**Joel Commentary**

**Joel Chapter 1**

Joe 1:5

**“for it will be cut off.”** The Hebrew text more literally reads that the wine has been cut off, but that is a prophetic perfect idiom, expressing a future event as a past action. The idiom is used to express the certainty of something that will happen and also for emotional impact. The destruction foretold in Joel is a future event, but a certain one.

Joe 1:6

**“For a nation.”** In this context, the “nation” is a nation of locusts. There may have been an actual locust plague around the time Joel wrote, but commentators agree that in Joel the locusts represent the attacking army that will attack God’s people, most specifically in the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation.

Joe 1:7

**“my vine...my fig tree.”** Israel was God’s land and the produce in Israel and the vines and figs were gifts of God to be stewarded by humans. But God’s people sinned against Him so now judgment will come on the land, even on the gifts God has graciously given to humankind.

Joe 1:9

**“the house of Yahweh.”** That is, the Temple in Jerusalem.

Joe 1:12

**“the apricot tree.”** Although many English versions read “apple tree,” that is not likely. The apricot tree is the tree that best meets all the requirements in the Bible for this tree.[[1]](#footnote-25145)

Joe 1:13

**“the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld.”** The grains and vines are withered and dry, so there is no grain or drink offering available from them.

Joe 1:15

**“it will come as destruction from *El* Shaddai.”** The “day” here in Joel 1:15 that will come with destruction is the Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”) when the earth and the people on it will suffer great tribulation. See commentary on Isaiah 13:9.

Joe 1:17

**“The seeds have shriveled under their shovels.”** The Hebrew of this line is unclear, and many suggestions as to how it can be translated have been given. Examples of other suggestions include “The seeds shrivel under their clods” (NJB) and “the seeds die in the parched ground” (NLT). In any case, the picture is one of the devastation of the crops.

**Joel Chapter 2**

Joe 2:1

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet. In this context, it would be blown to warn the people of a coming army.

**“for the Day of Yahweh comes.”** See commentary on Joel 1:15.

Joe 2:2

**“a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.”** This phrase is also found in Zephaniah 1:15.

**“a large and strong people *comes*.”** Although many armies have attacked Israel since the time of Joel, this verse describes the army that will attack Israel in the Great Tribulation.

Joe 2:11

**“his camp is very large.”** This refers to the large size of the army.

**“survive it.”** The Hebrew is “endure it,” but we think of “enduring” something as being able to put up with it. In this case, it means “survive it” or “live through it.” The vast majority of mankind will die in the Tribulation of the Day of the Lord.

Joe 2:14

**“Who knows.”** God had pronounced destruction upon Israel, but that did not mean that there was no chance He would change His mind, or at least some of the severe consequences, if His people would repent and return to Him. That certainly happened in the case of Jonah and Nineveh. If that did happen, instead of total destruction, God would “leave behind” people and a harvest that would allow for the worship of Yahweh to continue with grain and drink offerings.

**“He may turn and change his mind.”** The Hebrew word translated by the phrase “change his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and in this context, it means to back off of the consequences that had already started and were said to continue coming. God sometimes changes His mind in response to what people do, as we see here.

[For more information on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Joe 2:15

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet. In this context, the shofar is blown to call for an assembly of the people, whereas in Joel 2:1 it was blown as a warning of the approaching army. The shofar was blown for different reasons, so the reader has to be sensitive to the context to understand why it was blown.

Joe 2:16

**“groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom.

Joe 2:17

**“weep between the porch and the altar.”** The “porch” is at the front of the Temple, which faced east, so the priests would be in the Temple courtyard between the Holy Place and the altar in the courtyard of the Temple.

**“Where is their god.”** The word “god” is lowercase because this was the pagan nations speaking and they would have thought of the God of Israel as just another “god” of a nation, like Chemosh was the chief god of the Moabites or Marduk was the chief god of the Babylonians.

Joe 2:18

**“Yahweh will be jealous.”** The context indicates that the verb, which is normally a past tense, is referring to the future, which is common in biblical prophecy (cf. CJB, KJV, NASB, NLT).

