

Joel: A Commentary

Old Testament New European Christadelphian Commentary

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally—don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or

that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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CHAPTER 1

Joel 1:1 *The Word of Yahweh that came to Joel 1, the son of Pethuel*- There is no reference to this Joel 1 in the historical books, no clue as to who Pethuel ["visions of God"] was, and no clear statement within Joel 1 as to when exactly he lived and which invasion he was predicting. His references to Jerusalem and the temple suggest he was in Judah and predicting an invasion of Jerusalem. There is much internal evidence that Joel 1 has in mind the Babylonian invasion, and he was living in Jerusalem and appealing desperately for repentance in order to avert it. This would mean that he was in Jerusalem whilst Jeremiah was imprisoned for uttering his similar prophecies; and that might explain the relative anonymity of Joel 1, and why Jeremiah doesn't specifically mention him.

But despite surface level similarities with some historical incidents, his prophecy doesn't fit the Babylonian invasion. We are left with an open question as to whether his call for prayer and repentance was heard, and whether Jerusalem fell or not. The descriptions of the "northern army" being turned away and destroyed (Joel 1 2:20) have some similarities with the Assyrian retreat in the time of Hezekiah, but the location of their destruction doesn't fit the historical record. There is much similarity between Joel 1's language and that used of Babylon's invasion. It could be that Joel 1 lived just prior to

the invasion and was urging a desperate repentance in order to change the outcome, in line with the appeals of Jeremiah. But these were unheeded, and so his prophecy applies to the final latter day invasion of the land; the potential salvation he predicted was not realized.

Commentators have offered various historical contexts for Joel 1, but they all seem to come unstuck on many verses in the prophecy. Harry Whittaker's attempt to prove that it all refers to the unsuccessful Assyrian invasion of Isaiah's time runs into difficulty with the repeated similarities between Joel 1's description of the invader, and the language of Amos and others about the Babylonian invasion. If indeed Judah repented, as Joel 1 appeals for, then the invader would have been destroyed, the Spirit poured out and the Messianic kingdom established. And that didn't happen in Hezekiah's time; he himself turned away from faith straight afterwards. And yet indeed there are some points of contact with the Sennacherib / Hezekiah situation. We must also give due weight to Joel 1's insistence that the invasion was to be the unprecedented invasion of Judah, worse than anything before, and which would never be repeated (Joel 1 1:2,3 cp. Joel 1 2:2). This would point to the Babylonian rather than the Assyrian invasion. But ultimately the invasion in view is therefore that of the last days, before the Lord's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

But why the points of contact with the invasions of Assyria and Babylon? I suggest that Joel 1's prophecy could have come true at those points, if Judah had repented as he appealed for. But they didn't, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the last days. Likewise the passage about the pouring out of the Spirit is applied to the first century gifting of the Spirit (Joel 1 2:28 = Acts 2:17). But Israel did not repent then as they should have done, neither was the Messianic Kingdom established on earth then. It could have been; but Israel would not. Yet Joel 1's words shall come true in the last days. Although even then, whether Jerusalem falls is left by Joel 1 an open question, depending upon Israel's repentance. Other prophecies clearly show that Jerusalem will fall, Judah will not repent as required; but they shall do so finally, and Joel 1's Kingdom prophecies shall come true.

Joel 1:2 Hear this, you elders, and listen, all of you inhabitants of the land- As so often in the prophets, the leadership and ordinary people are bracketed together and jointly appealed to. God's call was and is to individuals; they were not to follow their leaders, and leave spiritual decision making to their leaders. This itself was a radical and unusual approach within the understanding of society in Joel 1's time. We can certainly learn from this; God's word calls to us as

individuals.

Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?- The idea of this sentence couple with the reference to "generations" of the future in :3 is that the situation was unprecedented, both in the past and future- and just this language is used in Joel 1 2:2. This is the "time of trouble" for God's people which had never been and would never be repeated again; and that is unquestionably language of the very last days before the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24:21). As noted on :1, Joel 1's prophecy could have potentially come true at various points in history, including his own time, perhaps just prior to the Assyrian or Babylonian invasion of Judah; but Judah did not repent as Joel 1 appealed for, and so the prophecy has its main fulfilment in the last days.

