



A QUESTION & ANSWER STUDY GUIDE

Bryan Matthew Dockens

JOEL: A QUESTION & ANSWER STUDY GUIDE

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Quotations of Scripture are from the New King James Version.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Who wrote this prophecy?

“The word of Jehovah that came to Joel the son of Pethuel”
(Joel 1:1).

“Joel” means *“Jehovah is God.”* There were several others with this name in Scripture (1st Samuel 8:2; 1st Chronicles 5:4, 8; 7:3; 11:38; 15:7; 27:20), none of whom would have been conflated with *“the son of Pethuel.”* His father’s name is all that can be known of him as a person.

2. To whom is this prophecy addressed?

“Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land!” (Joel 1:2).

The *“land”* under consideration is Judah and Jerusalem (3:1, 6, 8, 16-17, 18-20).

3. When was this book written?

Most Old Testament prophets specified when their message came, but this one did not. Ten of the prophetic books were written *“in the days of [certain] kings”* (Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1-3; Ezekiel 1:1; Daniel 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). Two prophetic books did not specify a time, but addressed foreign nations (Obadiah; Nahum), which helps to narrow down the scope for their timeframes. Jonah the son of Amittai wrote the book bearing his name (Jonah 1:1) and he prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (2nd Kings 14:23, 25). Habakkuk did not specify who was reigning when the prophecy came, but did foretell a destruction and occupation by the *“Chaldeans”* (Habakkuk 1:6), AKA Babylonians, which certainly provides a frame of reference as being near the end of Judah’s monarchy. Malachi, as well, did not indicate who was king when he prophesied, but there was a *“governor”* (Malachi 1:8),

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which points to a post-monarchy time-period. Thus, the book of Joel is unusual among the ancient prophets for its vague timing.

There are some clues, though:

- 1) The very lack of reference to a king strongly suggests either a pre-monarchy or post-monarchy setting. If it is pre-monarchy, then it is altogether unique among the books of prophecy, but this possibility will be ruled out shortly. If it was during the reign of the usurper Athaliah (2nd Kings 11:1-15), then it would stand to reason that she would have been called on to repent, but nothing suggests that at all in the book of Joel.
- 2) Jerusalem had been previously subject to foreign invasion (Joel 3:17), so a post-exilic time is implied.
- 3) This book anticipates a return from captivity (Joel 3:1, 6), which actually has a spiritual application, but that

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might not have been immediately discernible to the initial readers. If they were aware of a physical captivity, though, then they could have been eager for release, even if the spiritual application would have occurred much later. This reference hints at a time period shortly before, during, or after the captivity.

- 4) *“The house of Jehovah”* was standing and useable (Joel 1:9, 13, 14, 16). The temple was built by Solomon (2nd Chronicles 2:1-7:11) in about 960 B.C. It was destroyed (2nd Kings 25:9) at the same time when the last king of Judah was killed (7) and the first post-monarchy governor was installed (22) in 586 B.C. It was rebuilt under the rule of Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes (2nd Chronicles 36:2; Ezra 6:14-15) by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 5:2) in 516 B.C.
- 5) The temple had been despoiled of gold and silver (Joel 3:5). This occurred at least seven times, so matching

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the occasion to Joel's time period could be challenging. First, during Rehoboam's reign, Shishak king of Egypt despoiled the temple in 924 B.C. (2nd Chronicles 12:9). Second, Asa entreated Ben-Hadad king of Syria for aid against Baasha of Israel using silver and gold from the temple in 875 B.C. (2nd Chronicles 16:1-2). Third, Joash stripped the temple to turn Hazael king of Syria away from Jerusalem before 814 B.C. (2nd Kings 12:17-18). Fourth, Joash king of Israel despoiled the temple in the reign of Amaziah around 795 B.C. (2nd Chronicles 25:23-24). Fifth, Ahaz paid off Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria after 735 B.C. (2nd Kings 16:7-8). Sixth, Hezekiah did likewise for Sennacherib king of Assyria in 714 B.C. (2nd Kings 18:13-16). Seventh, Nebuchadnezzar sacked the temple during Jehoiachin's reign around 597 B.C. (2nd Chronicles 36:9-10). The spoils Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple were returned by order of King Cyrus (Ezra 5:13-15) during the reign of Darius (Ezra 6:5). It is entirely possible that some time after this, the

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temple was again despoiled, this time at the hands of Tyre and Sidon.

