

Commentary on the Prophecy of Joel.

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Who Was Joel?

All that we know of Joel which is at all dependable is found in the prophecy itself. Thus we learn that he was the son of a man called Pethuel (otherwise unknown), that he presumably prophesied in Judah (3.17, 20), and that he had good familiarity with Temple ideas and procedures (1.13-14; 2.15-17). We may therefore surmise, with a good likelihood of being correct, that he prophesied in Jerusalem, either as an official Temple prophet, or simply as an independent prophet called by God. But the message that he brought was not the word of the Temple, but 'the word of YHWH' (1.1).

The Date Of Joel.

We have no direct evidence on which to rely in determining the date of Joel's prophecy, apart again from what we find in the prophecy itself. But the fact that there is no mention of the Assyrians, Babylonians or Persians, and that the enemies of Judah at this time appear to have been Egypt, Philistia, in a secondary way the Ionians (Greeks) as purchasers of Judean slaves, Edom, and Tyre and Sidon, would serve to confirm a date for the prophecy prior to Amos. Amos makes clear that widespread slave trading in respect of Judean slaves was taking place in his time in Philistia and Tyre, and at that particular time there were almost certainly good connections between Ionian traders and nations around Judah (we know, for example, from Assyrian records that Assyria certainly had trading contacts with the Ionians in the 8th century BC). And this date can be seen as supported by the position of the book as second in the twelve prophets, with Hosea presumably coming first because it was the largest and one of the earliest. We would not, of course, expect those who originally ordered the Hebrew Bible to have the same precision with respect to dates as we have, but on the whole the books appear to commence with the roughly eighth century works (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Micah), and close with the latest 6th and 5th century works (Haggai, Zechariah Malachi). To us this might make Obadiah out of place, but there were certainly early traditions which placed him around 9th-8th centuries BC, even if they were wrong.

Arguments for a later date include reference to God's people as 'Israel' in 2.27 which has been seen by some as indicating a later date, although with regard to this we need to recognise that the Judean prophets did tend to see the two kingdoms as one because they belonged to YHWH, and therefore regularly thought in terms of the whole as 'Israel'. Other arguments for a late date include the non-mention of a king, and the reference in 3.2 to the scattering of Israel (but not necessarily Judah) among the nations. None of these, however, are conclusive, as Israelites were scattered among the nations by captivity in war almost from the beginning.

The early date might also be seen as supported (or otherwise) by the similarities that can be traced between Joel and the other prophets, something which we must now consider.

Similarities Between Joel And Other Prophets.

There are a number of occasions when Joel appears, either to have copied phrases from other prophets, or to have had his phrases copied by others. Consider, for example, the similarities with Amos:

- Joel 3.16 says, 'And YHWH will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem', which is exactly duplicated in Amos 1.2, 'YHWH will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem.'
- Joel 3.18 says, 'And it will come about in that day, that the mountains will drop down

sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk.' Whilst Amos 9.13 says, 'Behold the days come --- and the mountains will drop sweet wine, and all the hills will melt.'

It would appear from these examples that one had unquestionably read the other, or had heard his prophecies cited.

Consider also Isaiah:

- Joel 1.15 says, And cry to YHWH, "Alas for the day!" For the day of YHWH is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty will it come.' We can compare this with Isaiah 13.6 which says, 'Howl you, for the day of YHWH is at hand, as destruction from the Almighty will it come.'
- Or again Joel 3.10 says, 'Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears.' Compare Isaiah 2.4; Micah 4.3, which say the reverse, 'And they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.'

Again it would appear that one has read the other, or heard them cited.

We can also consider Obadiah:

- Joel 2.32 says, 'For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape,' whilst Obadiah 1.17 says, 'But in mount Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy.'
- Joel 3.4 says, And if you recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense on your own head?' whilst Obadiah 1.15 says, For the day of YHWH is near on all the nations, as you have done it will be done to you, your dealing will return on your own head.'

Whilst on their own these resemblances with Obadiah could be seen as coincidence, they gain in significance in the light of his similarities with other prophets.

Further examples of similarities are:

- Joel 2.6 says, 'At their presence the peoples are in anguish, all faces have become pale, whilst Nahum 2.10 says, 'And anguish is in all loins, and the faces of them all are waxed pale.'
- Joel 2.17 says, 'Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"', whilst Psalm 79.10 says, 'why should the heathen then say, "Where is their God."
- Joel 2.28-29 says, 'And it will come about afterwards, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, --- and also on the servants and on the handmaids, in those days will I pour out my Spirit,' whilst Ezekiel 39.29 says, 'For I have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel.'
- Joel 2.31 says, 'The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes,' whilst Malachi says, 'Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes.'

It is difficult to see all these similarities as mere coincidences, and we must therefore consider that the most likely explanation for them was that Joel either pre-dates or post-dates at least some of the other prophets (those with the closest similarities). It should further be pointed out that we have cited only those similarities which are closest, and that there are a number of other less striking similarities not included above.

This then raises the question as to which is most likely? Is it more likely that Joel had heard all these prophets cited and had utilised what he had heard? Or is it more likely that each of these other prophets had read Joel, or heard him cited? If we select the first alternative it undoubtedly has important implications as to when the other prophecies were gathered together so as to be available to Joel. It seems, however, to us, that the most likely scenario is that Joel was read by the other prophets, or that they had heard him cited. This would then

indicate an early date for Joel prior to Amos. And this suggestion is supported by its early place among the twelve 'minor' prophets, following Hosea but coming prior to Amos.

If we accept this early date for Joel then we should possibly see him as prophesying during the reign of Joash, at a time while Joash was still young and under the guiding hand of 'the Priest' (2 Kings 12. 1 ff). This would help to explain both the absence of any mention of the king, and the stress on the priesthood. But any time around that period is possible.

Another alternative possibility points to around the time of Haggai and Zechariah (c 500 BC), for that was at a time when there was a Temple in operation which was looked on with some favour, in contrast with Malachi's later view of it, but this has to assume that the Persian overlordship is simply ignored, and that the Persians looked the other way at some of the activities of Israel's neighbours. Other more radical scholars have suggested even later dates seeing it as made up of two prophecies, the one down to earth and the other eschatological, which have been combined. This argument is mainly based on the eschatological material that it contains. But that then involves removing the eschatological material from all the other earlier prophets, for they are equally eschatological in the sense that Joel is. But this appears to be a case of making decisions on the basis of a pre-determined theory. Fortunately, however, the question is not all that important for the date that we assign to it does not affect in any way the message of the prophecy. So we can leave the matter to the scholars recognising that nobody knows.

The Message Of Joel.

The first two chapters of Joel, going up to 2.27, deal either with an invasion of Judah by huge swarms of locusts, or alternately, depending on whose interpretation you accept, with the approach of a huge human army which is compared with locusts, or by both, the one illustrating the other. This then leads on to YHWH's promise of the future pouring out of His Spirit (2.28), with its consequential results, which is seen as followed at some stage by the days of judgment on the nations, although as the prophets necessarily saw everything with a foreshortened view, the one need not necessarily be seen as immediately following the other. The prophets had no idea how long the fulfilment of God's purposes would take once He began to work, nor of the time-scale that would be involved. They spoke rather of what God would do in the future on His own time-scale. Thus we may see that the prophet in fact saw two peaks ahead in this case, the first the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, 'the drencher with the Holy Spirit', and at Pentecost and in the early church, and the second the coming final judgment of God in the end times, but that he had no idea of what the distance might be that lay between them. However, the final consequence of God's judgment was to be the triumph of God's people, who would abide 'for ever' (3.17-21), with those who had meanwhile opposed God's people seriously languishing, seemingly into the long term future (3.19), (which tends to cancel out any theory of a so-called 'millennium' with its theoretical golden years of peace for all). Whilst therefore the prophet speaks in earthly terms because he had no other (heavenly spheres were seen as the possession of 'the gods') this clearly has reference, in Isaianic and New Testament terms, to life on the new Heaven and the new earth. It is only that life that can be 'for ever'. There is then no place here for any earthly 'millennium' (which was a concept seemingly unknown to either Jesus Christ, Paul or Peter and is based on a wrong interpretation of Revelation 20). The glorious future will take place in the new Heaven and the new earth that the patriarchs will find to be their 'better country' (Hebrews 11.10-14), and the same will be true for Israel.

Do The First Two Chapters To 2.27 Refer To A Literal Plague Of Locusts Of Exceptional Size, Or Do They Also Have Human Armies In View?

An important question in interpreting the prophecy is as to whether reference in 1.2-2.27 to what appears to be a number of plagues of locusts actually refers to genuine locusts, or is merely to be seen as using locusts as a vivid metaphor for human armies. There are three

main views concerning it (including inevitably a number of variations). The first refers chapters 1.2-2.27 to literal plagues of locusts that had already taken place and were taking place and which had brought Judah to a devastating halt, something which enables Joel to call God's people to repentance, and which he sees as pointing to the final 'day of YHWH' when God's final purposes will be worked out in an even more devastating way. The second refers chapter 1 to a literal plague of locusts, but considers chapter 2.1-27 to refer to a human army seen metaphorically in terms of the locust plagues described in chapter 1. The third applies both chapters to a human army on a similar metaphorical basis. Sometimes the human army is then seen as approaching in the relatively near future (e.g. the Assyrians or Babylonians), and sometimes as 'eschatological', that is, as appearing 'at the end times'. As this is clearly important for the exegesis of the first two chapters the question must be considered in some detail. What we need, however, to do, is rid our minds of pre-conceived conclusions so that we do not just read into it what we want to find.

The Grounds For Seeing A Reference To A Literal Plague Of Locusts In Both Chapters.

There are a number of sound arguments which support this conclusion.

The first argument for seeing the reference as to literal plagues of locusts is that 1.4 and 2.25 assume it. In these two verses four different 'types' of locust are described, either in terms of growing maturity (for which see below), or in terms of four different waves of locusts which descend one after the other upon the land. This would *prima facie* appear to indicate that in both cases genuine plagues of locusts are in mind. On the other hand it is said by those who dispute this that it is always possible that the descriptions were put in simply in order to build up the picture of total destruction. But there can really be no doubt that the prophet's mind was filled with the idea of locusts, and nowhere else in Scripture are such contrasting distinctions between locusts found.

The second argument is that the actual descriptions favour reference to genuine locusts. Thus in 1.6-7 we read;

1.6-7

'For a nation is come up upon my land,
Strong, and without number,
His teeth are the teeth of a lion,
And he has the jaw-teeth of a lioness.
He has laid my vine waste,
And de-barked my fig-tree,
He has made it clean bare, and cast it away,
Its branches are made white.'

The vivid description of the ability to chew through wood, and of the laying bare of the trunk and branches is typical of locusts. It must be questioned whether it really has any relevance, even metaphorically, to human beings who would not use their teeth for chewing wood, nor lay trunks and branches bare. Thus it might be felt that if the prophet had a human army in mind he is very much over-emphasising the metaphor.

Furthermore, while certainly 2.3-5 might be seen as giving the impression of an army of human beings (but see the descriptions of locusts on the march below), this would appear to be contradicted by 2.6-10 where there is clear reference to the behaviour of insects and the consequences of their appearance. Consider especially in this regard verses 9-10. Thus:

2.9-10

They leap on the city,
They run on the wall,
They climb up into the houses,
They enter in at the windows like a thief.'

**The earth quakes before them,
The heavens tremble,
The sun and the moon are darkened,
And the stars withdraw their shining.'**

In this description we can visualise the insects running on the walls, climbing up into houses, and entering in at windows, something typical of what happens on the advance of a creeping army of young locusts, while the blotting out of the sun and moon in the heavens is a typical result of huge swarms of flying locusts, a phenomenon which is often commented on when locusts are under discussion (compare Exodus 10.15, 'so they (the locusts) covered the whole face of the earth so that the land was darkened'). For other connections between Joel and Exodus 10 see the argument which follows.

It is, on the other hand, not easy to see how these details would be necessary in order to describe a human army, nor how they would add to the realism of the picture. They are deliberately taking us away from reality, for no soldiers would remotely have behaved like this. They would have entered houses by breaking down the doors, (they had not strictly come as thieves), not by running up the walls and climbing in through windows (an expertise of more modern thieves). Nor is there any metaphorical lesson to be learned from it, except in a very general way. So in our view the impression given is that it was the plague of locusts which was partly seen in terms of a human army, (the vivid picture in verses 3-5 illustrating the orderliness of the locusts, see description below in argument 4), rather than the other way round.

The third grounds for seeing the reference as being to genuine locusts are the sources from which the ideas expressed by Joel are obtained. The words in Joel 2.2, 'There has not ever been the like, nor will be any more after them, even to the years of many generations,' surely has in mind Exodus 10.14, 'The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again' (incidentally demonstrating that the last idea is not to be applied too literally). Taken with our comment about Exodus 10.15 above this is certainly significant. And this connection with Exodus 10 is further confirmed in that Exodus 10.1-2 says, 'Then YHWH said to Moses, --- "And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am YHWH." Compare with this Joel 1.2-3, 'Hear this, you old men, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land. Has this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell you your children of it, and your children their children, and their children another generation.' It would appear that the 'coincidences' are too many for them to be accidental, and that Joel had the tradition in Exodus 10 on mind. We should further note that in Exodus 10 all this was connected with a genuine plague of locusts.