Joe 2:20

**“the eastern sea.”** That is, the Dead Sea.

**“the western sea.”** That is, the Mediterranean Sea.

Joe 2:23

**“the former rain and the latter rain.”** There was one rainy season in Israel, and it usually started in mid to late October and ended in April. The rains at the start of the season got the planting going and were called the “former” rains. The rains at the end of the wet season allowed the grain to come to maturity and were called the “latter” rains.

[For more on the rainy season and the former and latter rain, see commentary on James 5:7.]

Joe 2:27

**“there is no other.”** There is no other God but Yahweh. The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and the REV commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Joe 2:28

**“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy.”** There is a lot in this verse that we can learn about the gift of holy spirit that God promised to give to His people in the future. One is that the spirit would be “poured out,” that is, given in abundance. This is in contrast to how holy spirit was given in the Old Testament and Gospel when it was given in differing ways to different people (cf. 2 Kings 2:9-10). Another is that the spirit would be poured out “on all flesh.” Throughout the Old Testament and Gospels, God’s gift of holy spirit was only given to select people, like the prophets and some kings. However, what we learn from this verse, which is clarified by Christ, is that “all flesh” refers to all those who believe (cf. John 7:38-39). Also, we learn from this verse that the gift of holy spirit was not “just there,” but it empowered people to prophesy and see visions and thus have spiritual empowerment from God. The Old Testament has quite a lot to say about the holy spirit that God promised to give and now has given to the Church.

[For more about the holy spirit that God promised in the Old Testament to give in abundance in the future but had not given by the time of Christ, see commentary on John 7:39. For more about the gift of holy spirit being “upon” people in the Old Testament and “in” people after the Day of Pentecost, and the differences between holy spirit in the Old Testament and after Pentecost, see commentary on Eph. 1:13, “promised holy spirit.” For more about the holy spirit being the gift of God and not a “Person” called “the Holy Spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more on the holy spirit and New Birth, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.” For more on Christians being part of the New Covenant, see commentary on 2 Cor. 3:6, “new covenant.”]

**Joel Chapter 3**

Joe 3:2

**“I will gather all nations.”** In this context, “all nations” are the nations that are enemies of Israel and of God. They will be gathered for war (Rev. 16:12-16) and gathered for judgment.

**“Valley of Jehoshaphat.”** For more on the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see commentary on Joel 3:12.

Joe 3:3

**“have cast lots for my people.”** Occasionally when large numbers of people were captured at one time the captive slaves would be gambled for to decide who got which slave or slaves. That apparently happened in some of the captivities of the people of Judah.

**“have traded a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for wine.”** In the ancient world when a nation conquered a foreign nation or even a large city, the people were usually taken as slaves. It sometimes happened that immediately after a conquest there were so many slaves that they were sold for ridiculous prices. That is depicted here: when God’s people were conquered and enslaved by foreign nations a boy was sold for the price of a prostitute, and a girl for some wine.

Joe 3:4

**“and what would you *do* to me.”** The sentence is unfinished in Hebrew, and is thus an anacoluthon, showing God’s great emotion at His people being conquered, mistreated, and scattered.[[2]](#footnote-23782) The verb is supplied in the REV for clarity of meaning.

**“Are you repaying me *for something I have done*?”** God asks the Phoenicians and the Philistines if their evil treatment of Israel is the result of some perceived wrong that Israel has done to them. The expanded translation in the REV follows the pattern in many English versions that expand the verse for clarity (cf. ESV, NAB, NIV, RSV, TNK). One of the lessons of this verse is that hurting God’s people is hurting God, and God will repay. Similarly, in the Church today, hurting Christians is hurting Christ (Acts 9:4).

**“I will swiftly and speedily return your repayment on your own head.”** The perceived justification for attacking and hurting Israel is not actual justification, and God says He will avenge His people. Evil people do their evil without considering that there will be a Judgment Day in the future, but there will be and things will not go well for the wicked.