Joel 1:3 *Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children tell another generation*- See on :2. This may be a literary device meaning that the situation would not be repeated in future generations, rather than a literal appeal to pass on the details of the tragedy to future generations.

Joel 1:4 *What the swarming locust has left, the great locust has eaten. What the great locust has left, the grasshopper has eaten. What the grasshopper has left, the caterpillar*

has eaten- The original words all refer to locusts but in various forms of their growth. Perhaps there was or will be a literal series of locust devastations of the land, designed to bring Jewry to repentance without the need for the bloodshed of an invasion; see on :7. But they will not be heeded. Am. 4:9 uses the same language in an apparently literal sense concerning the situation in the land before the Babylonian invasion. We note that God therefore worked by all means to try to bring His people to repentance without the Babylonian invasion. He works likewise with us, having to up the intensity to bring our stubborn hearts to repentance.

However it is clear from Joel 1 2:25 that the locusts represented "my great army which I sent among you". "Eaten" is the same word used for how the invading army would "consume" the land (Joel 1 2:3,5), and how the Babylonians would "consume" Judah (Am. 1:4; 2:5; Jer. 15:3). Whatever the possible potential historical application, locusts are used in Revelation as symbolic of the latter day invaders to come upon the land of promise; see on Rev. 9:3,7. And that is the primary application. The numerical values of the terms for the various locus forms have been interpreted as referring to the number of years the various empires dominated Jerusalem. These however are questionable; the Romans dominated the area beyond AD70, but I include the claims for your perusal:

Palmerworm, Hebrew *gazam*, numerical value 50- Babylon 588BC - 538BC

Locust, Hebrew *arbeh*, numerical value 208- Persia 538BC - 330BC

Cankerworm, Hebrew *yelek*, numerical value 140- Greece 330BC - 190BC

Caterpillar, Hebrew *hasil*, numerical value 108- Rome 38BC - AD70.

The attraction of the suggestion, however, is that we as latter day readers would therefore be intended to understand that after the four dominations of Jerusalem as outlined in Dan. 2 and Dan. 7, there was to be one last attempt in the last days. And that is the burden of Joel 1's material.

However there is no reason to think that the various kinds of locusts were consecutive, chronological invasions. Hebrew thought is not the linear thought of the Greeks and Western Europe. Jeremiah and Ezekiel described the Babylonian invasion as four-fold judgment (Jer. 15:3; Ez. 14:21), and this may be similar.

Joel 1:5 *Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth-* The impression is that Jewry was obsessed with self-pleasure and luxury, and the invasion was to catch them unawares. This is precisely the Biblical picture

we get of latter day Israel. The Lord's return will be when some of His people are drunken (Mt. 24:49). Such a scenario is hard to conclusively apply to the state of affairs in Jerusalem on the eve of the historical Babylonian and Assyrian approach to Jerusalem. It more aptly fits our last days, although there were drunkards in Judah prior to the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 28:1,3). The 'weeping' commanded was weeping in repentance; this is the great theme of Joel 1, that repentance could avert the otherwise inevitable destruction, as Nineveh averted theirs. See on :11.

Joel 1:6 For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number- Joel 1 appears to be speaking at a time when the invasion had already begun, although he may be using the present tense to emphasize that what God threatened was as good as done. If the invasion had already begun, the drunkenness of :5 was due to a stubborn refusal to accept the reality of Divine judgment; and that is a human feature we see all around us and within our own psyche. The only other usage of "without number" about soldiers is about the Babylonian army, who are likened to locusts innumerable, just as here in Joel 1 (Jer. 46:23).

His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a lioness- Babylon and Assyria are both commonly likened to

lions. Lam. 2:16 speaks of Jerusalem being devoured by the teeth of Babylon.