Thus these three clear connections between Joel's vivid picture and Exodus 10 would suggest that Joel had been vividly reminded by the current plagues of locusts of that previous experience of God sending locusts as a judgment on the Egyptians, reinforcing his own view that this current plague was a kind of judgment on Judah, a 'Day of YHWH'.

A fourth argument in favour of both chapters describing plagues of locusts comes from what can happen when a plague of locusts arrives. The initial arrival of the flying locusts can often result in the devastation of the land (described in chapter 1), but the locusts can then lay millions of eggs and in two months time those eggs hatch out and, being unable to fly, the young locusts go on the march in the search for food, devouring all before them, moving like a great army. Attempts are often made to stop them by walls of fire, but it is usually in vain. Nothing prevents their relentless march. This is what is being described in chapter 2.

Dr. Thomson in 'the Land and the Book' describes this eerie march from the point of view of an eye-witness. Having described a visitation of locusts who had laid millions of eggs over a

large area, he says, 'The people, familiar with the habits of the locust, looked with anxiety to the time when those eggs would be hatched, nor were their fears groundless or exaggerated. For several days prior to 1st June we had heard that millions of young locusts were on their march up the valley towards our village, and at length I was told that they had reached the lower part of it. Summoning all the people that I could collect we went to meet and attack them, hoping to stop their progress altogether, or at least to turn aside their line of march. Never shall I forget the impression produced by the first view of them --- these we now confronted were without wings, and about the size of full-grown grasshoppers --- but their number was astounding. The whole face of the mountain was black with them. On they came like a living deluge. We dug trenches and kindled fires, and beat and burned to death heaps upon heaps of them, but the effort was utterly useless. Wave after wave rolled up the mountainside and poured over rocks, walls, ditches and hedges - those behind covering up and bridging over the masses already killed. After a long and fatiguing contest I descended the mountain to examine the depth of the column, but I could not see the end of it. ---it was perfectly appalling to watch this animated river as it flowed up the road and ascended the hill above my house. --- for four days they continued to pass on towards the east, and finally only a few stragglers of the mighty host were left behind --- nothing in their habits is more striking than the pertinacity with which they all pursue the same line of march, like a disciplined army' (see 2.7-9). And it should be noted that what Dr Thomson was describing was just the result of a 'normal' visit of locusts, not of outstandingly exceptional ones such as happened in the days of Joel. We can only try to imagine the days of Joel when, after the land had first been visited by swarms of flying locusts, the whole land of Judah was filled from end to end with swarms of young locusts on the march, resulting from the millions of eggs that had been laid, and accompanied by the desperate burning of the land by farmers and vineyard owners in the hopeless attempt to stop them.

A fifth argument for seeing what is described as referring to an actual invasion by locusts is found in the fact that they will finally be dispersed, partly in the direction of the 'eastern sea' (the Dead Sea, compare Deuteronomy 11.24), and partly in the direction of 'the western sea' (2.20), (that is, the Great Sea, or Mediterranean). This would appear to confirm that there were a number of swarms which would finally be dispersed in different directions by the winds. But a similar kind of dispersion is not likely to have been seen as applying to human armies at that time.

A sixth argument for seeing them as genuine locusts is the emphasis on their running on the walls. No such emphasis is found anywhere else when speaking of invading soldiers, but it would be highly noticeable with insects. Furthermore one thing that is noticeable in the descriptions is that there is no suggestion of blood being shed in any way. If soldiers are being referred to in metaphor it has certainly been heavily disguised, almost as though Joel wanted us to see them as locusts.

The argument that Judah would have been so used to swarms of locusts and their effects that no prophet would have seen such a swarm as important enough to speak of it in this way is to overlook, firstly that we see such things from the perspective of history, with many parallel examples to go by, and therefore assess them on a totally different basis from someone to whom such a large plague of locusts might have been a once in a lifetime experience, never experienced before, and therefore seen as unique and overwhelming, reminding him of God's judgment on Egypt and of the coming Day of YHWH, and secondly, that the plague was clearly quite remarkably large, covering the whole of Judah, and may indeed have come in four waves or more one after the other (1.4), so that it seemed never ending. Standing in Jerusalem, with news coming from all over Judah of a Judah totally devastated by the largest plagues of locusts 'ever known', both by air and by land (chapter 1), would certainly have made the prophet think, especially as they were advancing on Jerusalem chapter 2), and makes us realise why he saw in what had happened, and what was happening, a picture of the

‘day of YHWH’ (the time when God ‘has His day’ in the past, present and future), especially in the light of Exodus 10. There were many Days of YHWH for they occurred whenever YHWH determined on judgment. They did, however, all look forward to a final Day of YHWH when YHWH would finalise His purposes.

When we add to all this that, especially in chapter 1, there is not the slightest indication anywhere that the descriptions are intended to be speaking metaphorically of human beings, (for Joel nowhere draws any parallel), it would appear to confirm that we are to see Joel as referring to an actual plague of locusts. Without such pointers as are required to indicate metaphors we must either take Joel at face value or recognise that we can make him mean anything we like.

The Grounds For Seeing Chapter 1 As Referring To Real Locusts And Chapter 2 As Referring To An Invading Army.

Clearly the arguments above support the first part of this position, and the second part is based on the kind of language used in chapter 2. This would be a fairly strong case if all that was in mind was a visit by flying locusts, but descriptions such as Dr Thomson’s (see above) of the creeping army of young wingless locusts helps to vividly explain that language. Indeed as we shall see, it brings chapter 2 alive. On the other hand, once the metaphorical idea of an army is removed, the remainder of the language clearly refers to the activities of insects as witnessed by Joel himself and vividly portrayed.

The Grounds For Seeing Both Chapters As Referring To Human Armies.

This view demands a leap of the imagination from what is presented in chapter 1 to the idea of human armies, and is usually held by those who interpret Joel in accordance with their own pre-conceived notions. Apart from the use of the word ‘nation’, which can be explained otherwise (compare its use in Zephaniah 2.14 where it means different species of animals in their groupings, and the reference to different species of creatures as a ‘people’ in Proverbs 30.25-27), there are really no grounds in chapter 1 for considering that it speaks of a human army, and it is noteworthy that the devastations described all adequately apply to insects like locusts, while nothing of what we would see as characteristic of humans (killing, rape, use of the sword, taking captives, etc.), is found anywhere in the narrative (of either chapter 1 or chapter 2). Note how all through it is only natural things that are affected, together with the provision of meal and wine for Temple offerings, with not a word said of any other effects. If Joel wanted us to think that he had locusts in mind he has certainly made a good job of it.

COMMENTARY.

Introductory Words (1.1).

1.1 ‘The word of YHWH which came to Joel the son of Pethuel.’

The whole prophecy is summed up in these words. It is to be seen as ‘the word of YHWH’, that is, as God speaking directly to Judah. And He did it through Joel (‘YHWH is God’), the son of Pethuel (who is otherwise unknown).

The Call To Hear What God Has To Say (1.2-5).

The prophecy opens with a call to all in Judah to hear what God has to say. The opening call has in mind Exodus 10.1-2 which, in the context of a plague of locusts, says, ‘Then YHWH said to Moses, --- “And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am YHWH.” Here Joel similarly calls on the old men, and all the inhabitants of the land, to recognise the uniqueness of the occasion, and pass on what they learn to those who will follow them, for he wants them to see that it is a judgment from YHWH, a warning shot concerning what is to come in even greater measure in the final Day of YHWH.

The judgment that they have experienced is then portrayed in terms of huge plagues of locusts, both of flying locusts and of hopping locusts, possibly following one after another in vast numbers, which have eaten up all that is in the land and left it desolated.

Analysis of 1.2-5.

- a Hear this, you old men, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land. Has this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell you your children of it, and your children their children, and their children another generation (1.2-3).
- b What the adult locust (or 'shearing locust') has left the maturing locust (or 'swarming locust') has eaten, and what the maturing locust has left the young locust (or 'hopping locust') has eaten, and what the young locust has left the infant locust (or 'destroying locust') has eaten (1.4).
- a Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth (1.5).

Note how the emphasis is on the huge plagues of locusts, with the call to consider it going out in 'a' to the old men and all the people, and in the parallel to the drunkards and drinkers of wine.

1.2-3

‘Hear this, you old men,
And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land.
Has this been in your days,
Or in the days of your fathers?’
‘Tell you your children of it, and your children their children,
And their children another generation.

The fact that the message has to be passed on for a number of generations indicates that this is something that is seen as a part of history and not as something occurring at the end of it. What he is describing is not descriptive of the final day of YHWH, but is rather something that is to be remembered in the light of it being an example of what could happen in the Day of YHWH, that day when YHWH brings about His purposes through judgment. The call to hear his words are first spoken to the 'old men', because they are the wisest and most knowledgeable in the land. Let them consider the significance of what has happened. YHWH has spoken. And the call is then extended to all the people, because what has happened has a message for everyone. And that message is with regard to something the like of which has never been seen in living memory. Indeed it is so important that its occurrence and its implications must be passed on to succeeding generations. As mentioned in the introduction we have here a parallel to Exodus 10.1-2, 'Then YHWH said to Moses, --- "And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am YHWH." Similarly Joel wanted the people of his and succeeding days to recognise in what had just happened a sign from YHWH of what He has done and of what He will yet do.

And what is it that Joel sees as so climactic that he wants it to be noted and remembered? It is that Judah have been visited by plagues of locusts unlike any in living memory, plagues that have devastated the whole land, and which are a sign of YHWH's displeasure with Judah. Plagues of locusts were one of the recognised curses which could come on God's people when they broke the covenant (Deuteronomy 28.38), and Solomon recognised in his prophetic prayer that God would punish His people with locust swarms, and prayed that when this happened they might seek and find forgiveness ((1 Kings 8.37; 2 Chronicles 6.28). So Joel had every reason to see in what had happened a signal judgment of YHWH.

1.4

‘What the adult locust (or 'gnawing locust') has left the maturing locust (or 'swarming

locust') has eaten,
And what the maturing locust has left the young locust (or 'hopping locust') has eaten,
And what the young locust has left the infant locust (or 'destroying locust') has eaten.'

The size and scale of the locust invasion is emphasised either by reference to all levels of locust from maturity to infancy, as in the text, or equally likely by reference to a number of swarms of locusts each of which is described in terms of one well known aspect of locusts, as in brackets. The words used are all descriptions of locusts, but as seeing them from differing viewpoints. Taking into account the roots behind the nouns the first word for locust has in mind its ability to 'shear or gnaw' the grain and fruit from its source (the same noun is used in Amos 4.9), the second has in mind its tendency to swarm at particular times (this is the most common word for locust), the third has in mind its ability to hop around on everything and everywhere (the locust is a form of grasshopper, compare Psalm 105.34-35; Jeremiah 51.14, 27; Nahum 3.15-16), and the fourth has in mind its tendency to destroy all living vegetation (compare 1 Kings 8.37; 2 Chronicles 6.28; Psalm 78.46; Isaiah 33.4). In some of the cited verses the second type is used in parallel with either the third or fourth which may suggest that two types of locust were being distinguished, the second type possibly referring to the flying locusts, and the others to the young locusts on the march (see introduction above). We may thus see the gnawing locusts as having arrived by air in swarms, and denuded the land, followed by swarming locusts who also had their fill and laid billions of eggs, followed by the hatching out of the young hopping locusts who marched over the land devouring everything in their paths, followed by the destroying locusts who acted similarly. But however it was, the overall emphasis is firstly on the vast scale of the invasions, so that as one appeared to be ending another one appeared, and secondly on the fact that once they had all finished their work nothing was left.

The all-embracing nature of the description calls to mind the similar all-embracing descriptions in Exodus 10. 5, 15, and no one who had experienced such an invasion would ever forget it.

The ability of a swarm of locusts to swoop down and destroy all vegetation and trees would have been well known, as would the ground based march of young locusts from the millions of eggs that would have been laid (described in the introduction). What was not expected was the intensity and widespread nature of what had happened this time. It was on a vast scale unknown before (compare 2.2), denuding the whole land of grain, vegetation and trees.

1.5

'Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
And wail, all you drinkers of wine,
Because of the sweet wine,
For it is cut off from your mouth.'

Even the drunkards are called on to take notice of what has happened and weep, for they are to recognise that it is affecting what they love best, the very source of their supplies of their beloved drink. But the call also goes out to all drinkers of wine, they too are to wail, for all will be affected. There is an indication here of what Joel sees as the reason for the judgment that has come on them. It is because they are so taken up with pleasure rather than with obedience to the covenant and the worship of YHWH.

A Description of the Plague And Its Consequences (1.6-18).

The effects of the huge plagues of locusts which had arrived to devastate the land are graphically described, and the consequences in the devastation of all vegetation in the land, with the result that both the people and the priests and servants of the Temple mourn and weep over what has happened, especially because it means that the meal and drink offerings are no longer available in the house of YHWH, and there are great shortages of food among

the people. Joel sees what has happened as a reminder of the imminence of the coming Day of YHWH when God's final purposes will be accomplished in both judgment and blessing.

Analysis of 1.6-18).

