103:20).

### **Joel 3:12 | The Lord as Judge**

*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.*

Considering the contents of the previous verses, we would expect that now the battle starts. But that's not the case. Suddenly the image goes back to that of a legal process, as announced in verse 2. There the LORD is more the Prosecutor, while here, amidst all the agitation of the nations, the image looms up of the majestic rest of the judgment seat on which the

LORD sits. In their march, the gathered pagan peoples walk the Judge in His arms. His verdict is what we read in verse 13.

### Joel 3:13 | The Wine Harvest

*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.*

No matter how great the arrogance of the people who think they are strong, in the end there is the judgment of God. The sickle of God will mow the earth. The picture we see here is reminiscent of the wheat harvest and the wine harvest we read about in Revelation 14 (Rev 14:14-20). There is, also spiritually, a distinction between the two. The wheat harvest means above all judgment that separates the good from the evil. The wine harvest is the exercise of vengeance. The second, the wine harvest, is what we are dealing with here.

The description “and the wine press was trodden outside the city” (Rev 14:20) corresponds to what Joel says. “The city” is the city of Jerusalem. Angels are involved in the harvest (Mt 13:41). Just as the ripe corn is cut off by the scythe of the mowers and the grapes are trampled on by the feet in the wine press, so the nations will be exterminated by the mighty men of God.

### Joel 3:14 | The Valley of Decision

*14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!  
For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.*

“The valley of decision” is where the final verdict, that is, the extermination of the peoples, will be carried out. With that the day of the LORD has come. That day does not imply doom for His people, but gives deliverance from their enemies and the blessing of the LORD.

### Joel 3:15 | Darkened and Faded

*15 The sun and moon grow dark  
And the stars lose their brightness.*

The light of the sun and the moon darkens and the sparkle of the stars fades at the scenes that take place on earth as a result of the dawning of the day of the LORD. It is also possible to think of a symbolic meaning. The celestial bodies are mentioned in creation as lights exercising dominion (Gen 1:16). We can then see sun, moon and stars as pictures of powerful rulers.

When the day of the LORD has come, those rulers will no longer reign as a 'government established by God', as they do now (Rom 13:1-7). They cast off any acknowledgment of God to unite in rebellion against Him (Psa 2:1-3). Darkened and blinded as they are, they rebel and will perish in the valley of decision. Nothing is left of their brilliance and radiance, which have won countless crowds for their cause.

### **Joel 3:16 | The LORD Speaks and Protects**

*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.*

The LORD raises His mighty voice like a lion roars in the forest. He makes His thunder roll as He rises to intervene. If at the raising of His voice the heavens and the earth tremble, what will be the effect on the gathered nations, which are considered by Him "like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales" (Isa 40:15)? Would not they shrivel up completely? The disillusionment must be great.

There they are, at the gates of Jerusalem, ready to take the city. Then they are addressed from the city. Not with a trembling voice, a voice that declares that the city will surrender. The voice they hear, makes them stop breathing. The LORD is in Zion, and those who have escaped are there as well (Joel 2:32). The city offers protection because it is the dwelling place of God. Whoever lives with Him lives in an impregnable fortress and can feel safe and secure.

### **Joel 3:17 | Where God Dwells, It Is Holy**

*17 Then you will know that I am the LORD your God,*

*Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain.  
So Jerusalem will be holy,  
And strangers will pass through it no more.*

Wherever God dwells, it is holy. Zion is a holy mountain and Jerusalem is a sanctuary because He is holy. When He appears to Moses in a bush, the ground is holy (Exo 3:5), and when He appears to Joshua at Jericho, the ground is also holy (Jos 5:15). He has had to leave His sanctuary, which is the temple in Jerusalem, because they have totally profaned His dwelling place (Eze 10:4,18). When He withdraws from Jerusalem, the enemies have free rein (Eze 10:4-22).