Joel 1:7 *He has laid My vine waste, and stripped My fig tree. He has stripped its bark-* Judah was God's vine and fig tree, but clearly Joel 1 is speaking. This confusion of pronouns between God and His prophet is quite common in the prophets, reflecting how closely identified the prophets were with God. Their spirit was His Spirit; they shared His urgency, passions and feelings. And this was confirmed by the whole process of Divine inspiration. The past tenses may be an example of the 'prophetic perfect', God's word being so sure of fulfilment in the future that it is spoken as already fulfilled. Being "waste" or 'desolate' was the punishment threatened at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 29:8; 30:7; Jer. 4:7). Clearly Joel 1 is alluding to the Babylonian invasion, but appealing for desperate repentance to avert it. But this was not forthcoming; and so his prophecy becomes descriptive of the latter day invasion of Israel which will be similar to the Babylonian invasion. The difference will be that it gives rise to Jewish repentance, the destruction of the invaders by the return of the Lord Jesus and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

And thrown it away- "Cast away", which is what God did to

Judah after the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 52:3 s.w.). And yet the paradox of God's love is that He cast them away, but didn't cast away His people (Rom. 11:1). This paradox is developed in Hosea especially. God has real emotions, real anger and speaks words in anger, and yet grace and passion which seeks to always have the beloved back. And this God is our God.

Its branches are made white- Perhaps the idea is that the bark was stripped from the branches, leaving them white (as GNB). But the language of complete destruction of the trees is such that we are to conclude that they were destroyed, even though their branches had been made white. For this is the language of pruning, so that a better harvest might be received. The impression could be that God had tried pruning them, without effect, but in the end just allowed them all to be destroyed; see on :4.

Joel 1:8 *Mourn like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth!*- This was the intensity Joel I hoped they would have in repentance. The husband Israel married in her youth was God at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1). As Hosea explains, she hardly remained a virgin, and lost her husband because she left Him for other gods. But here we have the situation explained in terms which provoke sympathy for the

woman; it was as if God had died. Although God is immortal, He was so pained by Israel's behaviour that He felt as if He had died. And that was how He could fully feel the death of His Son, whilst being immortal. Is. 54:6-8 uses a similar analogy, with God even taking blame which He need not have taken: "Israel, you are like a young wife, deserted by her husband and deeply distressed. But the LORD calls you back to him and says: "For one brief moment I left you; with deep love I will take you back. I turned away angry for only a moment, but I will show you my love forever." So says the LORD who saves you".

The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from Yahweh's house; the priests, Yahweh's ministers, mourn-
This could have been because they literally didn't have corn and wine to offer (:9). Or it could be that we have the frequently used 'prophetic perfect', whereby what is yet future is spoken of as having already happened. Judah are repeatedly condemned for mixing Yahweh worship with idol worship; their offerings were not pleasing to Yahweh (Is. 66:3; Jer. 6:20; 7:18-22). But the priests were so upset that they couldn't offer them. Their offerings were mere religion, even though they were done apparently sincerely and with true emotion. This is a solemn warning to us; emotion and enthusiasm about our religion is no guarantee of sincerity before God.

Joel 1:9 *The field is laid waste, the land mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up and the oil wastes away-* Their 'mourning' was because they had lost their material blessings; Joel 1 is urging them to instead mourn in repentance (:5,12). Oil, new wine and grain were the blessings for obedience; and these had been taken away.

Joel 1:10 *Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers; for the wheat and for the barley and the harvest of the field has perished-* AV "the field is wasted", which is a play on Hebrew words: *shadeh shadad*. The same word is used in Jeremiah of how even just before the Babylonian invasion, the land was "wasted" (Jer. 4:13,20). This seems a case of the prophetic perfect tense; God utters His word and it is certain of fulfilment, but in the gap between the utterance and the fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance and the changing of that word. This is what happened with Nineveh, and we too stand in that gap. It gives critical urgency and intensity to our repentance and prayers. And so the invitation to "wail" is to wail in repentance.