- a For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the jaw-teeth of a lioness (1.6).
- b He has laid my vine waste, and de-barked my fig-tree, he has made it clean bare, and cast it away, its branches are made white (1.7).
- c Lament like a virgin (young woman) girded with sackcloth, for the husband of her youth (1.8).
- d The meal-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of YHWH (1.9a).
- e The priests, the ministers of YHWH, mourn (1.9b).
- f The field is laid waste, the land mourns, because the grain is destroyed. The new wine is dried up, the oil languishes (1.10).
- g Be confounded, O you husbandmen, wail, O you vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley, because the harvest of the field is perished (1.11).
- f The vine is withered, and the fig-tree languishes, the pomegranate-tree, the palm-tree also, and the apple-tree, even all the trees in the countryside are withered, for joy is withered away from the sons of men (1.12).
- e Gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament, you priests, wail, you ministers of the altar, come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God (1.13a).
- d For the meal-offering and the drink-offering are withheld from the house of your God (1.13b).
- c Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the old men and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of YHWH your God, and cry to YHWH, "Alas for the day!" for the day of YHWH is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty will it come (1.14-15).
- b Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seeds rot under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down, for the grain is withered (1.16-17).
- a How do the beasts groan, the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture, yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate (1.18).

Note how in 'a' reference is made to the arrival of the locusts as being like lions, although 'without number', and in the parallel the cattle and sheep are desolated. In 'b' vines and fig trees are devastated, and in the parallel joy and gladness is cut off from the house of God, and the grain is useless. In 'c' they are to lament like a young newly married woman mourning for a dead husband, and in the parallel they are to lament because of the imminence of the day of YHWH. In 'd' the meal-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of YHWH, and in the parallel the meal-offering and the drink-offering are withheld from the house of your God. In 'e' the priests, the ministers of YHWH, mourn, and in the parallel the priests and ministers are to cover themselves with sackcloth. In 'f' the grain, wine and oil are greatly affected, and in the parallel the fruit-bearing trees are withered. Centrally in 'g' the husbandmen and vinedressers are confounded because the harvest of the countryside is perished

1.6

‘For a nation is come up upon my land,
Strong, and without number,
His teeth are the teeth of a lion,
And he has the jaw-teeth of a lioness.’

The initial arrival of the swarms of locusts is described in terms of a 'nation' (compare

Proverbs 30.25-27 where a similar idea is expressed; and the use of goyim in Zephaniah 2.14 of animals in their differing species) which was strong and without number (compare Psalm 105.34 which speaks of 'locusts -- without number'), and had teeth like a lion or lioness. In other words teeth that could gnaw and eat through anything.

1.7

‘He has laid my vine waste,
And de-barked (or ‘broken’) my fig-tree,
He has made it clean bare, and cast it away,
Its branches are made white.’

And with those teeth they had laid the vine waste, removed the bark from fig trees, and stripped the trunks and branches bare, leaving the white branches bare and visible, a very vivid picture of the activities of locusts well recognised by those who have experienced such a visitation. This would be a very good description of the activities of the ‘cutting or gnawing’ locusts (1.4).

1.8 ‘Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth,
For the husband of her youth.’

Judah were therefore to lament like a newly married woman (bethulah) who had been recently bereaved while still young, a most dreadful situation in those days, not only because her provider was dead, but also because it would affect her position in Judah. (Compare Isaiah 54.6 where in context such a woman had not borne children). The thought is that the lamentation should go very deep and be almost despairing.

The word translated ‘virgin’ (bethulah) clearly cannot mean literally a woman who has never known a man, for here she was a married woman and would therefore have had relations with her husband on the night of the marriage. But in fact in early Hebrew ‘bethulah’ did not refer to a pure virgin. This is evident from its use at Ugarit of the fertility goddess who was anything other than a genuine virgin, and its use of ‘the virgin daughter of Babylon’, who in Isaiah 47.9 was seen as a widow with children. Compare how the word had to be qualified by ‘and had not known a man’ in Genesis 24.16. It clearly meant a young woman whether married or unmarried, in contrast with ‘alma which indicated a young unmarried woman, and therefore truly a virgin.

1.9

‘The meal-offering and the drink-offering are cut off from the house of YHWH,
The priests, the ministers of YHWH, mourn.’

Because of the ravages of the locusts no grain and wine would be produced, and this apparently in the whole of Judah, and therefore there would be no firstfruits, and no grain or wine offerings. No wonder then that the priests and Temple servants mourned. There are no good grounds for denying that these types of offerings were offered in pre-exilic times, and they are in fact called for in the Law of Moses.

The lack of grain would affect the daily offerings which were seen as an essential part of the maintenance of the covenant, and the blow thus went very deep, although presumably there was grain in storage that could be used until it ran out or unless the locusts had got to it.

1.10

‘The field is laid waste, the land mourns,
For the grain is destroyed,
The new wine is dried up,
The oil languishes.’

We now have the explanation for the lack of meal and wine offerings. It was because the fields had been laid waste, the grain was destroyed, the wine was dried up and the olive oil was no

longer being produced. The locusts had apparently devastated the total harvest. The result was that even the land was seen as in mourning because it could produce no fruit. Or alternatively the idea of 'the land' is the people of the land, for the people were also left bereft.

1.11

‘Be confounded, O you husbandmen,
Wail, O you vinedressers,
For the wheat and for the barley,
For the harvest of the field is perished.’

The farmers and vinedressers could only look on helplessly at the devastation of their crops, and wail at what was happening. Nothing could be done about locusts which arrived in such vast numbers and would soon chew their way through the vegetation. Under their very eyes they saw their grain being consumed, and their harvest disappearing. Dr Thomson states from his own experience, ‘I saw under my own eyes not only a large vineyard loaded with young grapes, but whole fields of corn disappear as if by magic, and the hope of the husbandman vanish like smoke’.

1.12

‘The vine is withered, and the fig-tree languishes,
The pomegranate-tree, the palm-tree also, and the apple-tree,
Even all the trees of the field are withered,
For joy is withered away from the sons of men.’

And the locusts ate everything. The trees withered because their leaves had been consumed and they had even had their bark removed. And the consequence of all this withering was that men’s joy also withered. They no longer had anything to be joyful about. All their labours had been spent in vain.

1.13

‘Gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament, you priests,
Wail, you ministers of the altar,
Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God,
For the meal-offering and the drink-offering are withheld from the house of your God.’

And so the call goes up from Joel for the priests and Temple servants who served at the altar to clothe themselves with sackcloth and mourn in repentance for their failures. Indeed they were to lie in sackcloth all night, because the meal and drink offerings were being withheld from the house of their God because of Judah’s sins.

1.14-15

‘Sanctify a fast,
Call a solemn assembly,
Gather the old men and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of YHWH your God,
And cry to YHWH, “Alas for the day!”
For the day of YHWH is at hand,
And as destruction from the Almighty will it come.’

And they were to go further. They were to summon together all the men of Judah to a solemn assembly in the house of YHWH, including all the old men and all those who lived in the land, and they were to cry to YHWH, ‘Alas for the day’. And this was because the sad devastation that they had gone through was to be seen as a portent of the coming of YHWH’s final day, the Day of YHWH, the Day which would come imminently (at any time) as destruction from the Almighty, and for which they had to prepare themselves. That Day is described in some detail in Isaiah 24. It was a day to be dreaded by all who were not faithfully waiting on God.

1.16

**Is not the food cut off before our eyes,
Joy and gladness from the house of our God?’**

1.17

**The seeds rot under their clods,
The garner are laid desolate,
The barns are broken down,
For the grain is withered.’**

And this expectancy of coming judgment had been brought on by their food disappearing before their very eyes (typical of what would happen when locusts were on the march), the consequence being that there was no rejoicing and gladness in the house of God (either the Temple or the people as a whole). For what was left of the seeds was rotting, the garner had been desolated, and the makeshift barns had been broken down because the grain was withered.

1.18

**‘How do the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed,
Because they have no pasture,
Yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.’**

And not only the vegetation was affected. The animal world too suffered. The herds of cattle could not understand why they had no pasture, the flocks of sheep were bewildered and desolated. All that remained was the bare denuded earth, and all that they could do was ‘groan’.

The Young Locusts Appear As A Judgment From God Despite All Efforts To Prevent Them (1.19-2.3).

It may well be that after describing the initial locust invasions in chapter 1 Joel now goes on to deal with the next stage of the invasions when the locust eggs hatch out and become voracious grubs and then small grasshoppers.

Locusts tend to swarm when the weather is very hot, so that the opening words of this passage may refer to fires caused by a hot, dry summer. This would explain why the water brooks had dried up. But equally well it may apply to fires started by farmers desperate to save some of their crops and fruit trees from the advancing locusts. Or indeed both may be in mind. Fires were, in fact, the only way in which the desperate farmers could set up a barrier against the advancing young locust hordes, even if it often failed in its purpose. It was felt to be better than doing nothing, and as the farmers got more desperate the fires would become larger.

Joel appears speaking in Jerusalem where news has come in of the locust invasion and its effects, which he interprets as a Day of YHWH, a day when YHWH is exercising His judgment. And he calls on the priests to blow the ram’s horns to sound the alarm before the hopping locusts arrive in Jerusalem. He also calls all the people to tremble at the fearsome nature of what is happening, and then describes the sight of the approach of the yellow-winged swarming locusts out of the morning sun in terms of the dawn spreading on the mountains. And so great are the different swarms of locusts that he describes them as being unlike anything seen before, in terms similar to those used of the swarm of locusts in Exodus 10.14, compare also 10.6.

He then reiterates his description of the burning fields, possibly set on fire to battle against the locusts, and also with it describes the effects of the passing of the young locusts on the vegetation of the land, turning the land from fruitful land into a barren wilderness.

Analysis of 1.19-2.3.

- a O YHWH, to you do I cry, because the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the countryside. Yes, the beasts of the field pant to you, because the water brooks are dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness (1.19).
- b Blow you the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain, let all the inhabitants of the land tremble (2.1a)
- c For the day of YHWH has come, because a day of darkness and gloominess is near, a day of clouds and thick darkness (2.2a).
- b As the dawn spreads on the mountains, a great people and a strong, there has not ever been the like, nor will be any more after them, even to the years of many generations (2.2b).
- a A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns, the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness, yes, and none has escaped them (2.3).

Note that in 'a' the fire burn throughout the land, and in the parallel the same occurs. In 'b' the alarm is sounded and the people tremble, and in parallel is what they tremble at, the huge invasion of young locusts streaming over the land. Centrally in 'c' it is the day of YHWH, a day of gloom and darkness.

1.19-20

O YHWH, to you do I cry,
Because the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness,
And the flame has burned all the trees of the countryside,
Yes, the beasts of the field pant to you,
Because the water brooks are dried up,
And the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.'

The passage commences with a heartfelt cry to YHWH as he learns of the way that the fields are burning as a result of the farmers' efforts to hold back the army of young locusts. What the locusts had not eaten the fires were destroying. And the consequence was that the wild animals could only call on YHWH because water had become short, and the fires had devoured their pastures in the wilderness.

The land may well also have been suffering under semi-drought conditions, the type of hot summers that often brought out swarms of locusts in large numbers, thus causing the water brooks to dry up, a process hastened by the fires now partly out of control.

2.1

'Blow you the ram's horn in Zion,
And sound an alarm in my holy mountain,
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
For the day of YHWH has come.

Observing what he did, and recognising that it came from the hand of YHWH, Joel called on the priests to blow the ram's horn, sounding the alarm from the holy mountain (probably the Temple mount) to all who were round about. And he wanted it to shake up the inhabitants and make them tremble as they recognised that the day of YHWH had come, the time of His judgment of Judah.

This was not, of course the final day of YHWH as he recognised, for he describes that in chapter 3. Rather it was a localised 'day of YHWH' aimed at the present generation.

2.2 '

For a day of darkness and gloominess is near,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,

**As the dawn spreads on the mountains,
A great people and a strong,
There has not ever been the like,
Nor will be any more after them,
Even to the years of many generations.'**

He expands on what this day which has come near is like. It is a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness (compare Amos 5.18-20; Zephaniah 1.15), both to their spirits psychologically and to their eyes literally, as the huge mass of flying locusts blotted out the sun. And as he does so he lifts his eyes and sees the sun glinting on the yellow wings of the locusts, seeing them as being like the dawn spreading on the mountains.

His description of them as 'a great people and strong' is reminiscent in its use of people of Proverbs 30.25, 'the ants are a people not strong' where locusts are also mentioned 'having no king' over them. The Jews therefore saw insects which came together in large numbers as 'peoples'. Compare also 1.6. The statement that 'there has not ever been the like, nor will be any more after them, even to the years of many generations' is reminiscent of Exodus 10.14 where in describing the plague of locusts in Egypt Moses says, 'before them there were no such locusts as they, nor after them will be such'. This demonstrates that both statements were hyperbole, and that neither has in mind a final plague larger than any other. Indeed 'even to the years of many generations' limits the statement to a time in the not too distant future eschatologically speaking. It is simply saying that it was not of the norm and was something that only happened once, say, in a hundred years.

It is interesting, however, that God is often spoken of as being in darkness (Psalm 18.11), and in clouds (Exodus 16.10 and often; Psalm 18.11-12) and thick darkness (Exodus 20.21; Psalm 18.9), in order to shield His glory from His creation, which is a reminder to us that even in the darkest hour God is with us. In the midst of the Day of YHWH He would still be watching over His own.