- 6) Greeks are mentioned specifically as people who received Jewish slaves sold to them by Tyre and Sidon (Joel 3:4-6). For most of the Old Testament, Greeks were unmentioned until Daniel began prophesying that they would conquer the Persians who were ruling during most of Daniel's and Zechariah's prophetic ministries (Daniel 8:20-21; 10:20-11:4; cf. 2:39; Zechariah 9:13). The very mention of Greeks at all hints at a post-exilic period. Notice, though, they are not yet the dominating force that will conquer Persia, but merely a society buying slaves, and an apparently distant one at that.
- 7) The Greeks are mentioned in the context of punishing Tyre and Sidon for selling Jews into Greek slavery (Joel 3:4-6). Although Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would begin the overthrow of Tyre and Sidon with a siege

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from 586-573 B.C. (Ezekiel 26:7), the full extent of their destruction (Ezekiel 26:14) would not be accomplished until Alexander the Great's army built a causeway over the sea and leveled the city in 332 B.C. As of 520 B.C. (Zechariah 1:1), the desolation of Tyre and Sidon and the Philistines was still being foretold (Zechariah 9:1-8). The primary text even suggests the possibility of some cooperation between the Greeks and the Jews in the overthrow of Tyre and Sidon (Joel 3:7), which the historian Josephus confirmed: "So Alexander came into Syria, and took Damascus; and when he had obtained Sidon, he besieged Tyre, when he sent an epistle to the Jewish high priest, to send him some auxiliaries, and to supply his army with provisions" (Josephus 11.317).

That there was a temple, but probably not a king of Judah, while the Greeks were a concern but not a powerhouse, could indicate Joel may have been writing during the Second Temple era.

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Another perspective is that Joel prophesied in the time of Joash/Jehoash, about 835 B.C. When his father King Ahaziah was killed in battle, his grandmother slew his brothers and usurped the throne, but he was hidden in the temple for six years (2nd Kings 11:1-3). When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada the priest had Joash rightfully crowned (2nd Kings 11:4-12) and Athaliah executed (2nd Kings 11:13-21). The reign of Athaliah, about 841-835 B.C., was a period when the temple stood and there was no king, so the theory has potential. The difficulties with this approach are that Judah had not yet been taken captive (Joel 3:1) and Israel had not been scattered (Joel 3:2). While the temple was despoiled during this period, it was while Joash was reigning, not Athaliah, so there was a king.

The post-exilic, Second Temple period seems the most likely fit.

4. Why were Joel's readers to ponder the past and what were they to do in the future?

"Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation" (Joel 1:2-3).

They were expected to compare current events to history in order to recognize what was happening was unprecedented for Judah. What was occurring would still be spoken of for generations to come, even. God expects His people to diligently instruct subsequent generations about His statutes (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:7; 11:19; 31:13) and about His accomplishments (Joshua 4:1-7).

5. Identify the four devourers.

"What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust

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has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (Joel 1:4).

The KJV calls these insects: palmerworm, locust, cankerworm, and caterpillar. Regardless of what specific variety of insects are under consideration, there is a reminder of the eighth plague God brought down upon Egypt (Exodus 10:12-15; Psalm 105:34-35).

6. What had befallen the drunkards, the priests, the vinedressers, and the farmers?

The wine was gone for the drunks (Joel 1:5), the grain and drink offerings were gone for the priests (9-10), and the vines and trees were all dried up for the vinedressers and farmers (11-12). All the food was gone for everybody. Whether they were blatantly immoral or feigning righteousness, or even the providers of food, there was nothing left to eat for anybody.

7. Was this a literal plague of locusts?

“For a nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion. He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree; he has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white” (Joel 1:6-7).

The answer is ambiguous from the first chapter as the swarm is presented as an invading “nation.” These are comparable to the swarm that emerged from the bottomless pit in another prophecy of judgment (Revelation 9:1-12), whose role was to torment men (Revelation 9:4-6), and who also had the teeth of lions (Revelation 9:8) and who also resembled horses (Revelation 9:7; Joel 2:4).

It becomes clearer in the next chapter, though, that the locusts are literal. They are “like a strong people set in battle array” (Joel 2:5), “they run like mighty men” (7),

“they climb the wall like men of war” (7). If it was a foreign nation presented allegorically as a locust swarm, then the insects would not be compared to an army in this way.