Joel 1:11 *The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all of the trees of the field are withered away; for*

joy is withered away from the sons of men- This is very similar to Jer. 12:4, about the situation just prior to the Babylonian invasion. Although "joy" was withered away from the people, they were getting drunk (:5). God intends His obedient people to live in "joy"; and when their disobedience precludes that, they instead turn to fleshly joy. The withered state of the land was directly reflective of the withered state of the people in the land. This parallel between land and people is common; the oft presented fecundity and prosperity of the natural creation in the Kingdom of God are all going to be reflections of the spiritual state of the inhabitants of the earth.

Joel 1:12 Put on sackcloth and mourn, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar- The Levites and priests were called to repentance just as much as land owners and farm labourers (:11); continuing the theme of :2, that ordinary people cannot leave spirituality to their elders. All were to repent. By wearing sackcloth and admitting they had sinned, the priests could not wear their priestly clothing. This command was tantamount to asking them to seek forgiveness through the Mosaic rituals; instead they were to mourn in repentance and throw themselves directly upon God's mercy.

Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the meal offering and the drink offering are withheld

from your God's house- The offerings were "withheld" in the sense that they were debarred, not accepted. As noted on :8, the idea could also be that the wine and grain were simply unavailable due to the famine or locust swarms. The temple was going to be destroyed and the sacrifices made impossible to offer in captivity- because even when Judah could have offered them, they did not do so acceptably.

"Your God's house" recalls how the Lord spoke of the temple as "your house" and the feasts are described as 'feasts of the Jews'. They had hijacked God's religion, and turned His house and feasts into their own. And organized religion always runs the risk of doing this. Especially has "the Lord's table" been turned into "our table".

Joel 1:13 *Sanctify a fast*- Joel 1 prophesies how latter day Israel will be exhorted to howl in their prayers, clothing themselves with sackcloth; exactly as Jeremiah had pleaded with Israel in the last moments before the first Babylonian onslaught: "Gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl" (Jer. 4:8). There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond in fervent prayer. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial

repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. The call to hold a fast and a solemn gathering could be a call to keep the day of atonement feast as it should have been kept; maybe it was even a call to keep such a feast outside of the law of Moses.

Call a solemn assembly- Judah had kept such solemn assemblies or feasts, but God was deeply irritated by them (s.w. Is. 1:13). Keeping external rituals without deep seated, desperate repentance is abhorrent to God. And all who are involved in attending religious meetings need to probe themselves deeply about this.

Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land- As noted on :2 and :12, the appeal was for all sectors of society to repent; for ordinary people to take full spiritual responsibility.

To the house of Yahweh your God, and cry to Yahweh- This was clearly spoken whilst the temple was still standing, and all Judah had the possibility of travelling up to Jerusalem. This would suggest that the Babylonian incursions were yet future. They are spoken of in the present tense because God's words are so certain of fulfilment that they are spoken of as if they have already happened. And yet there is the chance to

change them by repentance, in the gap between the words and their fulfilment. But Joel I is talking of the need for true repentance, rather than a mere crying out to God in pain and desperate request for help in need. That is a reaction common to all men. But crying out in true repentance is different, and that is Joel I's burden.

Joel 1:14 Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is at hand, and it will come as a destruction from the Almighty-
Joel I has just appealed to Judah to keep the feast or day of atonement (:13) with true repentance. The feasts were each "the day of Yahweh", and the final judgment will likewise be the ultimate "day of Yahweh". We might conjecture that the Lord will return on a Jewish feast day, but that is perhaps mere literalism. The more essential idea is that by keeping the Lord's day or feast as asked, with deep repentance, then they would have a foretaste of the final day of the Lord. It's why the breaking of bread service, the Lord's feast of our times, is a preview of judgment day, an assurance of acceptance then if our souls are contrite before the cross now.