2.3

**' A fire devours before them,
And behind them a flame burns,
The land is as the garden of Eden before them,
And behind them a desolate wilderness,
Yes, and none has escaped them.**

Joel then draws attention to two aspects of the locust invasions, referring again to the fires lit both to prevent them moving forward, and in order to prevent them turning back, and to the effect of the voracious hordes on the land as they turned what was virtually a Garden of Eden (land in full growth) into a desolate wilderness denuded of all vegetation. The land was being doubly destroyed.

For the use of fire in driving back the locusts consider Dr Thomson's words cited in the introduction, and how he also described how he vainly attempted to save his own garden from their depredations. 'By the next morning the head of the column had reached my garden, and hiring eight or ten people I resolved to rescue at least my vegetables and flowers. During this day we succeeded by fire, and by beating them off the walls with brushes and branches, in keeping our little garden tolerably clear of them, but it was perfectly appalling to watch this animated river as it flowed up the road and ascended the hill above my house. At length, worn out with incessant skirmishing, I gave up the battle --- and surrendered the remainder to the conquerors.' We can therefore imagine the position of farmers and vineyard owners who saw their whole livelihood being destroyed.

The March Of The Young Locust/Grasshoppers (2.4-11).

Joel then describes the onward 'march' of the young locusts in their mass movement made up

of sheer numbers, advancing like a huge ‘army’ covering many miles of territory, a living converging mass, and he does so in picturesque terms. He likens them in appearance to horses, a likeness related to the head of the locusts and often noted by observers, and likens the noise that they made as they moved forward to the rumbling of chariot wheels, and the crackling the fires that burned up stubble (in this case before its time), seeing them as moving forward ‘in battle array’ as a strong people, whom nothing could turn back. Meanwhile people turn pale at their advance, and are filled with anguish, while the locusts themselves move inevitably forward as irresistible as mighty men, climbing up walls rather than going round them (or breaking them down), with each marching forward on his way. There is no breaking of ranks and no jostling as they pour forward in their huge numbers like a rolling mass, and they burst through every ‘weapon’ set up to prevent their advance, whether it be fire, or flails, or feet, or whatever. Nothing holds them back.

Though multitudes die, the remainder just carry on over them. They leap up walls, climb up into houses and scurry through windows, while the earth and the heavens (in other words the whole creation) tremble before them because they are YHWH’s messengers. Meanwhile as a result of the swarms of flying locusts the sun is darkened and the moon’s shining is blotted out, while visibility of the stars is lost. And the question then is ‘Who leads this people who have no king?’ And the answer is, ‘It is YHWH Himself, Who has brought them as a judgment on His people, because it is the latest great and terrible day of YHWH’.

Analysis of 2.4-11.

- a The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses, and as horsemen, so do they run, like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire which devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array (2.4-5).
- b At their presence the peoples are in anguish, all faces have become pale (2.6).
- c They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war, and they march every one on his ways, and they do not break their ranks (2.7).
- d Nor does one jostle another, they march every one in his path, and they burst through the weapons, and do not break off (2.8).
- c They leap on the city, they run on the wall, they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows like a thief (2.9).
- b The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining (2.10).
- a And YHWH utters his voice before his army, for his camp is very great, for he is strong who executes his word, for the day of YHWH is great and very terrible, and who can abide it? (2.11).

In ‘a’ the advancing ‘army’ is described in all its terribleness, a strong ‘people’ set in battle array and in the parallel we learn that it is YHWH’s army, and that He too is terrible and strong. In ‘b’ the people are in anguish and all faces become pale, and in the parallel earth and heaven tremble, and the lights of heaven become dark. In ‘c’ we have a detailed description of their forward movement, and in the parallel we have the same. Centrally in ‘d’ their invincibility is emphasised.

2.4-5

The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses,
And as horsemen, so do they run.
Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap,
Like the noise of a flame of fire which devours the stubble,
As a strong people set in battle array.

It is made clear here that they are not horses and chariots, any more than they are like flames

of fire, but merely in one way or another give the impression of the same. Note the reference to 'leaping', and compare verse 9 which was typical of the movement of a small locust (grasshopper).

Locusts are compared with horses elsewhere. In Jeremiah 51.27 the horses are to come up 'like rough locusts', while in Job 39.19-20 they are seen as 'leaping like a locust', and certainly the heads of locusts do remind us of tiny armoured horses, which is why the Italian word for locust means "little horse," and the German word means "hay horse", confirming that they share the same impression. Thus the description of the locusts here as 'having the appearance of horses' and as 'leaping on the tops of the mountains' is in accord with general opinion. The reference to chariot noise and the crackling of fires burning up the stubble is reminiscent of the clicking noise that grasshoppers make with their legs, while the description of them as a 'strong people' has in mind the inexorable way in which they progress, with nothing holding them back.

2.6

At their presence the peoples are in anguish,
All faces have become pale.

Joel was striving here to get over the impression of the awfulness of the judgment that God was bringing on His people, and it is a feature of the movements of small locusts in vast, heaving masses that they bring anguish and even fear to men, as they see the awesome nature of their advance, consider the consequences of that advance, and after struggling to deal with the menace, find the situation hopeless. Dr Thomson saw the sight as so fearsome that he admitted that he could not get it out of his thoughts and his dreams for some time afterwards, and he was a man used to strange and awesome sights.

'All faces have become pale.' The fear of what was coming could be seen on the faces of the watchers. This could be rendered 'they gather blackness'. Compare the darkening of sun and moon in verse 10. The reference to 'peoples' may suggest that other nations around were also affected.

2.7-8

'They run like mighty men,
They climb the wall like men of war,
And they march every one on his ways,
and they do not break their ranks.
Nor does one jostle another,
They march every one in his path,
And they burst through the weapons,
And do not break off.'

The scurrying huge mass of leaping grasshoppers are here likened to the eager advance of mighty men into battle, as like men of war they ascend the walls and continue marching on in their ways. The mass never breaks up as they move inexorably forward, every one on its path, and they surmount any obstacle put in their way by mass suicide, with the dead grasshoppers providing a bridge for the living. They 'burst through the weapons and do not break off (or alternatively 'fall').

An alternative translation to 'weapons' is 'water-courses'. This may suggest that even water does not prevent their advance, or that they used water tunnels as a means of access to the city (e.g. the tunnel of Siloam).

If we use our imaginations we can see the people of Jerusalem looking over its walls at the massive phalanx of young locust/grasshoppers advancing on the city, leaping and prancing like a great host of tiny horsemen, and making the noise of many chariots. The young locusts

did not, of course, have the city as their goal. They were just advancing in a straight line and the city happened to be in their way (it was YHWH Who was directing their advance - verse 11). But there was no stopping them and no obstacle hindered them. They did not turn aside for anything, nor did they hesitate, they just climbed over whatever lay before them, city walls, houses, palaces, and the lot. This is now eloquently described.

2.9

‘They leap on the city,
They run on the wall,
They climb up into the houses,
They enter in at the windows like a thief.’

Once in the city they move everywhere in search of food. They leap on the city, they run up the wall, they climb up into the houses and they enter into windows ‘like a thief’, a description hardly applicable to soldiers. But it is a typical picture of insects getting everywhere with no means of preventing them. Dr Thomson describes similar behaviour in his town, ‘when the head of the mighty column came in contact with the palace of the Emeer --- they did not take the trouble to wheel round the corners but climbed the wall like men of war and marched over the top of it; so when they reached the house of Dr Van Dyck, in spite of all his efforts to prevent it, a living stream rolled right over his roof’. Compare also the words of Moses of the plague of locusts in his day, ‘they will cover the face of the earth that one shall not be able to see the earth, --- and your houses will be filled, and the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians’ (Exodus 10.5-6).

2.10

‘The earth quakes before them,
The heavens tremble,
The sun and the moon are darkened,
And the stars withdraw their shining.’

The reason that the earth quakes before them and the heavens tremble is because they are instruments of YHWH’s judgment (compare how in Haggai 2.21 God speaks to His people in terms of shaking the heavens and the earth through the activities of Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest. Whenever God works in His mighty power the heavens and the earth are seen as trembling). The whole of creation is watching in anticipation at what YHWH is doing. And it may well be that there was a huge storm, or even an earthquake, or both, but it is not really required by the wording.

And the consequence will be that the sun, moon and stars will cease to shine. This last idea may well have come to Joel from the way in which light had been blocked out by the huge swarms of flying locusts, something which would be repeated when these young locusts being described grew their wings and flew. Such an effect on the heavens would make a great impression on the people. The same descriptions were used of human invasions when the smoke from burning fields and cities blotted out the sun (e.g. Isaiah 13.10, 13). It is how men speak when they face their greatest catastrophes. But it is not limited to ‘the end times’. It may well be that it was Joel’s description that was taken up and expanded on by the other prophets.

2.11

‘And YHWH utters his voice before his army,
For his camp is very great,
For he is strong who executes his word,
For the day of YHWH is great and very terrible,
And who can abide it?’

And the reason why the heavens and the earth would shake was because YHWH was

marching before His army (compare Psalm 148.8 for the idea of YHWH commanding creation to do His will) and uttering His cries of judgment (or commands to His army of young locusts/grasshoppers), while His followers were ‘very great’, for they were beyond human counting, and in carrying out His word they were invulnerable, as they pierced into every part of life. Their strength lay in their numbers. As men saw the locust/grasshoppers covering the whole ground and getting into their homes, with their voracious appetites consuming everything that was remotely edible, they would indeed see in it ‘the great and terrible day of YHWH’, as He expressed His judgment against them for their wrongdoing. It must have been a time of great horror (it would have appeared as though locusts would be arriving for ever). And like all ‘days of YHWH’ it would be almost beyond bearing. Furthermore it would be a reminder to them of the great and terrible Day of YHWH yet to come.

‘His camp is very great.’ We can compare here how we might say, ‘the whole camp went out to meet him’. The camp here indicates an ‘army’, and such an army had never been seen before in such huge numbers..

Joel Calls The Priests And People To Repentance In The Hope That YHWH Would Turn Away His Judgment (2.12-17).

The call to repentance divides into two sections, the first an appeal to the people by YHWH for them to turn to Him from their sin, and the second a call by Joel to bring the whole people together to cry to YHWH for mercy.

YHWH’s Appeal To The People To Repent And Turn To Him (2.12-14).

This is probably to be seen as all in the words of YHWH in spite of the change to the third person half way through and the question ‘who knows?’ at the end. Such a change in person is a regular feature of YHWH’s appeals to His people, while the ‘who knows?’ ‘is in order to get the people thinking and to test out their faith. On the other hand some see verse 12-13a as in the words of YHWH, and verses 13b-14 as in the words of Hosea.

Analysis of 2.12-14).

- a “Yet even now,” says YHWH, “turn you to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning” (2.12).
- b And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn to YHWH your God (2.13a).
- c For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in covenant love (2.13b)
- b And repents him of the evil (2.13c).
- a Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal-offering and a drink-offering, to YHWH your God? (2.14).

Note that in ‘a’ YHWH calls on them to turn to Him with fasting, weeping and mourning, and in the parallel the hope is that He will turn to them and repent, and provide them with a blessing. In ‘b’ they are called on to repent in their hearts, and in the parallel YHWH is declared to have repented Himself of the evil things that He has brought on them. Central in ‘c’ is the declaration of God’s character and being.

2.12-13

“Yet even now,” says YHWH,
“Turn you to me with all your heart,
And with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning,
And rend your heart, and not your garments,
And turn to YHWH your God,
For he is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and abundant in covenant love,
And repents him of the evil.” ’

We now come to the purpose of YHWH’s severe judgment. It was in order to call

priests and people to repentance. As in all such cases His covenant with them lies at the heart of the problem. It was because they had failed to observe YHWH's covenant requirements that they were being called to account, and facing one of the curses attached to that covenant. But now they were to turn to YHWH with all their hearts 'even now'. And they were to do so with fasting, and weeping and mourning because their own sinfulness and obduracy were the root cause of what had happened. In words spoken by Hosea they were to 'break up their fallow ground'. This is an indication that what has been described previously was something that had occurred in Joel's day.

And they could do this in the hope that YHWH would hear and would intervene as they 'rent their hearts' rather than their clothing. In other words their repentance was to be genuine and not ritualistic. The 'rending of the heart' required true contrition of heart (compare Psalm 51.17; Ezekiel 36.26; Deuteronomy 10.16; Jeremiah 4.4), and it was among such people that God on High promised to dwell (Isaiah 57.15). And with their hearts (their whole inner being) rent they were to turn to 'YHWH your God'. He was still their God and waiting for them to repent.

And they could thus turn to God because of what He is. 'He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in covenant love, and repents Him of the evil.' The terms are all covenant terms used previously for example in Exodus 20.6; 34.6, reminding them of His readiness to receive them once they truly turn to Him. Exodus 34.6 may well have been the source of his thoughts.

'And repents Him of the evil.' This does not mean that God is to be seen as having sinned and in need of repentance. Rather it indicates His unhappiness at what He has had to do in bringing 'evil things' (like locusts) on them and promises that He will have a 'change of heart' once they truly respond to Him. But the idea is not that He is righting something that He has done wrong, but that once they have repented it will make it possible for Him to do what He has always wanted to do, bless them under the covenant. It is their sin that prevents Him 'repenting', not His own. Compare 2 Samuel 24.16 where the case was very similar.