Joe 3:5

**“my silver...my gold.”** Just as the grapevines and fig trees were God’s in Joel 1:7, here we see that the gold and silver in Judah, and especially in the Temple, belonged to God. God’s enemies had killed the vines and trees and taken the valuables home to their nations. But God will gather those enemies to Judah (the Valley of Jehoshaphat) and “judge” them, which in this context involves both killing them and then judging them on Judgment Day (Joel 1:2, 12).

Joe 3:6

**“people of Judah.”** The Hebrew text reads “the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem,” which in this context is idiomatic for the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

**“to the Greeks.**” The Hebrew text reads, “to the sons of the Greeks,” which is a Hebrew idiom for “the Greeks,” and many English versions read that way.

**“remove them far from their territory.”** Selling Jews to faraway places often ensured that they would never be able to return to Israel, even if they were freed from slavery.

Joe 3:7

**“and will return your repayment.”** It is important to notice that the Bible does not say it is the Jews who return to take revenge on those who have sold them. Joel 3:7 speaks of two different actions. God will “rouse” His people, and the verb can mean rouse, stir up, or awaken. Some of God’s people were “roused, stirred up” historically, and went back to Israel, for example, Alexander the Great let many Jews return to Israel. Other Jews died in captivity but will be “awakened” at the resurrection and return to the land of Israel (see commentary on Jer. 32:37).

Joe 3:8

**“I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the people of Judah.”** This did not happen wholesale, at one specific time, but did occur over time. Interestingly, Alexander the Great and his successors set many Jews that were in their conquered lands free and allowed them to return to Israel. In contrast, Greek rulers enslaved many people in their conquered lands and sold them. For example, in 345 BC, Antiochus III sold the people of the Phoenician port city of Sidon into slavery, and in 332 BC, Alexander the Great enslaved the people of Tyre and Gaza. The close proximity of those cities to Israel would have generally ensured that at least some of those slaves were sold to Jews, who in turn would sell them to people with whom they traded.[[3]](#footnote-27639)

Joe 3:9

**“Prepare for war!”** In Joel 3:9-11 the nations, who have been so quick to fight and conquer Israel, are now challenged to fight with God. The nations are told to “Stir up the mighty men” (v. 9); “Beat your plowblades into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears” (v. 10); and call even the weak man strong (v. 10). Then all the nations around Israel are called to gather together to fight with God (v. 11). But the last sentence of Joel 3:11 changes and addresses God, not the enemy nations. “Cause your mighty ones to come down there, O Yahweh.” So in Joel 3:9-11, the nations are summoned together to fight with God.

However, the last sentence of Joel 3:11 is a complete change. Someone, likely the prophet although the speaker is not identified, requests that God send down His “mighty ones” (or “strong ones,” “warriors,” “heroes”) to fight this army of unbelievers. This is clearly a foreshadowing of the Battle of Armageddon when God’s heavenly army will come down from heaven and fight and destroy the army on earth that Satan has gathered (Rev. 16:12-16; 19:11-21). This idea is reinforced by the fact that after the battle in Joel 3:11, the Judgment is portrayed in the next verse, Joel 3:12.

Joe 3:10

**“Beat your plowblades into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears.”** This is an ironic twist of the statement made in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 that in the future Millennial Kingdom of Christ, God’s people will beat their swords into plowblades and their spears into pruning hooks because there will be no more war.

Here in Joel 3:10, God is preparing for the Final Battle, Armageddon, and the judgment that will follow, and so he calls all of God’s enemies to Israel (represented by the “Valley of Jehoshaphat.” The name “Jehoshaphat” means “Yahweh has judged”). Here in Joel, God gathers His enemies to Israel so he can fight and destroy them, but in the book of Revelation it is demons sent out by the Devil, the Antichrist (the “Beast”), and the false prophet that gather the people of the world to Israel to fight against God (Rev. 16:12-16). Revelation is literal, God only gathers His enemies in the sense that He stands for righteousness, obedience, and love and His enemies hate that and rebel against it (this is known as the “idiom of permission,” see commentary on Exod. 4:21).