This verse is an exact repeat of Is. 13:6, which could support the idea that Joel I was prophesying at the time of the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time. But I would suggest that the overwhelming inter-textual evidence is that Joel I has

the Babylonian invasion in view, and by quoting Isaiah he is pointing out that as the repentance of a remnant in Jerusalem averted destruction by the Assyrians, so it would be true with the Babylonian threat. Isaiah of course had told Hezekiah that although the Assyrian threat had been averted, Babylon would destroy Jerusalem. But even this clear word of prophecy could be changed, so sensitive is God to genuine repentance. The word for "destruction" is used of what the Jews had done to themselves by their 'spoiling' of their own brethren (Ez. 45:9; Hos. 12:1). Divine judgment was therefore a bringing upon His people what they themselves had done. Sin is its own judgment.

Joel 1:15 Isn't the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?- Again we get the impression that there had been literal drought and locust swarms, leaving them without food and drink for the daily temple offerings. If indeed Joel I was prophesying in the last days before Babylon took Jerusalem, then we can connect this with the chronic lack of food within the city recorded in Jer. 37:21; 38:9; 52:6. "The house of our God" contrasts with "the house of *your* God" in :13. In any appeal for others to repent, it's appropriate that we demonstrate our solidarity with them; and the prophets certainly did that. We think of Daniel fully identifying with Judah's sins in Dan. 9. The old covenant promised "joy" at time of harvest for those who remained in the covenant (Dt. 12:6,7,12; 16:11,14,15). The

lack of joy and harvest therefore implies they had broken covenant with God.

Joel 1:16 *The seeds rot under their clods. The granaries are laid desolate. The barns are broken down, for the grain has withered-* The lack of harvest over a period of years (see Joel 1 2:25), to the point that barns had decayed through lack of use (s.w. Prov. 24:31), all pointed to the withdrawal of covenant blessings explained on :15. "Desolate" is the word used about the curses for disobedience (Lev. 26:22,31,32,34). The land was to lie desolate for 70 years (Lev. 26:34,35 cp. Jer. 25:11). Again we have the impression that Joel 1 is speaking just prior to the Babylonian invasion and the start of the 70 years.

Joel 1:17 *How the animals groan! The herds of livestock are confused because they have no pasture. Yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate-* The groaning of the animals because of lack of pasture was reflected in the crying of Joel 1 for the same reason (:18). The idea is that as the famine made the animals groan to God, so should the inhabitants of the land groan to God in repentance. But the word is often used of the groaning of the people of Jerusalem after the Babylonian invasion (Lam. 1:8,11,21). They groaned to God about their situation, but not the groan of repentance. All

spiritual practices and attributes have a fake appearance of the real thing; and repentance is particularly an example.

Joel 1:18 *Yahweh, I cry to you because the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field-* Joel 1 has been appealing for mass repentance and groaning to God in sorrow for their sins. He does so himself, perhaps hoping that the repentance of a minority would be acceptable to avert the destruction of Jerusalem, as it had been in the time of Hezekiah. The emphasis upon fire destroying the land is strange; the Babylonians burned Jerusalem with fire and some other towns afterwards, but there is no evidence they used a scorched earth policy upon Judah generally before the fall of Jerusalem. As noted on :1, Joel 1's prophecy could potentially have come true at the time of the Babylonian invasion, but it points ahead particularly to the last days. And it is likely that fire, perhaps as a result of nuclear warheads, will be used by the land's latter day invaders.

Joel 1:19 *Yes, the animals of the field pant to You, for the water brooks have dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness-* As noted above, "pant to you" suggests that the turning of the animals to God was to serve as a pattern for Judah's panting to God in repentance. The description of the water sources drying up is very much the language of the situation in Elijah's time; and again, the

drought was intended to elicit repentance. The bush fires which broke out in the pasture lands were intended to provoke repentance, so that the fire of the Babylonians as they burnt Jerusalem and the temple would not have been necessary. God likewise works with us, seeking to elicit repentance from His hand in our lives, and then having to increase the intensity if we don't respond. This would then explain Joel 1 2:3 "A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns".