2.14

'Who knows whether he will not turn and repent,
And leave a blessing behind him,
Even a meal-offering and a drink-offering,
To YHWH your God?'

The hope is then posited that if they do repent and turn to God, YHWH will repent of His judgment on them and turn to them. And the consequence of this would be that He 'left a blessing behind Him' when He returned to Heaven having called off His judgment. And that blessing would be in the form of a part of the land having been spared from the hordes of locusts, so that meal-offerings and drink-offerings would again be offered to 'YHWH your God', to Whom they have turned (verse 13). They would once more have acknowledged His overlordship in the covenant.

The Call Goes Out For The Whole Of Judah To Gather Together For A Time Of National Repentance In Order To Remedy The Situation In The Light Of God's Call To Them (2.15-17).

Joel then gives his instruction to the priesthood to have a time of national mourning for sin because of what has happened, and because of YHWH's call to them which he has brought. They are to blow the summoning ram's horn on the Temple mount, they are to set apart time for a fast, they are to call all the people of Judah to a solemn assembly, they are to gather the people, and then once they have assembled they are to sanctify them (either by sacrifices, or by washing (possibly in 'water for purification') and

abstinence from sexual activity), and this is to include both the old men and the children (none are to be exempted for any reason whatever. For even breast fed babies with their nursing mothers, and the bridegroom and bride in the midst of their marriage celebrations, are to assemble. No reason for absence is to be accepted.

Then the priests and Temple servants are to weep between the porch and the altar, in the very place where sacrifices are offered and where the wine of the wine-offerings would be poured out, facing the entrance to the sanctuary, and are to call on YHWH to spare His people, and not let them be overcome by an enemy so that, as YHWH's heritage, they come under reproach and are ashamed. And the main reason for this is in order to justify God, lest conquering nations say, 'where is their God?'

It is apparent from this that Joel saw in the warning of the locust plagues an indication that, unless they repented, YHWH would move on to the further curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 which included invasion and subjection to an enemy.

2.15-16 'Blow the ram's horn in Zion,

Sanctify a fast,
Call a solemn assembly,
Gather the people,
Sanctify the assembly,
Assemble the old men,
Gather the children,
And those who suck the breasts,
Let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber,
And the bride out of her closet.'

The rapid fire instructions are an indication that what he is speaking of must be done at speed. There was to be no delay. The locusts were possessing the land. The blowing of the ram's horn in Zion, either as an alarm call, or as a call to a feast, is the first item on the agenda. It was a call to a solemn fast. This call is a repetition of the one in 1.14, or possibly a further one because the situation has got more severe. It may parallel the one in 2.1 although that may rather have been an alarm signal in view of the approaching hordes of young locust/grasshoppers.

The 'sanctifying of a fast' indicated the solemn setting aside of a time for an emergency approach to YHWH in fasting and prayer. They were then to give the official summons to a solemn assembly (the gathering together, usually of the menfolk, to a special gathering in Jerusalem), but in this case it was to be a gathering of everyone, male or female, young or old. The assembly was then to be sanctified. There were a number of ways of doing this, one of which was by washing their clothing (Exodus 19.10, 14) and abstaining from sexual activity (Exodus 19.15). This was as a symbol of their cleansing of their lives and rightly attuning their minds to meet with God.

Instructions were then given that everyone must be involved. They were to assemble the old men (who might under certain circumstances have been excused) and the children, and even the smallest infants with their nursing mothers. Furthermore even marriage celebrations were to provide no exception. Usually being involved in a marriage feast exempted those present from certain normal strict requirements of the Law (e.g. those related to making merry; compare also Deuteronomy 20.7; 24.5), but in this case it was not to be allowed to provide an exception. Even the bridegroom and bride must attend. This demonstrated the extremely serious nature of what was happening. The whole covenant community was to be involved, for all were in one way or another tainted by the sin and disobedience of the nation.

2.17

**‘Let the priests, the ministers of YHWH, weep between the porch and the altar,
And let them say, Spare your people, O YHWH,
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?” ’**

Then the priests, the servants of YHWH, were to stand between the porch and the altar facing the door of the sanctuary in which YHWH was seen as enthroned on the Ark of the Covenant, and weeping over the sins of Israel, were to officially call on Him to spare His people, so that His people should not suffer the reproach of having their enemies ruling over them. (This would suggest that these statements at least were made prior to the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian invasions, otherwise they were meaningless. It therefore confirms an early date for Joel). The position facing the door of the sanctuary, no doubt with representatives of the people behind them, would indicate that the priests were making their plea as representatives of the people, not as representatives of YHWH.

Note how Joel’s concern was for the honour of YHWH, in line with that of most of the prophets. He recognised that Judah were God’s inheritance, and was concerned lest the question be asked among the peoples who knew of this, ‘where is their God?’ The nations would expect Judah’s God to intervene on their behalf regardless of their sinfulness. Their view would be that if the sacrifices were maintained then God was bound to act. They had no understanding of the requirements of the covenant. So Israel which was intended to be an example and witness to the nations would have become a witness for the prosecution. For the astonishment of ‘they’ compare Jeremiah 19.8; Leviticus 26.32; Deuteronomy 28.37, which it will be noted is also connected with a judgment of locusts. For the question, ‘where is their God?’ compare Exodus 32.11-12; Micah 7.10; Psalm 42.10; 79.10; 115.2. For ‘the people of your heritage’ compare 1 Kings 8.51; Deuteronomy 4.20; 32.9. See also Exodus 19.5-6.

Having Accepted His People’s Repentance YHWH Promises To Deliver Them from The Plagues Of Locusts By Casting The Locusts Into The Seas On Both Sides Of The Land And That He Will Then Restore The Fruitfulness of Their Land (2.18-27).

After the plagues came the deliverance, presumably because the people repented in accordance with Joel’s instructions (2.15-17). As a consequence of their repentance YHWH was ‘jealous’ for His land. He once again recognised it as His own and determined to free it from all adversity, and to make it fruitful once again. He promised that He would cause ‘the northern menace’ to be removed far off and to be driven into the wilderness, into the Dead Sea to the east and the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) to the west, where they would rot, and called on the land and the wild animals to be afraid no longer concerning the lack of vegetation. And He called on the land and the people to be glad and rejoice because the rains would come in due season and the land would once again flourish resulting in more than making up for what had been lost. No more would they suffer shame among the nations because they were seen as the people whose God could not save them from the extreme locust devastation, and the consequence would be that they will know that YHWH is in the midst of them, and that there is no other God like Him.

Analysis of 2.18-27.

- a Then was YHWH jealous for his land, and had pity on his people (2.18).**
- b And YHWH answered and said to his people, “Behold, I will send you grain, and new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied with it, and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations (2.19).**

- **c** But I will remove far off from you the northern (army, menace), and will drive it into a land barren and desolate, its forepart into the eastern sea, and its hinder part into the western sea, and its stench will come up, and its ill savour will come up, because it has done great things (2.20).
- **d** Do not be afraid, O land, be glad and rejoice, for YHWH has done great things (2.21).
- **e** Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree bears its fruit, the fig-tree and the vine yield their strength (2.22).
- **d** Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in YHWH your God, for he gives you the former rain in just measure, and he causes to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month, and the floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil (2.23-24).
- **c** And I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten, the young (hopping) locust, and the infant (devouring) locust, and the adult (swarming) locust, My great army which I sent among you (2.25)
- **b** And you will eat in plenty and be satisfied, and will praise the name of YHWH your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you, and My people will never be put to shame (2.26).
- **a** And you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am YHWH your God, and there is none else, and my people will never be put to shame (2.27).

Note that in 'a' YHWH was jealous for His land and had pity on His people, and in the parallel they will know that He is in their midst, and that He is their God and the only God, while His people will never be put to shame. In 'b' YHWH will make their land fruitful again, and in the parallel they will eat in plenty and be satisfied. In 'c' He will remove from their midst the invading 'army' of locusts, and in the parallel He will restore the years of fruitfulness which the locusts have destroyed, that great 'army' that He had sent among them. In 'd' the land is to be glad and rejoice because YHWH has done great things, and in the parallel the children of Zion are to be glad and rejoice because He will give the necessary rains, making the land fruitful. Centrally in 'e' the beasts of the field are to be unafraid because the pastures of the wilderness will flourish, and the trees will bear their fruit.

2.18

**'Then was YHWH jealous for his land,
And had pity on his people.**

That chapters 1 & 2 refer to a past experience comes out here in that YHWH now acted to deliver His land and His people. He was 'jealous' for the land (compare how a good father will be 'jealous' for his family, wanting to ensure that they enjoy the very best). That is, He was determined to rid it of all that marred and spoiled it, because it was His land and His inheritance (see 2.17) and He was responsible for its upkeep and wanted to ensure the very best for it. Furthermore He had compassion on His people. Note the distinction. The people needed compassion because while they were in rebellion He could not be 'jealous' over them. Once, however, they had turned to Him again it was different. And as a result both would be able to be glad and rejoice at what He was going to do.

2.19

**'And YHWH answered and said to his people,
Behold, I will send you grain, and new wine, and oil,
And you will be satisfied with it,
And I will no more make you a reproach among the nations,**

He promised that he would once again send them grain, new wine and oil, the three staple products of the land, and he would do it to such an extent that they would be satisfied with it. And in doing so He would remove the reproach that they were experiencing among the nations, as their neighbours declared that their God had been unable to deliver them from the extreme plagues of locusts (see their cry in verse 17, and the Judean appeal for their reproach to be dealt with)., They would no longer suffer under such reproach when their neighbours saw what God had done in removing the locusts and providing such bountiful harvest.

2.20

But I will remove far off from you the northern (army or menace),
And will drive it into a land barren and desolate,
Its forepart into the eastern sea,
And its hinder part into the western sea,
And its stench will come up, and its ill savour will come up,
Because it has done great things.'

For He would remove from them the menace that had come from 'the north'. This need only indicate that the major hatching out of the young locust/grasshoppers had occurred to the north of Jerusalem so that they had approached Jerusalem from the north, or it could signify that they had been blown in from the Syrian desert to the north. Alternatively it may be that the north, from which any major unanticipated enemy came (they had been dealing with their neighbours and Egypt for centuries and saw them as a local problem) was seen as a symbol of all that was bad and unanticipated, so that 'northern menace' indicated substantial interference from unknown external sources. There may even be the suggestion that the locust plagues were seen as coming from 'the mountains of the gods' in the north (Isaiah 14.13).

And God promised that He would drive the locusts out of the land into the desolate wilderness (the biter bit), partly into the Dead Sea and the desert beyond, and partly into the Great Sea, and that they would die there so that, as their bodies decayed, a great stench would come up. The stench of locusts who had drowned and been thrown up rotting on shore was proverbial. And this would occur to them because they had done 'great things', i.e. had totally devastated the land, especially to the north of Jerusalem. They had caused as much devastation to the vegetation as an invading and ruthless enemy.

2.21

'Do not be afraid, O land, be glad and rejoice,
For YHWH has done great things.'

In consequence the land need no longer be afraid of any further such activity. It could be glad and rejoice because YHWH had also done 'great things', but in His case for the benefit of the land. 'O land' may not only signify the land itself, but also the people of the land.

2.22

'Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field,
For the pastures of the wilderness do spring forth,
For the tree bears its fruit,
The fig-tree and the vine yield their strength.'

It is possibly significant that while the wild animals (or the domesticated animals) are told that they need no longer be afraid of a future absence of their food supply, they are not told to be glad and rejoice. It is the people who worship and rejoice. The animals just receive what God gives, even though they are symbolically addressed as though

they could understand. The prophetic message was in fact really to the people. Note how this is a reversal of 1.10, 12, 18-20. In 1.18-20 the pastures of the wilderness are emphasised.

Elsewhere in Scripture the wild animals along with the whole of creation are also depicted as praising God and giving Him glory (e.g. Psalm 148.10; Revelation 5.13, and symbolically in the cherubim/living creatures with their fourfold manifestation of man, lion, eagle and ox), but then it is, of course, a use of anthropomorphism, for animals do not worship.

The wild animals (or domesticated animals) are promised that in the very wilderness areas where they dwell, which has been devastated equally by the young locusts, the vegetation will 'spring forth' (a verb only used elsewhere in Genesis 1.11), the trees will bear their fruit, and the fig tree and vine will 'yield their strength', although this last will mainly benefit men, which is why the children of Zion are also especially to be glad and rejoice.

2.23

‘Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in YHWH your God,
For he gives you the former rain in just measure (or ‘in righteousness’),
And he causes to come down for you the rain,
The former rain and the latter rain,
In the first month.’

The ‘children of Zion’, who can now be called this because they have been restored, are also to be glad and rejoice, both because of the promised fruitfulness of verse 22, and because YHWH has promised to them that the rains will come abundantly in due season in the right amounts (in just measure). The ‘former rain’ in October/November would soften up the ground and prepare it for sowing, the latter rain in March/April would ensure the full growth of the harvest (the ‘first month’ of Abib or Nisan occurring around this time). Both these rains are a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5; 55.10-13. This is not therefore just a promise of fruitful lands, but of all the spiritual blessing that goes with God blessing His people (see verse 28).

‘In just measure (or ‘in righteousness’).’ The idea may be that the rains would come in the ‘right’ amounts, or that they would come because of the restoration of covenant righteousness resulting from their repentance and turning to YHWH.