Joe 3:11

**“Hurry and come.”** This may be the speaker (perhaps the prophet) exhorting God’s enemies to hurry to the battle, or it may even be the enemies exhorting each other to hurry, but in any case, the enemies of God are being exhorted to come to battle with God and His people. The enemy would be bloodthirsty and arrogant in their false confidence of victory and domination, but they are hurrying to their doom because he who fights with God fights a losing fight. The Egyptians did not win at the Exodus, the Canaanites did not win at the time of Joshua, and the enemy will not win at the Battle of Armageddon, their dead bodies will be food for the carrion birds (Rev. 19:19-21).

**“Cause your mighty ones to come down there, O Yahweh.”** The subject shifts to someone, perhaps the prophet, speaking directly to God and requesting that He send down His mighty ones. This will happen when the heavenly armies come down and fight the Battle of Armageddon.

[For more context of this, see commentary on Joel 3:9.]

Joe 3:12

**“the Valley of Jehoshaphat.”** The word “Jehoshaphat” means “Yahweh judges” (or “Yahweh has judged” or “Yahweh will judge”). This valley is not identified in Scripture. It is called “the Valley of Jehoshaphat” here in Joel 3:12 and also in Joel 3:2 which are the only times the phrase is used in the Bible or in secular history. It is called “the Valley of Decision” in Joel 3:14. It has long been thought that the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” is the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem, partly based on Zechariah 14:2. “Christian tradition made this identification at least as early as the fourth century AD, perhaps beginning with the Bordeaux Pilgrim’s account.”[[4]](#footnote-14317) The Bordeaux Pilgrim account is from AD 333-334). However, Eusebius (c. 260-339) identified it as the Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem, but the famous Saint Jerome (AD 347-420), who lived in Bethlehem and did most of the translation of what is now known as the Latin Vulgate, identified it as the Kidron Valley, and his opinion became generally accepted Christian tradition. Nevertheless, even though many scholars have followed Jerome, there are good reasons to understand that the location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat is outside of the Jerusalem area.

For one thing, it must be remembered that from quite early on in Christian history the actual way that the End Times events will occur was lost. This was no doubt due in part to the persecution and killing of Christians that started officially in AD 64 with Nero and continued to AD 312, and many knowledgeable Christian leaders were killed in that persecution. It was also due in part to the Greek concept of the “eternal soul” coming into Christianity both from the converted Greeks (such as Augustine) and Greek-speaking Jews who had been raised on the Septuagint and not the Hebrew text. In those early centuries the concept that believers who had died would “be in heaven forever” replaced the clear teaching of Scripture that Christ would come to earth, conquer it, and set up his kingdom on earth (note Jesus’ teaching, “the meek will inherit the earth” in Matt. 5:5).

Once the concept of Christ coming to earth and fighting the Battle of Armageddon and conquering the earth was lost, then the meaning of the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) was lost too. But the Sheep and Goat Judgment is an essential part of understanding what is going to happen in the future and Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, because the Battle of Armageddon will not kill everyone on the earth. Some people will survive the battle, and with over seven billion people on earth today, those survivors could number in the millions. But all those survivors will not be allowed into Christ’s kingdom because many of them are evil and God-rejectors. So when Christ comes back to earth as king, he will set up a judgment to decide who gets to enter his earthly kingdom and who does not, and that judgment is called the Sheep and Goat Judgment.

The Bible says that once Jesus conquers the earth he will set up his throne and the people who are alive on earth will be gathered before him and judged (Matt. 25:31-32). The exact location of that judgment is not known today, although it might have been known in biblical times. The location of the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” and “Valley of Decision” seems to be “in the wilderness,” as Ezekiel says, “I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face” (Ezek. 20:35). The place of judgment cannot be the Kidron Valley or the Valley of Hinnom because Ezekiel 20:38 says it will not be in Israel: “I will purge out from among you those who are rebelling and those who are transgressing against me. I will bring them forth out of the land where they live, but they will not enter into the land of Israel, and you will know that I am Yahweh.” The identification of the Valley of Jehoshaphat as the Kidron Valley has been supported by associating it with Zechariah 14:2, but Zechariah is speaking of the Battle of Armageddon and its effects, not the judgment after the Battle of Armageddon. Even if some of the survivors of Armageddon are in Israel, Ezekiel says they will be brought out from there to the place of judgment (Ezek. 20:38).