CHAPTER 2

Joel 2:1 *Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh comes, for it is near at hand-* The trumpet summoned Israel to the day of atonement rituals, which have been alluded to in Joel 1 1. Yet the trumpet blasts also warned of approaching armies. As the enemy approached, there was to be a desperate keeping of the day of Atonement- whether or not it was the right time of year. Legal rituals became unimportant compared to the pressing need for repentance and forgiveness. The day or feast of Yahweh was to be for repentant Israel the day of Yahweh in the sense of judgment day. The whole ritual of the day of Atonement was an opportunity for Israel to have a preview of judgment day, and to be pronounced acceptable and cleansed, if they truly humbled their souls. This is "the day of Yahweh" here refers to both the feast of the day of atonement, and the judgment day of Yahweh. More literalistic minds could reason from this that the Lord's return may be at the day of atonement, or another feast / day of the Lord. But the essence is that Israel were to repent; the inhabitants of the land were to tremble in repentance, not simply from fear of judgment to come. The verdict could be changed- that was and is the greatest reality in spiritual life.

"The day of Yahweh is near" is the very phrase used about the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 30:3; Zeph. 1:7,14). It is also

used in Joel 1 3:14, where the outcome of that day is the judgment of the nations opposing God's people in a valley, and then the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in the land of Israel. This didn't happen after Babylon took Jerusalem; so we can conclude that the scenario Joel 1 had in mind for Babylon and Judah didn't work out. But the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days. This is perhaps why "Babylon" is not named; another nexus of powers will fulfil the terms of the prophecy as a perfect fit, and will come to their end at the valley mentioned in other prophecies, at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joel 2:2 *A day of darkness and gloominess*- Literally, the light was being made into darkness. This is a reversal of creation, and speaks of judgment and as it were, de-creation. This verse is a repeat of Am. 5:20 and Zeph. 1:15, where the Babylonian invasion is in view. Am. 5:18,20 comment that this "day of Yahweh" was much sought after by Judah- but it would be a day of darkness and condemnation for them. Apparent enthusiasm for the second coming is not necessarily a sign of spirituality, nor acceptance at that day. Israel looked for light, but were given instead the gross darkness of the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 13:16).

A day of clouds and thick darkness, like the dawn spreading

on the mountains- The day of clouds and thick darkness speaks clearly of the Babylonian invasion and the beginning of the exile (Ez. 34:12; Zeph. 1:15). But "clouds and thick darkness" is very much the language of Yahweh's coming down in covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 20:21; Dt. 4:11; 5:22). Now that covenant was being abrogated, for Judah had broken it. But in all God's judgments, there is the hope of final restoration. This day of thick darkness, presaging the arrival of a "great and strong" army of desolators, also seemed as the beginning of the dawn- an image used in Mal. 4:2 of the arising of Messiah and the restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel. God's wrath and judgment is therefore unlike human wrath, where the focus of the moment is solely upon punishment and retribution. God is grace and hope itself, and He is also outside our limits of time. So in wrath He remembers mercy. The Babylonian judgment and exile was intended to result in the restoration and reestablishment of the Kingdom under a Messiah figure. Although even that didn't happen as potentially possible.

A great and strong people! There has never been the like, neither will there be any more after them, even to the years of many generations- The Babylonian army were made seemingly invincible by God; and as noted on Joel 1 1:2, this invasion would never be seen again nor had it been seen before. This is unquestionably language of the very last days before the Lord's return (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24:21). As noted on

Joel 1 1:1, Joel 1's prophecy could have potentially come true at various points in history, including his own time, perhaps just prior to the Babylonian invasion of Judah; but Judah did not repent as Joel 1 appealed for, and so the prophecy has its main fulfilment in the last days.

Joel 2:3 A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns- The fire that came before the Babylonians may refer to the wildfires resultant from the extreme drought of previous years; because Judah refused to allow that fire to bring them to repentance, the Babylonian fire came. See on Joel 1 1:19. So the forest fires were replaced by the fires left burning by the Babylonians.