2.24

‘And the floors will be full of wheat,
And the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

The result of the rains coming in abundance at the proper time will be a huge grain harvest, so that the barns will once again be full of wheat, and the flourishing of vines and olives so that the vats will overflow with wine and olive oil (contrast 1.10).

2.25

‘And I will restore to you the years that the locust (swarming locust) has eaten,
The young locust (hopping locust), and the infant locust (destroying locust), and the
adult locust (gnawing locust),
My great army which I sent among you.
And you will eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And will praise the name of YHWH your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you,
And my people will never be put to shame.’

Their harvests are to be so plentiful that all that has been lost will be restored, all that has been eaten by the different types of locust. Note the phrase ‘the years that the locusts have eaten’. They had not only destroyed what was on the land, but also what had been stored from past years, although some see the plagues as having continued over a number of years. These words should be a great encouragement as we grow older, for they remind us that He can make up for the failures of past years.

YHWH, however, fully acknowledges His responsibility for the locust plagues. They were His great army which He had sent among them. But now that all has been put right between them, the people will once again have abundance of food. They will eat in plenty and be satisfied. And in consequence they will praise the Name of YHWH their God, the One Who will have dealt so wondrously with them.

And they will no more be subjected to shame before their neighbours. All Israel’s neighbours were aware of the great claims that Israel/Judah made concerning their invisible God, and the plagues that had come upon them would undoubtedly have resulted in great shame because their boasts appeared to have been unfulfilled. What the neighbours failed to recognise was that Judah’s God, unlike their own gods, was a covenant God Whose covenant included both blessings and cursings. Thus their view had been that His failure was simply due to His inability to do anything.

Note the emphasis (in God’s words) on the fact that the damage was done by the locusts already outlined in 1.4. It is as though God wanted to emphasise that this was a real locust invasion, just in case anyone would think otherwise.

2.27

‘And you will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
And that I am YHWH your God, and there is none else,
And my people will never be put to shame.’

And the final result of what has happened will be that Judah/Israel will know that YHWH is among them, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill, and that He is their God and that there is no other god. Thus to look anywhere else than to Him would be foolish. And they could be assured that while they responded to Him and His covenant, they would never be put to shame, because God would never fail them. The repetition of ‘my people will never be put to shame’ brings out how deeply Joel felt that shame that had been brought on God’s Name because the judgment had been necessary, even if it gave the wrong impression to outsiders.

Note the emphasis on YOUR God and MY people. Because they had repented and returned to Him full covenant relations had been restored.

The Promise Of Great Spiritual Blessing Yet To Be ‘Poured Out’ And Portents Of Judgment To Come (2.28-32).

And as a result of their restoration to Him through repentance and their turning to Him, He promised that once they had seen the fulfilment of these promises they would at some stage see the fulfilment of greater promises. For at some time in the future He would pour out on them His own Spirit (compare Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5), with the result that all God’s people, both young and old, master and servant, male and female, would become prophets. ‘All flesh’ does not signify ‘everyone’, whether in Israel or the world, but rather signifies people of all classes and levels so that no one will necessarily be excluded on account of status, as the words that follow make clear

And also at some time there will be apocalyptic signs, so that just as the skies and the heavenly lights had been darkened by the locusts (2.10), so will it then be darkened by God’s judgments on the world. The heavens and the earth would both contain portents

of what He was about to do. On the earth blood (which it will be noted was singularly lacking from the judgment of the locusts), and fire, and pillars of smoke, a clear indication of warfare, violence and destruction of both earthly property and cities, and in the heavens the sun ‘turning into darkness’ (which could be caused by pillars of smoke, volcanic action, or great storm clouds), and the moon turning red like ‘blood’, (a phenomenon well known in Palestine when there were eclipses, and which could also be caused by a polluted atmosphere). And these would all be a warning of the coming of the final great and terrible Day of YHWH, of which the plagues of locusts had been a foretaste.

And in that day whoever calls on the Name of YHWH (as one who is a regular true worshipper of YHWH, one Who is called by YHWH) will be saved. Note that those who will be saved are only a remnant of those who face the final judgments, those whom YHWH calls, and this includes some who will escape in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, all this in accordance with the word of YHWH, for it will result from His word bringing about His will (compare Isaiah 55.10-13).

Analysis of 2.28-32.

- And it will come about afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions, and also on the servants and on the handmaids, in those days will I pour out my Spirit (2.28-29).
- And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke, the sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes (2.30-31).
- And it will come about that whoever will call on the name of YHWH will be delivered, for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as YHWH has said, and among the remnant those whom YHWH calls (2.32).

Note that in ‘a’ it will come about that the Spirit of YHWH will be poured out on all levels of people so that they become prophets and discerners of His ways, and in the parallel it will come about that all who reveal themselves as His by ‘calling on the Name of YHWH’ (a phrase signifying offering Him true worship) will be delivered as a result of the call of YHWH. Centrally in ‘b’ judgments will come upon the world as portrayed by portents in both earth and heaven.

2.28-29

‘And it will come about afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
And your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions,
And also on the servants and on the handmaids,
In those days will I pour out my Spirit.’

There is probably here a reminder of when YHWH poured out His Spirit (spoken of to Moses as ‘your spirit’, that is the spirit of prophecy, wisdom and leadership given to him by YHWH) on the seventy elders in the wilderness (Numbers 11). This expectancy of the pouring out of the Spirit on God’s people was clearly current in the 8th century BC. Compare Isaiah 32.15. Both Joel and Isaiah 44.1-5 see it as very much poured out on people in order to make them responsive towards YHWH. The purpose of the promise was as an assurance that one day all YHWH’s people would be endued with the Spirit and would experience spiritual gifts, because one thing was finally certain, and that is that YHWH would work among His people in full restoration.

‘Pour out.’ The word is regularly used of God pouring out his wrath, and indicates

giving in full measure, but in this case of Himself. They are to receive YHWH's own Spirit. It is used in Amos 5.8; 9.10 of the pouring out of the rain, and in view of Isaiah 32.15; 44.1-5; 55.10-13 must surely also suggest that the coming of the Spirit is to be seen as like spiritual rain falling on His people to cause them to become fruitful.

'On all flesh.' That this is limited to God's people is emphasised by the reference to YOUR sons and Your daughters, but the point is that within God's people it will not be limited to anyone. All levels and genders of society will receive the Spirit. The idea that fleshly man was to receive the Spirit of YHWH is a breaking down in the difference between man and God. Previously man has enjoyed 'the breath of God' (Genesis 2.7). Now he is to be imbued with His Spirit. This is God's future intention for His people.

'And your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.' The idea is to indicate that all will enjoy prophetic gifts (compare Number 12.6), not in order to delegate the gifts to some. It was recognised that prophets would have dreams and visions, and the servants and handmaids were not excluded. It is wrong to overemphasise the ecstatic nature of what will happen. God is not promising strange phenomena, but revelation and truth.

'Afterwards' (after His current restitution of the land) is a vague time reference and gives no indication of when this will take place. The giving of the Spirit would be anticipated after the Babylonian exile (Ezekiel 36.24-27) and was promised in part to Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4.7), and to John the Baptist (Luke 1.15-17). It was fulfilled when the Coming One was 'drenched with the Holy Spirit' (compare John 3.24) as the One Who was the representative of the true Israel and would then drench others (Matthew 3.11 and parallels; John 1.30-33). There can be no doubt that it was partially fulfilled on the Apostles during Jesus' earthly ministry (inferred from Luke 11.13, and from Matthew 12.38 and the success of the Apostles in doing so), was sealed in the Upper Room (John 20.22), and became a wider gift to the whole church at Pentecost (Acts 2), when 'all flesh' prophesied, which was thus the true fulfilment of Joel's prophecy as Peter observed. And the Holy Spirit now possesses the true church not 'as well as Israel', but because they are the true Israel, that is the congregation of the true Israel established by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16.18; 21.43), the true Vine (John 15.1-6), the 'Israel of God' (Galatians 6.16; Ephesians 2.11-22; 1 Peter 2.9).

It will be noted that Joel does not directly link this pouring out of the Spirit directly to the portents which he then refers to. They will certainly follow it, but at no stated interval, and it is unquestionable that those portents have themselves been manifested at different times in history as a reminder that the great and terrible day of YHWH is coming. Indeed Peter saw them as partly fulfilled in the darkening of the sun while Jesus was dying, and the reddening of the moon which no doubt accompanied it, due to the strange weather conditions (the moon appears as blood red in Palestine on many occasions).

2.30-31

'And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth,
Blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke,
The sun will be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes.'

The loose connection with the previous verse ('and') gives no indication of time span. The real point that is being made is that the Spirit will be poured out, to be followed at some stage by portents of God's final judgments. In other words God's people will be well prepared before it comes. This promise results from the new renewal of the covenant resulting from the effects of the locus invasion. But there is also a warning

here that the people must not think that all would go smoothly from then on. Mankind was such, and even His people were such, that judgments, and then final judgment, were inevitable. Thus the future would hold, both in the short term and the long term, times of blood and violence and destruction. It was in the nature of man. And in the same way the heavens would give their portents, portents which have been observed through the ages (see e.g. Isaiah 9.18; 13.10; 34.4 etc. We cannot just lump all these into 'the end times'. They occurred in history). The smoke and explosions of war, or of violent expulsions from volcanoes, or strange weather effects, have all resulted in a darkened sun and a blood coloured moon at different times. And men have always seen in these strange events portents of what is to come. All this would happen time and again as a reminder of the coming terrible Day of YHWH.

The pouring out of the Spirit of YHWH on His people would introduce a new creative situation whereby His people would become God-possessed, patently both flesh and Spirit, thus enhancing the old creation, it is therefore significant that this new act of creation should be seen as followed by portents and signs which are a reminder of God's judgments on Egypt and His subsequent revelation of Himself to Israel (Exodus 7.17; 9.24; 10.21-22; compare 19.18). It was a reminder that in redeeming those whom He has created for Himself God must bring His judgments on the world.

All this will occur 'before the great and terrible day of YHWH'. Like the plague of locusts that had just devastated Judah, it would all be a reminder of the coming Day of YHWH. But it would not itself be the Day of YHWH. Joel only knew that the world faced tumult before the end. He had no conception of how much tumult. As empire has rolled on after empire, and as the world faced has catastrophic situations, these 'signs' have been seen again and again. They express the tumult of the world and the catastrophic nature of events that occur, rather than being a specific sign of 'the end times'.

2.32

'And it will come about that whoever will call on the name of YHWH will be delivered,
For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape,
As YHWH has said,
And among the remnant those whom YHWH calls.'

But in the face of all this the true people of YHWH would have nothing to fear. All who truly 'call on the Name of YHWH' will be saved. To 'call on the Name of YHWH' is to truly worship Him (see Genesis 4.26; 12.8; 13.4; , compare 1 Kings 18.24; 1 Chronicles 16.8; Psalms 105.1; 116.13, 17; Zephaniah 3.9; Acts 2.21; Romans 10.13), and this is speaking of true believers who respond to Him and intend to continually walk with Him. They will enjoy final deliverance.

But however bad things become YHWH will ensure the survival of His people. This is expressed in terms of survival in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, for they were in those days the centre of the worship of YHWH. And among them will be those whom God will call, the holy seed (Isaiah 6.13). The early believers and the new Israel were themselves first established in mount Zion and Jerusalem (Acts 1-12), where the pouring out of the Holy Spirit took place (Acts 2), resulting in the believing remnant of Israel, who were called by God and thus 'called on the Lord' (Acts 2.21). Then as a result of the coming of Jesus and His resurrection mount Zion and Jerusalem were seen as transferred to Heaven (Galatians 4.22-31; Hebrews 12.22-23; Revelation 14.1; 21.2, 10).

'As YHWH has said.' What YHWH says will inevitably come about, for His word goes forth to accomplish it (Isaiah 55.10-13).

Note On Joel 2.28-31 And Acts 2.16-21.

That Peter saw a level of fulfilment of Joel 2.28 ff. in what happened at Pentecost is undeniable, simply because he himself defined it in those terms. But it is often questioned whether Peter saw Joel 2.28 as actually speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In other words the question is, when he said, 'this is that --', did he mean precisely that.

Of course, regardless of what Peter did mean what is described here in Joel cannot be limited to Pentecost. At the least it also required for its fulfilment the continuing work of the Spirit that followed Pentecost. But the argument is that all that was simply a reflection of Joel 2.28 which awaits its fulfilment in the future. Now to those who insist on applying the whole of Joel to 'the end days' for dogmatic reasons the answer is cut and dried. Joel was talking about something that would happen to the Jews in the end days, and all that Peter was doing was say something like, 'this is the kind of thing that Joel was talking about'.

One main argument advanced is that Peter gave the whole quotation, and it is claimed that he himself would have recognised that the so-called apocalyptic signs were not fulfilled. But that must be open to question. For Peter himself was aware that the sun had been darkened when Jesus was being crucified, and he lived in a time when blood and fire and pillars of smoke had regularly been experienced in Palestine. The Roman occupation was not always a happy one, and people like Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5.36-37) were just two of those who had felt the full force of their might, resulting in blood, and fire and pillars of smoke as people died and houses were burned, something that was thrown into new light by the crucifixion of Jesus. Thus Peter might well have felt that Joel's words had been fulfilled.