8. Whose land, whose vine, and whose fig tree were being ruined?

“A nation has come up against My land... he had laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree” (Joel 1:6-7).

God allowed the destruction notwithstanding His personal claim on all that was being destroyed. This is what discipline really is; it hurts the disciplinarian, not only the rebel.

9. What were the priests called to do in their wailing and lamentations?

“Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth,

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you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of Jehovah your God, and cry out to Jehovah” (Joel 1:13-14).

Proper mourning included wearing sackcloth, fasting, and assembling the people to cry to God together. It is all about self-affliction.

10. What was *“at hand”* that they were to cry about?

“Alas for the day! For the day of Jehovah is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15).

“The day of Jehovah,” or Day of the Lord, refers to any particular time of judgment God brought down on a people. It does not always refer to the great and final day of judgment, although that is also one such judgment.

11. Which of the curses that Jehovah warned Israel about before entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) are upon them in the primary text?

- 1) Locusts destroy crops (Joel 1:4; Deuteronomy 28:38, 42).
- 2) Grapes and wine destroyed (Joel 1:5, 7; Deuteronomy 28:30, 39).
- 3) Invaded by a foreign army (Joel 1:6; 2:1-11, 25; Deuteronomy 28:22, 25, 33, 47-51).
- 4) Grain ruined (Joel 1:9-11, 13, 17; Deuteronomy 28:17-18).
- 5) Olives destroyed (Joel 1:10; Deuteronomy 28:40).
- 6) Livestock suffer (Joel 1:18-19; Deuteronomy 28:31).
- 7) Land laid waste (Joel 1:10-12, 17-20; 2:3; Deuteronomy 28:18, 23; 29:22-23).
- 8) Drought (Joel 2:23; Deuteronomy 28:24).
- 9) Enemy dreaded (Joel 2:6; Deuteronomy 28:25).
- 10) Country and city dwellers affected (Joel 1:11; 2:9; Deuteronomy 28:16).

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11) Nation reproached (Joel 2:17; Deuteronomy 28:37).

12) Posterity affected (Joel 1:3; Deuteronomy 28:46).

CHAPTER TWO

1. **What is the first blast of the horn intended to communicate?**

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of Jehovah is coming, for it is at hand” (Joel 2:1).

This trumpet blow was a warning to Judah that a day of judgment was near.

2. **How would this day of Jehovah look? How would it sound? How would it feel?**

The appearance was overcast, dark, gloomy: *“A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains” (Joel 2:2)* and *“The sun and moon grow dark,*

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and the stars diminish their brightness” (Joel 2:10). Locust swarms can be so thick as to block the sun.

The sound was an awful din: “With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array” (Joel 2:5).

The feeling was rough: “The people writhe in pain” and “The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble” (Joel 2:10).

3. Describe the land before and behind the locust invasion, respectively.

“A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them” (Joel 2:6).

Among the few mentions of *“the Garden of Eden”* in Scripture beyond the initial events about Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:15; 3:23-24), this one is the reverse of another in which desolate land is restored to be Eden-like (Ezekiel 36:35). It is a fitting description in view of what locusts can accomplish.

4. How extensive was this infestation?

“They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief” (Joel 2:7-9).

While locusts want to be in the fields where the food is, this swarm came over the walls, entered the city, got

through the windows and into the houses. There was no relief! It was like the plague in Egypt (Exodus 10:6).

5. How could they get Jehovah to “*relent*” from this calamity?

“‘Now, therefore,’ says Jehovah, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning’ (Joel 2:12).

As God had instructed Israel when first issuing the blessings and curses (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), He wanted them to turn to Him with their whole heart. When people turn away from evil and turn to God (Jonah 3:10), the Lord calls that repentance (Luke 11:32). Repentance remains essential for initial salvation (Acts 3:19) and for restoration after apostasy (Acts 8:22).

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As fasting, weeping, and mourning imply, repentance is based on sorrow (2nd Corinthians 7:10). Sin is not trivial; it must be regretted seriously (James 4:7-10).

6. What did God expect them to *“rend?”*

“So rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:13).