So the Sheep and Goat Judgment will be in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but where is that? In taking a close look at the “Valley of Jehoshaphat,” there are some important things we should know. The name “Jehoshaphat” is significant because it can mean “Yahweh will judge,” and it could be the actual historical name of a valley or it could be a symbolic name that is applied to the valley in prophecy because that is where the Sheep and Goat judgment and perhaps other judgments as well, will take place. Also, the Hebrew word translated “valley” in Hebrew is *amaq* (#06010 עֵמֶק), and it can refer to a valley with steep sides, but also it can mean a lowland, open country, or plain. For example, the “Valley of Jezreel” (Josh. 17:16) is a plain many miles wide, but it is bordered by mountains on the north and south. The huge variation in what a “valley” can actually look like means we cannot just go to a topographical map, locate a suitable steep valley, and say that is likely the place of judgment. It might be on a plain, not in what we typically think of as a valley. Another important thing is that in the days of Jehoshaphat, God did indeed judge people in the “wilderness” as Chronicles states.

During the reign of Jehoshaphat the armies of Moab, Ammon, and the area of Edom, attacked Judah (2 Chron. 20:1,10). They came up from the south through the wilderness of Judah to En-gedi, then moved inward toward the hill country of Judah via the ascent of Ziz, a little way north of En-gedi (2 Chron. 20:16). Jehoshaphat’s forces traveled south from Jerusalem and stopped in the wilderness of Tekoa (2 Chron. 20:20), and began to sing and praise, and when they did, the armies of the enemy fought with each other until there was not a man left alive (2 Chron. 20:22-24). So in Jehoshaphat’s situation, his name, “Yahweh will judge” was prophetic because God judged the nations, and furthermore, He did so “in the wilderness,” just as Ezekiel says a coming judgment will be in the wilderness (Ezek. 20:35). It could be that the future judgment in the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” spoken of in Joel will be in the same “valley” (or plain) where the enemies of Judah killed each other as 2 Chronicles 20 records, and it became known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat because of the great victory that occurred there. However, it seems more likely that the place where Christ will set up his throne for the judgment will be in the wilderness and outside of the territory of Israel, as Ezekiel states. In that case, the reason the place is called “the Valley of Jehoshaphat” would be to remind people of God’s victory over His enemies and thus encourage people to obey God. In that sense, God’s judgment on His enemies in the wilderness at the time of Jehoshaphat is typological of the coming Sheep and Goat judgment, which will be in the wilderness and at which time God’s enemies will be destroyed while His followers will be blessed.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on a person’s soul not being an “eternal soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more on dead people being dead and awaiting a resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Joe 3:14

**“Multitudes, multitudes.”** The immediate doubling of the word “multitudes” is the figure of speech epizeuxis, which is used for emphasis. There will be a huge multitude at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:32).

**“the Valley of Decision.”** This is apparently the Valley of Jehoshaphat of Joel 3:2 and 3:12; see commentary on Joel 3:12.

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Joe 3:18

**“a spring will flow out from the house of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “a spring will come forth out of the house,” but it refers to the water flowing out of the Millennial Temple. The water flowing out of the Temple is also mentioned in Ezekiel 47:1-9 and Zechariah 14:8.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“Valley of Acacia *Trees*.”** The Hebrew word for the acacia tree is “shittim,” and many English versions leave the Hebrew untranslated. However, in this context understanding that this is a valley named because of its abundance of acacia trees is important and points to its geographical location. Acacia trees grow in very dry and therefore relatively infertile soil, and that kind of soil is found in Israel in the Arabah, the land that bordered the Dead Sea and northward up the Jordan Valley for some 40 miles. So the river described in Joel 3:18 is also mentioned in Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Zechariah 14:8.

1. See Harold and Alma Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible*, 184-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-25145)
2. Cp. Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentary*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23782)
3. Cp. Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* [NICOT], 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-27639)
4. Merrill Tenney, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. “Jehoshaphat, Valley of.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14317)