Acts 2.16 ff. is also cited by Peter as connecting with 'the last days'. This may have been because he was citing a different text from the MT, or was himself quoting loosely. But what this certainly shows is that Peter did consider that what had happened had happened in 'the last days'. And that is not too surprising for the early Christians did see what was happening as occurring within the last days, for they saw the last days as having begun with Christ's resurrection and exaltation as the Lord of glory. This is apparent from a number of New Testament citations. Peter himself in his letters declared that what the prophets had revealed had been for his own day (1 Peter 1. 12), and that Jesus 'was made manifest *at the end of the times* for your sake' (1 Peter 1.20), and he claimed that '*the end of all things is at hand*' (1 Peter 4.7). Paul also spoke of something being 'for our admonition, on whom *the end of the ages* has come' (1 Corinthians 10.11). Whilst the writer to the Hebrews declared that God had '*in these last days* spoken to us by the Son' (Hebrews 1.2), and that Jesus Christ 'has once for all appeared *at the end of the age* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself' (Hebrews 9.26). It is quite clear from this that the early church saw themselves as being in 'the last days' and 'at the end of the age'. They were not to know that those last days would last for over two thousand years. This being so it is difficult to believe that Peter was expecting a further outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would be unique. In our view it is clear that Peter did see Joel's prophecy being fulfilled in his day.

This is not to deny that the Holy Spirit has continued to be manifest in special ways at certain times, and that it may well be that at some stage such a work of the Holy Spirit will take place in Jerusalem turning many Jews to their true Messiah, but it is to deny that that is required by what Joel says. What we must insist on is that Joel's words were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and, through Him, of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and in what followed.

End of note.

The Consequence Of YHWH's Blessing Of His People Must Be The Judgment Of The Nations Who Have Oppressed His People (3.1-6).

The judgment of the locusts has carried Joel's thoughts forward to the final Day of YHWH. No time scale is given, but Joel knew that the consequence of YHWH's future pouring out His Spirit on His people must be the restoration of all His scattered people, and the judgment of the nations who had oppressed them. The two always go together, the blessing and the cursing. And as the nations have mistreated His people, so must they receive their recompense.

This picture of judgment has come to Joel's mind as a result of the awful plagues of locusts which had seemingly taken over Judah and Jerusalem. They were a revelation of what God could do, and an indication of the inexorable activity of YHWH. They were a reminder of coming Days of YHWH and of the final Day of YHWH. But as we have already seen it also included blessing on God's people.

No Valley of Jehoshaphat is known, and it is very likely that it is a symbolic valley found only in the mind of Joel and in the mind of God, the Valley of YHWH IS JUDGE, for in one sense YHWH's judgment would take place over the centuries, until it finalised in the final Judgment. In other words YHWH has in His own mind a place where He will judge the nations. And what they will be called to account for, both now and especially in the future, will be how they have behaved towards His people (compare Matthew 25.31-46. Both are parabolic pictures expressing a greater reality). The people of YHWH will emerge in triumph, whilst those who have rejected Him and persecuted His people will reap what they have sown.

Analysis of 3.1-6.

- For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I will bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem (3.1).
- I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of YHWH is Judge (Jehoshaphat), and I will execute judgment on them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and they have parted my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink (3.2-3).
- Yes, and what are you to me, O Tyre, and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Will you render me a recompense? And if you are recompensing me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense on your own head (3.4).
- Forasmuch as you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly precious things, and have sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem to the sons of the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their border (3.5-6).
- Behold, I will stir them up out of the place where you have sold them, and will return your recompense on your own head, and I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the men of Sheba, to a nation far off, for YHWH has spoken it (3.7-8).

Note that in 'a' YHWH will bring back the captivity of His people, and in the parallel he will stir them up out of the place to which they have been sold. In 'b' the nations are accused of scattering YHWH's people by selling them as slaves, and in the parallel He describes how they have done this. Central in 'c' is that He will recompense them for what they have done.

3.1

‘For, behold, in those days, and in that time,
When I will bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

The time indications are vague, as indeed they had to be, for the time when YHWH would do this was seen to be in His hands, but when that time came YHWH would restore His people from their captivity. This captivity is immediately explained, it is the captivity of those who have been carried off in the ancient slave trade, and in numerous battles, as the nations round about took advantage of Judah's weakness in order to send bands of slave traders into Judah so that they could carry them off and sell them as slaves. This will now be described in more detail, and as Amos 1.6-12 makes clear, it was a particular feature of this period. There is an important lesson in this. YHWH's concern was finally not for His land but for His people. Although they would soon be forgotten, even by their fellow Israelites, they were not forgotten by Him. He knew each one of them, and where they were, and what they were suffering. And one day, if they were faithful to Him, He would bless them.

Joel was speaking as a prophet to Judah and Jerusalem, but notice how easily he can slip into speaking of Israel. For in the eyes of the prophets Judah and Israel were one people, YHWH's inheritance. It should be recognised that in fact Judah and Jerusalem were a cosmopolitan community, for people came to live in and near Jerusalem from many parts of the surrounding area, as is clear from the many names which indicate the foreign source of their bearers ('Uriah the Hittite' etc). The people of Israel had never really ever been made up purely of descendants of Abraham. That was a myth as the Law of Moses makes clear. They had always included descendants of servants and foreign slaves who had served the Patriarchs, they included descendants of the mixed multitude (Exodus 12.38) who had left Egypt with the Israelites and had entered the covenant at Sinai, they included many who had since made common cause with Israel. All who submitted to YHWH and to circumcision could enter the covenant (Exodus 12.48). It was thus in Joel's time a good representation of the people of God of all ages. (That is how the church became Israel, they were simply incorporated into the new Israel of God established by Jesus Christ and His Apostles). And we consequently have here God's guarantee of the final prosperity of His people when their necessary hardships are behind them.

'I will bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem.' This could equally be translated as 'restore the fortunes of ---.' But that this includes restoration from captivity is made clear in the context.

3.2-3

'I will gather all nations,
And will bring them down into the valley of YHWH is Judge (Jehoshaphat),
And I will execute judgment on them there,
For my people and for my heritage Israel,
Whom they have scattered among the nations,
And they have parted my land,
And have cast lots for my people,
And have given a boy for a harlot,
And sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.'

But at that time those who have persecuted God's people will be called to account. For both during history and in the final day there will be a judgment of all nations by YHWH in the place of His appointing. This is a remarkable statement of YHWH's overlordship and sovereignty over the whole world. All nations were to take note of the fact that in the end in one way or another they had to render account to Him.

The judgment of Tyre and Philistia would take place in the following centuries through the invasions of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians and finally the Greeks (a nice irony in the face of the accusation). Compare for this Amos 1. But they still also

await the judgment in the last day (Matthew 11.21). His prime accusation at this time is the way in which they have deliberately enslaved many of His people for profit. It had been well organised, and they had worked together on it. They had divided up Judah and Israel into sections, so that they did not interfere with each other's activities (just think of that, we can hear Joel saying, they have divided up YHWH's inheritance), and then they had snatched the boys and girls of Judah, cast lots for them (compare Obadiah 1.11; Nahum 3.10) and sold them off so that they could buy themselves harlots and strong drink. Thus were YHWH's people already scattered among the nations. The scattering is not to do with the later exiles. This was the scattering of His people by means of the slave trade, and through men and women taken in battle or by invasion.

And there in the valley of 'YHWH is Judge' (Jeho-shaphat) He will execute judgment on the nations in accordance with how they have treated His people, those who are His inheritance. (A valley would appear to Joel as the natural place for such a gathering). We have already seen how important God's heritage were to Him (see 2.17). This final 'judgment of the nations' is represented in many ways in Scripture (e.g. Isaiah 24; Matthew 25.31-46; John 5.28-29; Revelation 6.12-17; 11.15-18; 14.14-20; 19.11-21), and none more awesome than the account in Revelation 20.11-15.

'The valley of Jehoshaphat.' In the Hebrew the text reads 'yehoshephet we nishphatti', '(the valley of) YHWH is Judge and there He will execute judgment'. It is YHWH's own 'secret' valley, reserved by Him as a place of judgment. We have no indication anywhere of any such literal valley. Later it will be called 'the Valley of Decision' (verse 14).

Note on the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

All attempts to identify the valley are purely speculative and without foundation. We simply do not know of any such valley, and the link of the name with its purpose suggests that it is a name invented for the purpose. The Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the Scriptures) saw them as having no specific place in mind and Targum Jonathan renders it as 'the plain of the decision of judgment'. Ibn Ezra sought to identify it as the valley of Berachah, south of Bethlehem, where Jehoshaphat's forces gathered after success in battle (2 Chronicles 20.26), but with no real grounds. Zechariah might be seen as placing the valley of judgment near to Jerusalem in a valley to be formed by divine activity (Zechariah 14.4). 1 Enoch 53.1 sites it in a valley near the valley of Hinnom. Later tradition has identified it as the Kidron valley and have made it into a burial ground in readiness for the day (even investing it with a tomb of Jehoshaphat, which is really a Graeco-Roman tomb). But Kidron is not an 'emeq (Joel's word) but a nahal (ravine). From all this it is quite clear that, as so often, 'nobody knows except God'.

End of note.

3.4

'Yes, and what are you to me, O Tyre, and Sidon,
And all the regions of Philistia?
Will you render me a recompense?
If you are recompensing me,
Swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense,
On your own head'

His accusation against Tyre, Sidon and Philistia (who were the ones mainly engaged in the slave trade in Amos 1.6-10) was that they were seeking to get their own back on Him, as if that were possible. In attacking His people they were attacking Him. But they will soon learn their mistake, for if they are recompensing Him they can be very

sure that He will respond swiftly and speedily, and will return their recompense on their own head.

These regions might well have felt bitter because of their subjection to Israel/Judah in the days of the empires of David and Solomon, (even though Tyre and Sidon had a treaty arrangement, it would have been as a very junior partner), and in what followed, and thus almost have seen it as their right to 'get their own back' on the God Who had so subjected them.

3.5-6

‘Forasmuch as you have taken my silver and my gold,
And have carried into your temples my goodly precious things,
And have sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem to the sons of the
Ionians (Greeks),
That you may remove them far from their border,’

But they needed to recognise that when they had invaded Judah/Israel it was YHWH's gold that they had taken, it was YHWH's possessions that they had stolen, and even dared to put in their own temples, and it was YHWH's children (Deuteronomy 14.1) that they had sold to the Ionians. To be sold so far away meant that there was no opportunity for buying them back (compare Nehemiah 5.8). They were, humanly speaking, lost for ever. (Which was why the selling on of slaves taken in war was forbidden in the Law - Deuteronomy 21.14). Thus these peoples were directly accountable to Him for what they had done.

3.7-8

‘Behold, I will stir them up out of the place where you have sold them,
And will return your recompense on your own head,
And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah,
And they will sell them to the men of Sheba,
To a nation far off,
For YHWH has spoken it.’

But YHWH would not leave His people in the places where they had been sold. One day He would stir them up out of their place and restore them to Himself. And He would also recompense Himself on those who had stolen from Him. He would do it by Himself selling their children to Judah who in turn would sell them in the east, to the Sabeans (the opposite direction to the Greeks). If carried out at all this specific judgment would have been carried out in later centuries and is not to be seen as something that will happen in the future. YHWH's judgments extend over a long period before they are finally summed up in the final judgment. But there is good reason for seeing this as simply an example of retribution not to be taken literally. (It is quite clear that YHWH Himself would certainly not 'sell slaves' to anyone).

‘To a nation far off.’ Just as the Judean slaves had been carried over the seas, so would the Tyrian and Philistine slaves be carried afar off, for the Sabeans would sell them on to many places in Africa. And all this would happen because YHWH had purposed it. It would result from the powerful word of YHWH which always accomplished its purpose (Isaiah 55.10-13).

There is in fact no record of this selling of slaves to the Sabeans, and it is very possible that this was simply intended to say graphically, ‘what you have sown you will reap’, or in Old Testament terms, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. As already mentioned, it is quite clear that YHWH would not literally sell slaves to Judah. It was simply His way of reminding the nations of what He could do if he wished, and what the future would hold for them in general because of their opposition to Him. It was

also a guarantee of the prosperous future of Judah.

YHWH Calls The Nations To Judgment Before Him And His Mighty Ones (3.9-14).

The final day of YHWH is set up and the nations are called for judgment. The nations send out the call because they clearly think that they will be able to do battle with YHWH (as they always do) but really it is YHWH Who has called them, and they are reduced to helplessness by YHWH's Mighty Ones. In the midst of life and expectation of great booty they are suddenly and unexpectedly faced up with YHWH's judgment. For there in 'the valley of YHWH is Judge' the nations are brought to judgment, not by earthly forces but by heavenly ones. And there they are called on to pay the price for their wickedness.

Analysis of 3.9-14.

- a Proclaim you this among the nations, "Prepare war, stir up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears, Let the weak say, 'I am strong.'" (3.10).
- b Haste yourselves, and come, all you nations round about, and gather yourselves together.
- c There cause your mighty ones to come down, O YHWH.
- d Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of YHWH is Judge (Jehoshaphat), for there will I sit to judge, all the nations round about (3.12).
- c Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, come, tread you, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great (3.13).
- b Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! (3.14a)
- a For the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision (3.14b).