The LORD can only dwell with His people again after they have been cleansed of their sins. Then no stranger will go through it again to profane the city, just as in the new Jerusalem, which is above, nothing will enter that which is unclean (Rev 21:27). No one will be there except those who have the right to be there.

### **Joel 3:18 | Abundance**

*18 And 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.*

From this verse there comes a benevolent rest in the hitherto impetuous prophetic book. The battle is over, the judgment has been carried out, peace and security are guaranteed. The expression “in that day” stands for the time when the realm of peace has arrived. The abundance of drinks – wine, milk and water – contrasts sharply with the drought and its consequences that we see in Joel 1 (Joel 1:5,10).

The prophet describes these blessings from high to low. First he sees the high mountain slopes with vines, then the lower hills with the milk-producing flocks, and finally the valley of Shittim that will be filled with the descending waters. The abundance of wine is a sign of the overwhelming joy of life in the realm of peace (Psa 104:15; Jdg 9:13; Ecc 9:7; 10:19). Where

the LORD dwells is a source of blessing that first springs forth and then brings blessing wherever it flows (Eze 47:1-12; Psa 65:10). The LORD Himself is the only spring of every blessing.

As we see this scene we are reminded of the state of paradise before the fall in sin took place. The realm of peace is, in a sense, a continuation of paradise. However, maintaining its enjoyment no longer depends on the first man, the first Adam or his offspring, but on the second Man, the last Adam. He controls His realm in a perfect way, so that for a thousand years without interruption there is a situation of peace, rest and blessing.

Perhaps we can think of Shittim in the land of Moab (Num 25:1; 33:49). That Shittim is the last camp of Israel before they cross the Jordan and enter the promised land. If it is that place, it may be to represent God's promise of a new time of blessing. God's people then stand, as it were, again in Shittim, that is, on the threshold of a new journey across the Jordan and a new entry into the land. This new entry applies literally to the scattered and expelled (verses 2,6). The purpose of this new entry, both literally and spiritually, is Zion, where the LORD dwells in the midst of His people.

### **Joel 3:19 | Egypt and Edom**

*19 Egypt will become a waste,  
And Edom will become a desolate wilderness,  
Because of the violence done to the sons of Judah,  
In whose land they have shed innocent blood.*

In addition to an exceptional fertility, there is also political security. The enjoyment of the blessing of verse 18 is only possible if Judah can live without being threatened by enemies. Therefore they must be eliminated. Egypt and Edom represent all hostile nations, but not only that. The second part of the verse indicates concrete actions that show the enmity of these nations. They are acts of violence in which they have shed innocent blood.

Egypt has often crossed Israel in battle with Assyria and has caused terrible sufferings there. Edom has taken every opportunity to add to the suffering Israel has experienced from enemies. In his prophecy, the prophet Obadiah speaks at length about what Edom has done to God's people.



**Joel 3:20 | The Contrast**

*20 But Judah will be inhabited forever  
And Jerusalem for all generations.*

The destruction of Egypt and Edom is not an end in itself, but paves the way for the purpose that God has with His people. Once the enemies have been eliminated, Judah and Jerusalem will remain forever, to all generations. It is a contrast: Egypt and Edom perish, Judah resurrects and continues to exist in unthreatened security.

**Joel 3:21 | The LORD Lives Forever on Zion**

*21 And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged,  
For the LORD dwells in Zion.*

Through His radical punishment of the enemies of Judah, who shed much blood of the Judeans, the LORD shows that it is innocent blood. That is why they have deserved the severe punishment with which He has waited until now, but which He will now carry out anyway. By judging the nations involved, the LORD will take away the blood guilt which they have loaded upon themselves, because they have persecuted God's people.

The second part of the verse is a repetition of the contents of verse 17. This repetition places great emphasis on God's continued dwelling in the midst of His people, because that can only guarantee all promised blessings and the survival of Judah.

The end of the book of Joel is reminiscent of the end of history, the moment when time passes into eternity. We read about that in Revelation 21 (Rev 21:1-8). There it is also written that God will dwell with the people (Rev 21:3).

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