Tearing clothes was a traditional demonstration of grief in the ancient world (Genesis 37:29; Job 1:20; 2nd Samuel 1:11) as clothing was not so affordably acquired as it is today, so it destroyed something valuable to express mourning. While this expression of sorrow can be good, what really matters is the broken heart that comes to God (Psalms 34:18; 51:17).

7. What qualities of God move Him to *“relent?”*

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“For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:13).

These qualities which allow sinners to repent abide in God still (Romans 2:4; 2nd Peter 3:9).

8. After the locust curse, what might God do in His relenting?

“Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him — a grain offering and a drink offering for Jehovah your God?” (Joel 2:14).

They could reasonably anticipate blessings replacing the curse, as He had foretold (Deuteronomy 30:11-20).

9. What is the second blast of the horn intended to communicate?

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“Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room” (Joel 2:15-16).

This horn was to call the whole people together for a holy purpose.

10. What was expected of the priests?

“Let the priests, who minister to Jehovah, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O Jehovah, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?”’” (Joel 2:17).

They were to:

- 1) Weep publicly

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2) Pray, specifically, that Israel not become a reproach among the nations, causing blasphemy to God.

11. How would Jehovah's response to the people's repentance be characterized?

"Then Jehovah will be zealous for His land, and pity His people" (Joel 2:18).

God responds favorably when people turn from sin.

12. What action would Jehovah take because of Judah's repentance?

"Jehovah will answer and say to His people, 'Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his

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face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things.'

Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for Jehovah has done marvelous things! Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Jehovah your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you — The former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

'So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of Jehovah your God, who has dealt wondrously with you" (Joel 2:19-26).

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He would reverse the calamity which had befallen them:

- 1) Destruction by four types of locusts (1:4; 2:25),
- 2) Wine cut off (1:5; 2:22, 24),
- 3) Infestation (1:6; 2:20),
- 4) Destruction of vines, fig trees, grain, wine, and oil (1:7, 9-12, 16-17; 2:19, 22, 24, 26),
- 5) Shame (1:11; 2:26-27),
- 6) Destruction of pastures (1:18-20; 2:22),
- 7) Drought (1:20; 2:23).

13. What had already *“come up”* and what would yet *“rise?”*

At first, the locusts had *“come up”* as a nation against God’s land and they would *“climb”* into the city and into the houses (Joel 1:6; 2:7, 9). Later, the stink of the locusts’ decaying corpses would *“rise”* (Joel 2:20). That stench was, of course, unpleasant, but it indicated the threat was over. There are often residual unpleasant effects lingering

after repentance and restoration are obtained, which serve important reminders.

14. With their restoration to God, what would Judah come to know?

“Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am Jehovah your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame” (Joel 2:27).

The lesson they were to learn is a return to the most fundamental fact of all: the exclusive nature of the only God (Deuteronomy 4:39). Considering this is the reason idolatry is wrong (Deuteronomy 5:7), this may hint at what sin Judah had to repent of on this occasion. If so, it is the only indication the Jews ever reverted to idol worship after the captivity. It is not a necessary conclusion, though. This statement may be presented to launch into the next point.

15. **Identify the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning what would *“come to pass afterward.”***

What Joel foretold (Joel 2:28-32) is explicitly applied by Peter the apostle to the events of Pentecost Day when the church was established (Acts 2:1-21).

16. **Upon whom would the Lord *“pour out [His] Spirit?”***

“That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28-29).

By *“all flesh,”* He was not speaking in the absolute sense. This does not apply to animals. Nor is it about every single human being, but all kinds of people: men and women – *“your sons and your daughters,”* young and old – *“your old men.. your young men.”* It almost certainly

points to the inclusion of Gentiles along with Jews (Acts 10:44-48).

17. What would the outpouring of the Spirit enable?

“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).

Prophecy, visions, and dreams were all means through which God revealed His word to His servants.

18. What would precede the *“great and awesome day of Jehovah?”*

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Jehovah” (Joel 2:30-31).

19. How could salvation be obtained?

“And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of Jehovah shall be saved” (Joel 2:32).

This is quoted twice in the New Testament. First, Peter included a lengthy quotation from Joel in his Pentecost sermon, concluding with this text, which he used to launch into an introduction to Jesus for the Jews who had gathered from every country (Acts 2:21). Second, Paul quotes just this portion of Joel 2:32 in an explanation to the Romans of how salvation is received (Romans 10:13). The full explanation (Romans 10:9-17) is that salvation depends on confessing Christ, that is calling on His name, which depends on faith in the heart, which depends on hearing the word of God, which depends on preaching, which depends on preachers being sent. Of course, merely calling on His name without subsequent obedience to the rest of the gospel is inadequate (Matthew 7:21-23; Acts 22:16).