Note that in 'a' the call to the nations goes out that they are to prepare themselves to face YHWH, and in the parallel the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision. In 'b' the nations are to make haste to gather themselves together, and in the parallel there are multitudes in the valley of decision. In 'c' YHWH will make His mighty ones come down, and in the parallel they put in the sickle and reap. Central in 'd' is the purpose of it all, the nations are to come to the valley of YHWH is Judge in order to be judged by YHWH.

3.9-10

‘Proclaim you this among the nations,
“Prepare (literally ‘sanctify’) war,
Stir up the mighty men,
Let all the men of war draw near,
Let them come up.
Beat your ploughshares into swords,
And your pruning-hooks into spears,
Let the weak say,
“I am strong.”

The heralds of the nations are commanded by YHWH to call their nations to battle. It is as usual a silent command, and the nations would not be aware that they were responding to YHWH's call. Their view would be that they were following out their own political decisions. But the call was in fact YHWH's for the time had come for the nations to be judged.

‘Sanctify war.’ This is a reminder that Judah were not the only nation to call on their

deity for assistance in war. Every nation believed that their own gods would give them victory as long as they treated him properly and fulfilled his ritual requirements. And their heralds would therefore call on them to perform those necessary rituals. The difference was that their gods had no roar (see verse 17), and could do nothing when YHWH was calling the nations to judgment..

So just as YHWH had stirred up His own people to return to Him (verse 7), the nations were now to stir themselves up to come to judgment. They were to do so by sanctifying themselves for war, mustering their mighty men, calling up the men of war, turning their farm implements into weapons, and encouraging the waverers to be strong. The turning of their sharp farming instruments into weapons was not just symbolic. Many warriors would have no other weapons. Little would those who were mustered realise that they were simply providing evidence to YHWH when they come before Him for judgment. We have precisely the same idea presented in Revelation 19.11-21 where the gathering of the earthly forces was not directly aimed at the figure on the white horse, but at His people on earth. It is only we who are permitted to see the heavenly side of things as YHWH's great ones come to carry out God's judgment.

3.11a

‘Haste yourselves, and come, all you nations round about,
And gather yourselves together.’

The call goes out for the nations to hurry themselves up. It is a time for war. They are to gather themselves ready for their attack on God's people. Little do they realise as they excitedly come together what they are hurrying towards. Their eyes are glistening with the hope of spoils, they do not realise that it is they who will be the spoils.

3.11b

There cause your mighty ones to come down,
O YHWH.’

For unknown to them their Enemy is also mustering His troops, and what troops they are. YHWH is causing His Great Ones to come down from heaven ready for what is to come. He is offering divine protection for His people (the protection that was not called on by Jesus Christ Who trod the way of suffering alone - Matthew 26.53).

3.12 ‘Let the nations bestir themselves,

And come up to the valley of YHWH is Judge (Jehoshaphat),
For there will I sit to judge,
All the nations round about.’

Now it is YHWH Who sends out His summons. Let the nations bestir themselves and make haste, for they are coming to the valley of YHWH is Judge, where YHWH is waiting to judge them. As in the case of Revelation 19 there is to be no battle. Who can battle against the Almighty or against the Lamb? Rather they will discover that YHWH is seated there on His judgment seat ready to act as Judge.

3.13

‘Put you in the sickle,
For the harvest is ripe,
Come, tread you,
For the winepress is full,
The vats overflow,
For their wickedness is great.

And there in that valley of YHWH's judgment the angels are commanded to ‘put in the sickle and reap’ because the harvest is ripe. The wicked have come to full ripeness and

it is the time for the nations to be judged. The angels are to reap the grain, gather the grapes and tread the winepress which will then be full to overflowing, with the result that the winevats will also overflow, because the wickedness of the nations is very great.

This vivid picture is taken up again in Revelation 14.14-20 which is another picture of the last judgment, and is also in mind in Matthew 13.30, 41-43, 49-50. All that Joel lacks is awareness of Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.

The picture is in some ways deliberately parallels that in 2.24, except that the message is different. But both harvests would benefit His people. It is a reminder that because of their repentance the future of Judah has changed.

3.14

**‘Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
For the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision.’**

The passage closes off with ominous words. ‘Multitude, multitudes in the valley of decision, because the day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision.’ The picture is of the massed multitudes of the enemy, gathered in numbers beyond counting (indicated by the repetition of ‘multitudes’), and unaware that the day of YHWH is almost upon them. (What a contrast they are with another multitude which no man could number which was made up of the chosen of YHWH - Revelation 7.9 ff.).

The Final Showdown (3.15-21).

Joel closes his prophecy by declaring what YHWH will do for His people as by His mighty roar, and by portentous signs, He demonstrates to the world His watch over them. As a result all will know that Judah and Jerusalem are under His protection and therefore not to be touched. This will be because they have become so holy that no foreigner can be allowed to come among them. Their enemies, on the other hand, will be left a desolation (as Judah had been after the locust invasion, and possibly as a result of YHWH’s judgment), whilst in contrast Judah will become well-watered and fruitful, having not only fully recovered from the locusts, but also having become a land flowing with wine, milk, and rivers, as well as being provided with a God-given spring which will come directly from the house of YHWH (and will therefore not be dependent on rain).

As so often with these descriptions of the final consummation what is described is other-worldly. This does not have in mind a so-called millennium (here southern neighbours are desolate while Judah and Jerusalem are so holy that no foreigner can enter Jerusalem, which is in total contrast to Zechariah 14.16-21 where foreigners will flock to Jerusalem and the flourishing of the nations depends on their attendance at the Feast of Tabernacle). Rather YHWH’s people have become perfect, and the spring coming out of the house of YHWH is clearly not of this world. It is a continual miracle. Meanwhile Judah’s existence is guaranteed for ever. It is quite clear that the everlasting kingdom is in mind.

Analysis of 3.15-21.

- a The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining, and YHWH will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth will shake, but YHWH will be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel (3.15-16).
- b So will you know that I am YHWH your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain, then will Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no foreigners pass through her any more. (3.17).
- c And it will come about in that day, that the mountains will drop down sweet

wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters, and a spring will come forth from the house of YHWH, and will water the valley of Shittim (3.18).

- b Egypt will be a desolation, and Edom will be a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land (3.19).
- a But Judah will abide for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. and I will cleanse their blood, that I have not cleansed, because YHWH dwells in Zion (3.20-21).

Note that in 'a' YHWH will roar from Zion, and will be a refuge to His people, and in the parallel YHWH will dwell in Zion and will enable Judah and Jerusalem to abide for ever. In 'b' no foreigners will pass through Jerusalem any more, and in the parallel we learn what will happen to foreigners in order to prevent that. Centrally in 'c' Judah will flourish and be exceedingly fruitful.

3.15-16

‘The sun and the moon are darkened,
And the stars withdraw their shining.
And YHWH will roar from Zion,
And utter his voice from Jerusalem,
And the heavens and the earth will shake,
But YHWH will be a refuge to his people,
And a stronghold to the children of Israel.’

Presumably as a consequence of YHWH's judgment there will be portents in the heavens, the sun and moon will be darkened and the stars will withdraw their shining, just as they had during the plague of locusts (2.31). There it had indicated the displeasure of YHWH. Here it is evidence that God is directly at work on behalf of His people against their enemies. There were many ways in which the sun could be darkened, by the smoke resulting from the despoiling of the countryside by an invader, as a result of volcanic action, clouds of locusts in the sky, a heavy storm, a sirocco, etc. It may also here include the thought that the gods of the nations, represented by sun, moon and stars, had been nullified. Now there was only YHWH for the world to look to. Incidentally this is possibly the first such description of such phenomena, on which the other prophets would later expand, although consider Judges 10.12 where Joshua's command to the sun and moon was to be 'silent' or 'still', and Exodus 14.19-20 where the Egyptian army were prevented from catching up with the fleeing Israelites by cloud and fire.

Meanwhile YHWH will roar from Zion (compare Amos 1.2; Hosea 11.10) and speak from Jerusalem, and will do it so powerfully that the heavens and the earth will shake (compare Haggai 2.21; Exodus 19.18-19), a clear testimony to YHWH's presence. His word will go forth to accomplish His purpose. And meanwhile YHWH will be a refuge to His people, a stronghold to the children of Israel. He will be dwelling among them permanently and no longer be angry with them because they will have become a faithful people.

3.17

‘So shall you know that I am YHWH your God,
Dwelling in Zion my holy mountain,
Then will Jerusalem be holy,
And there shall no foreigners pass through her any more.’

There will be no more separation between YHWH and Judah. Judah will have full confidence that YHWH is their God, dwelling among them in His holy mountain, Zion.

The result will be that Jerusalem will be 'holy', set apart wholly to YHWH. And this will be so much so, that no foreigners will be allowed to enter. This does not simply mean that no foreign conquerors will come, but that Jerusalem is so 'holy to YHWH' that only those within the covenant and ritually clean will be allowed to enter, in the same way as previously men could not enter the Tabernacle area unless they were ritually clean. Compare the vivid picture in Isaiah 4.2-6. Compare also the words of Revelation 21.27, 'nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination (idolatry) or deceit, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life'. This is clearly a picture of the everlasting kingdom where YHWH will continually be with His people (Revelation 21.22-23; 22.4-5).

There was, of course, a preliminary fulfilment when YHWH descended on the temple mount in fire and wind and filled the infant church which was gathered there. From then on His people would be YHWH's temple and dwelling place. As Paul put it, 'we are the temple of the living God, even as God said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people, --- and will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and My daughters"', says the Lord Almighty' (2 Corinthians 6.16-18), this in accordance with Jesus' promise in John 14. 23.

3.18

‘And it will come about in that day,
That the mountains will drop down sweet wine,
And the hills will flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters,
And a spring will come forth from the house of YHWH,
And will water the valley of Shittim.

The consequence of YHWH's continual dwelling among them will be that the vineyards on the mountains will flourish (compare Amos 9.13), their herds and flocks on their hillsides will produce an abundance of milk (the Promised land was to be a land of milk and honey), and all their rivers will continually flow with water, making them as fruitful as Egypt. The picture is one of Paradise restored, a new Eden (compare Revelation 22.1-5). But above all else will be the fact that from the house of YHWH will flow a permanent spring, as YHWH guarantees direct provision for His people, similar to but far better and more permanent than the water that came from the rocks in the wilderness. His people will find permanent satisfaction for their thirst from Him. They will not hunger any more, nor will they thirst any more, an idea taken up in Revelation 21.3-4. It is the result of the fact that 'the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them --.' The picture is taken up by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 47.

‘And will water the valley of Shittim or Acacias.’ Acacias often grew in very arid places, and the idea is probably that even a valley which had never known water would now continually be fed with water.

3.19

‘Egypt will be a desolation,
And Edom will be a desolate wilderness,
For the violence done to the children of Judah,
Because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

Egypt and Edom are selected because they above all had proved themselves to be Judah's enemy. Egypt had enslaved Israel in Egypt and had thereby been responsible for many thousands of deaths of innocent people, including the infant boys who had been slaughtered, and as the largest nation in the area they were the most to be feared. They were the one nation that Judah could never hope to finally win against.

Furthermore Shishak's invasion of Israel had taken place possibly a hundred or so years before, and had caused a further large number of deaths. Thus as far as they knew there was always a constant fear of further invasion from Egypt.

Edom were their brother tribe and yet had refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory when they were approaching Canaan (Numbers 20.14-21). Furthermore they were organisers of the slave trade (Amos 1.6, 9) which no doubt resulted in many deaths as a result of the slave-gathering raids, and meant that many Israelites were transported to places from which there was no return by ransom. The practising of this trade demonstrated the hatred of Edom against Judah. To make matters worse on the death of Solomon Hadad of Edom had organised guerilla warfare against Israel/Judah (1 Kings 11.14 ff.), and following that Edom had warred with Judah in the time of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 8.22), as a result of having broken away from Judah's control (having thus reneged on a solemn treaty), which probably meant that they were still seen as rebels and traitors, with the reciprocal hatred which that engendered. They probably still harassed Judean caravans using the trade route to the port of Ezion-geber.

The two together, who were a continual threat to Judah's southern borders, (Judah had Israel to the north) thus symbolised all nations who shed the blood of Judeans in raids and warfare, being the ones who had most recently done so and were an ever present threat. And it was because of their shedding of 'innocent blood', i.e. the blood of those not acting in warfare, including women and children, that they would now be especially punished by YHWH.

3.20-21

'But Judah will abide for ever,
And Jerusalem from generation to generation.
And I will cleanse their blood, that I have not cleansed,
Because YHWH continually dwells in Zion.'

In contrast with the desolation of Egypt and Edom would be the fact that Judah and Jerusalem would be established for ever, and would receive cleansing for their own blood guilt which had not yet been cleansed. There were no sacrifices available for blood guilt, for it was a capital crime. Thus cleansing demanded deeper repentance than for everyday sins. But Judah and Jerusalem would have the assurance of such cleansing, and we know that the reason for this would be the cross. And it would be because YHWH dwelt continually in Zion that they would have full cleansing from all sin. Thus the book ends with the assurance that one day God would make provision for all sin, even the most heinous.

Some translate the MT as, 'And shall I leave their bloodshed unpunished? I will not, as surely as YHWH has His home in Zion,' thus ending the book on the motive of revenge against Egypt and Edom.