The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and after them- like a desolate wilderness- I suggested on Gen. 1 that the *eretz* in view there is the land promised to Abraham, and that the land of Israel was effectively the garden of Eden. As sinful Adam was sent out of the garden to the east, so were God's people. These words of Joel 1 support that approach. Eden was as it were destroyed and turned into a wilderness like the rest of the planet.

Yes, and no one has escaped them- The Assyrians and Babylonians boasted of a series of victories against other peoples before they came against Judah. God is saying that he knows this; and their apparent victory over Yahweh was

only apparent and not in reality. For He had even predicted that they would boast in this way. The same word is used in :32, where we learn that there could have been some who "escaped" Babylon's invasion. So potentially, some could have "escaped"; and the word is used in Ez. 14:22 of how a remnant would survive the invasion. But that potential wasn't realized, at Joel 1's time. All these failed potentials were and are so distressing to God. But the offer of salvation shall finally come true in our last days. It is for us to witness to Israel ahead of time so that they have the knowledge of Christ required for repentance.

Joel 2:4 *Their appearance is as the appearance of horses, and as horsemen, so do they run-* Locusts appearing as horsemen is without doubt alluded to in Rev. 9, which as demonstrated there concerns the latter day invasion of the land. The scenario could have been fulfilled during the Babylonian period; Judah could have repented, Babylon destroyed and the Messianic Kingdom established. But they didn't repent, and so the prophecy was reapplied to our last days.

Joel 2:5 *Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array-* The allusion may be to a locust swarm, with the rising sun glinting off their wings. We are given the picture of extreme

military advantage and strength, and God's people left powerless to resist. Whilst Joel 1 has limited application to the Babylonian invasion, this doesn't fit the text perfectly; see on :2. The main fulfilment will be in the latter day invasion, described in the locust prophecy of Rev. 9. Currently, Israel survives by keeping the technological, military advantage against their surrounding enemies. But this will not last. They will be left helpless before a vastly superior group of enemies. The enthusiasm for some Protestant groups about Israel's military might is misplaced and quite against the Biblical picture of the last days.

Joel 2:6 At their presence the people are in anguish. All faces have grown pale- "Presence" is Heb. 'face'. The Hebrew implies a face to face meeting between Jewry and her invaders; and her face becomes pale before them. The allusion may be to Jacob in his "time of trouble" meeting Esau face to face having wrestled face to face with the Angel whose face represented that of Esau (Gen. 32:30; 33:10). The unprecedented time of trouble of :2 is the time of Jacob's unprecedented trouble of the last days (Dan. 12:1), and Israel will likewise wrestle with God and man until they finally quit all human strength and repent. There is another Jacob allusion in :11.

Joel 2:7 They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like warriors. They each march in his line, and they don't

swerve off course- Israel's enemies have been ever characterized by disunity. But there will come a brief moment of total unity as they all strive together for the one thing which unites them- the capture of Jerusalem. "The wall" of Jerusalem was Judah's perceived great military and technical advantage, just as modern day Israel trust in such advantage against their enemies; but that shall be scaled.

Joel 2:8 Neither does one jostle another; they march each one in his path, and they burst through the defences, and don't break ranks- As explained on:7, the enemy will be focused upon the capture of Jerusalem and "Zion", the temple mount, in particular. They will overcome "the defences"; it is so emphasized that the apparent defensive technological advantage of the defenders will be overcome. This has clear appropriacy to latter day Israel.

Joel 2:9 They rush on the city, they run on the wall, they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows like thieves- This continues the picture of :7; Jerusalem's wall, the apparently invincible defensive technology of the Jews, will be totally breached. The houses and windows are those on the wall.

Joel 2:10 The earth quakes before them, the skies tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw

their shining- This is language specifically applied to the last days in Mt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12; 8:12. Earthquakes feature in several descriptions of the last days. Sun, moon and stars are specifically used as symbols of the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9). Whatever application there may have been to Babylon's actions, this was but a primary fulfilment.