20. Where would deliverance come from?

“For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as Jehovah has said, among the remnant whom Jehovah calls” (Joel 2:32).

The Old Testament prophets were clear that when salvation came it would start in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3; Obadiah 17; Zechariah 1:16; 8:3). Jesus instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for their power from on high (Luke 24:49), and, once that power was received in the Holy Spirit, they were to begin preaching in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). So, the apostles were, in fact, in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12; 2:5), when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1-4) and they proclaimed the fulfillment of Joel’s words (Acts 2:17-21).

CHAPTER THREE

1. **When will the events foretold occur?**

The phrase, *“in those days and at that time”* (Joel 3:1) refers to the end of chapter two which looked to *“afterward”* (Joel 2:28-32) and which Peter said was starting on Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 2:16-21). This is not to say everything which follows would happen on the Day of Pentecost, but that day began the era when the following events would occur. Thus, the New Covenant would be in effect whenever most of these events unfold.

2. **Who are the *“captives”* God intended to *“bring back?”***

“When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem” (Joel 3:1) is prophesied in the same vein as *“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel”* (Amos 9:14). The context of this passage is: *“‘On that day I will raise up the*

tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' says Jehovah who does this thing" (Amos 9:11-12). These verses are quoted by James (Acts 15:16-17) and applied to the church receiving Gentiles. Thus, the captives are not literally Jews, but spiritually so, "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; 3:7-9, 29; Romans 9:6-8; Philippians 3:3). Captivity refers to the sin holding souls in bondage and from which Jesus sets free (Luke 4:16-21; John 8:32).

3. Where would Jehovah *"gather all nations?"*

"I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2).

The fourth king of Judah was named Jehoshaphat (1st Kings 22:41-50), but neither Scripture, nor history, nor geography offers any record of a place, much less a valley,

called by his name. *“Jehoshaphat”* means *“Jehovah judges,”* so the reference is to wherever God would enter into judgment against nations. Because this place is set in contrast to *“Jerusalem”* (Joel 3:1), which God would avenge, and because Jerusalem is higher in elevation than anywhere else in sight, always referred to as *“up”* from elsewhere (Acts 21:15), it stands to reason that the judgment place would be, comparatively, a *“Valley.”* Therefore, the *“Valley of Jehoshaphat”* is not a physical place at all, but a spiritual location, as heaven and hell, immaterial but very real.

4. What would He do with *“all nations”* at Jehoshaphat?

“I will enter into judgment with them there” (Joel 3:2).

Jesus, too, foretold His judgment on all nations: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will*

separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31-32). Jesus’ judgment will happen “in the last day” (John 12:48), so that is what this chapter is about.

5. What are the charges levelled against the nations?

“On account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land. They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy as payment for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink” (Joel 3:2-3).

1) They had scattered His people among the nations.

This refers to the Jewish diaspora (Esther 3:8) following the overthrow of Israel by Assyria and of Judah by Babylon (Jeremiah 50:17). This was not just the captivity in the lands of the nations who had conquered them, but the scattering beyond.

- 2) They had divided up His land. Again, this refers to the overthrow of Israel and Judah (Amos 7:17; Lamentations 5:2).
- 3) They had cast lots for His people (Obadiah 11; Nahum 3:10): Paying for prostitutes with a boy slave and paying for wine with a girl slave. They were engaged in human trafficking, but were not even fetching the standard price of a servant, thirty pieces of silver (Exodus 21:32), thus cheapening human value.

6. What was God's first question to Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia?

"Indeed, what have you to do with Me, o Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia?" (Joel 3:4).

This was a common form of repudiation in the ancient world (2nd Samuel 16:10; 1st Kings 17:18; 2nd Kings 9:18-

19; John 2:4). It was a way of saying these peoples ought not to have interfered with God's people.

7. What was His second question to them?

“Will you retaliate against Me? But if you retaliate against Me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head” (Joel 3:4).

He challenged them to contemplate whether their actions against Him, Jehovah, by way of what they had done to the Israelites were legitimate. He warned them that they were the ones deserving of recompense and they were going to receive it.

8. What had the Tyrians, Sidonians, and Philistines done to merit retaliation from God?

“Because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My prized possessions. Also the

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people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem you have sold to the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their borders” (Joel 3:5-6).

The temple had been despoiled no less than seven previous times: by the Egyptians (2nd Chronicles 12:9), by the Syrians twice (2nd Chronicles 16:1-2; 2nd Kings 12:17-18), by the northern kingdom of Israel (2nd Chronicles 25:23-24), by the Assyrians twice (2nd Kings 16:7-8; 18:13-16), and by the Babylonians (2nd Chronicles 36:9-10). Evidently, further looting had taken place by Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia. While the Jews were in Babylonian exile, the Ark of the Covenant disappeared, never to be seen again (Jeremiah 3:16).

They also sold the Jews into slavery to the Greeks, far away from their homeland and this is what bothers the Lord most.

9. How would God “return” their “retaliation” upon their “own head?”

“Behold, I will raise them out of the place to which you have sold them, and will return your retaliation upon your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off; for Jehovah has spoken” (Joel 3:7-8).

God has been explicitly clear throughout the ages in teaching consequences for sin (Psalm 7:14-16; Proverbs 26:27; Galatians 6:7-8). Accordingly, the people who had sold Jews into Greek slavery would experience their offspring being sold into slavery into a distant land of the opposite direction.

The Sabeans, the people of Sheba, were known to be traveling merchants (Job 6:19; Ezekiel 27:33), so the Jews would not need to be an ocean-going people like Tyre,

Sidon, or Philistia because the Sabeans would come to them to buy slaves.

10. What are the nations summoned to?

“Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, “I am strong.”’ Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Jehovah” (Joel 3:9-11).

God says, “Fight me!” He says, “Bring it!” In so many ways, He lets them know that, because these nations had fought His people, He would fight them back! They can amass all their armies, mobilize their special forces, conscript farmers, and even stir up the courage of their weaklings; they can throw everything they have at Him because He is ready to throw down!

Notice *“Let the weak say, ‘I am strong’”* is a phrase God ascribes mockingly to the enemies whom He intends to punish. Lyricists in certain hymns seem to miss the point.

11. What were the nations to do with their plowshares and pruning hooks?

“Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears” (Joel 3:10), which is the exact opposite of what Isaiah and Micah foretold: *“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word Jehovah from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people;*

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they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). Isaiah and Micah also prophesied concerning the latter days, meaning the New Testament era and they also prophesied of all nations. Their prophecies focused on turning weapons into implements of peace because the nations desired to be taught by God, whereas Joel’s prophecy focused on the opposite – turning implements of peace into weapons of war because the nations who had resisted Him would be punished.

12. Did God literally mean for armed conflict or some other adversarial situation?

“Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations” (Joel 3:12).

The summons to war is to impress upon the nations His fierce opposition to them. They are to present themselves to Jehovah in the place where Jehovah judges for Jehovah to judge them! Combat was merely an illustrious metaphor concerning judgment.

13. How else does God illustrate His impending judgment?

Next, He turns to agricultural metaphors. *“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great”* (Joel 3:13). Harvests and sickles and winepresses are common figures for judgment (Mark 4:26-29; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:15). The farmer and the vintner must wait for harvest and for fruit to ripen and God does wait for enemy peoples to complete their iniquity (Genesis 15:16; 1st Thessalonians 2:16).

14. After the analogy, what are the multitudes again warned about directly?

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“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of Jehovah is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14).

God spoke of judgment somewhat plainly (Joel 3:2), compared His judgment to warfare (9), again spoke of judgment plainly (12), compared His judgment to harvest (13), and again spoke of judgment plainly (14).

15. **Explain the sun, moon, and stars going dark.**

“The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness” (Joel 3:15). Scripture often described exalted world leaders as celestial luminaries in just the same way cinematic headliners are called “stars” now.

Notice parallels when God has warned of judgment against others. He was addressing Babylon (Isaiah 13:1) when He said, *“Behold, the day of Jehovah comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate;*

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and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine” (9-10). He was addressing Egypt (Ezekiel 32:2) when He said, “When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land” (7-8).

God told the prophet Isaiah to “take up this proverb against the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 14:4): “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit”

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(12-15). Popular misconceptions notwithstanding, “*Lucifer*” is not a name for Satan, but means “Day Star,” and specifically refers to Nebuchadnezzar in this instance. He was figuratively identified as a celestial body that went dark.

Remember Joseph’s dream of the heavenly bodies bowing down to him (Genesis 37:9).

In the New Testament, we are told who our warfare is against. *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12). Because we are in combat against certain spiritual armies in celestial realms, it should come as no surprise that these lofted opponents go dark when God brings His judgment.

16. Where would God’s voice be heard coming from?

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“Jehovah also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem” (Joel 3:16).

Whereas it was Jerusalem sounding the alarm previously because the Jews were the subject of God’s anger (2:1), now that they have repented, God directs His wrath outward, from Jerusalem/Zion, toward *“all nations”* (3:1, 9, 12).

17. **What effect does His voice have upon *“the heavens and earth?”***

“The heavens and earth will shake” (Joel 3:16).

Whereas the prior mention of the earth quaking (2:10) was, quite plausibly, literal in its reference to the locust infestation, a literal application does not seem likely here. Rather, this seems to fit the theme of judgment prophecies (Psalms 18:7; 114:4; Isaiah 2:19; 5:25; 24:19-20; Jeremiah 4:24; Ezekiel 38:18-20; Nahum

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1:5; Habakkuk 3:6; Haggai 2:6; Zechariah 14:4), such as Isaiah against Babylon: *“Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of Jehovah of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger”* (Isaiah 13:1).

Even the uninspired used similar wording to cast aspersions on those who preached Christ. A mob in Thessalonica said, *“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too”* (Acts 17:6). Words can shake up the earth, so God’s judgment can do likewise.

18. While heaven and earth were shaking, what would become of Israel?

“Jehovah will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16).

While the nations are upended in judgment, God's people, figuratively Israel, are stable and secure. *"The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His'"* (2nd Timothy 2:19).

19. What would they come to know?

"So you shall know that I am Jehovah your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain" (Joel 3:17).

They needed reminder that no other god than Jehovah is real and He is the God whose people is Israel.

Knowing God is a major theme of Scripture, especially in the New Testament: *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him"* (1st John 2:3-5).

20. What would become of *“Jerusalem?”*

“Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:17). Writing at a time when the Jews had known a conquered Jerusalem, Joel was reassuring the people of God that there would be a time when the holy city is impregnable.

Daniel had prophesied, *“In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”* (Daniel 2:44). The Hebrew writer confirmed, *“we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken”* (Hebrews 12:28). And Jesus said *“the gates of Hades shall not prevail against”* His church and kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19).

Joel refers to *“the Jerusalem above”* (Galatians 4:26), not the city on earth.

21. What is the significance of the wine, milk, and water all dripping, flowing, and flooding?

“And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of Jehovah and water the Valley of Acacias” (Joel 3:18).

Whereas the wine had previously been cut off in God’s wrath (Joel 1:5, 9, 10), and the cattle suffered (Joel 1:18), and the brooks dried up (Joel 1:20), there would be a reversal (Joel 2:21-27). However, what mattered was not the physical, but the spiritual. God was pouring out His Spirit (Joel 2:29) and this is here portrayed in allegory.

22. Why would Egypt and Edom be desolated?

“Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of

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Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land”
(Joel 3:19).

Violence was the core reason God destroyed the earth in Noah’s day (Genesis 6:11-13), and immediately after the flood, He set forth a new law imposing a penalty on violence (Genesis 9:6). The shedding of “*innocent blood*” is of particular concern to Him (Proverbs 6:16-17).

In particular, the victims of the violence were God’s protected people.

23. In what sense would Judah and Jerusalem always abide?

“But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation” (Joel 3:20).

It is not the physical lineage of Israel God was building up (Romans 11:11-32); rather, His “*holy nation*” and “*special*

people” now are those who have received mercy in Christ (1st Peter 2:4-10).

24. What would God who dwells in Zion do about blood?

“For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for Jehovah dwells in Zion” (Joel 3:21) is probably not the most accurate rendering of the verse. More preferable is: *“I will avenge their blood, blood I have not avenged, for Jehovah dwells in Zion” (ESV).* Jesus promised to avenge the blood of all martyrs in the generation during which He had dwelt on earth (Matthew 23:34-36).