Joel 2:11 *Yahweh thunders His voice before His army; for His forces are very great; for he is strong who obeys His command*- The prophets repeatedly emphasize the invading armies were God's armies; His people are not in the hands of radical evil, but rather all "armies" against them are totally under His control and command. See on Mt. 22:7 for another example. The same Hebrew phrase is used in Gen. 32:2 of Yahweh's camp or "forces"- both of Angels and Esau's soldiers (see on :6). Yahweh is Yahweh of hosts, both or Angelic and human armies whom those Angels control.

For the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?- The very words of Mal. 3:2 about the final day of Yahweh at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joel 2:12 *Yet even now, says Yahweh, turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning*- The judgments had been spoken and are even recorded in the present tense as if they had already happened, so sure were they of fulfilment. But in the gap between the

Divine statement and earthly fulfilment, there is the possibility of repentance- "even now". We too stand in that gap, and it should impart an intensity and urgency to our living and repenting. God's word is His word, and He doesn't say that if they repent, He will change His word. That is implied as a possibility, but it is not to be expected as some kind of contractual obligation from Him if we repent. Hence :14 "who knows if..".

Joel 2:13 *Tear your heart, and not your garments, and turn to Yahweh, your God-* A theme of Joel 1 is that repentance can be on a merely surface level, and not the real thing. Joel 1 has described how Judah would cry out to their God- but they were urged to cry out in true repentance. The Babylonian judgment was to come upon Judah because when the Assyrian judgment was averted, Hezekiah had not repented from his heart; he tore his garments (same words in Is. 37:1), but not his heart. And they are being urged to learn that lesson. Hos. 13:8 describes the final Babylonian destruction as God rending or tearing the heart of Judah- again, the same words are used. They refused to tear their hearts, and so their hearts were torn in the condemnation process. If we will not repent, then we shall be forced to repent all too late in condemnation. John the Baptist used the same logic in appealing for repentance; it was a choice of fire, or the fire of condemnation.

For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity- The very nature of God's Name, which is alluded to here, invites repentance. God had earlier repented Himself of the evil He planned to do to Israel (Ex. 32:12,14; 2 Sam. 24:16)- in both cases, because of the spirituality of a minority. Joel I was hopeful that even if a minority responded to his appeal, the judgment could be averted. This is how God works; third parties are saved, or at least blessed with the aversion of judgment, for the sake of others' spirituality. I suggested on Joel 1 1:1 that Joel I was contemporary with Jeremiah. Judah had not repented of their evil (Jer. 8:6) and so God would not. Jeremiah more than any other prophet repeats this theme of God being willing to repent or relent from His stated position of bringing evil upon a nation (Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3,13,18; 42:10). And Joel I is making the same appeal. This feature of Yahweh, stating judgment to come but then repenting of it if there was repentance, was a unique feature unknown in any other god or religious system. Gods are typically presented in all religions as unchanging. The only unchanging feature of Yahweh is that the sons of Jacob are not consumed when they ought to be, because of His grace (Mal. 3:6). And this God is our God today.

The characteristics of God's Name are clearly alluding to His self declaration in Ex. 34:5,6: "Gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness" is word for word what we read there. But "And relents from sending

calamity" must therefore be the equivalent of what follows in Ex. 34:7: "Keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin". God through Joel 1 was now clarifying what that meant- it meant that His forgiveness was of such a deep reaching quality that even the consequences for sin could be forgiven. And we rightly gasp at such grace, such a God.

Joel 2:14 *Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering and a drink offering to Yahweh, your God-* "Who knows? He may turn..." may not in fact be leaving it as an open question; for in :13 we have just read the assurance that He does do this. The sense may therefore be: "The one who experiences this, will experience a God who turns and relents, and goes even further- He will restore you grain and wine. But you are to use that blessing of grace by offering it to Yahweh, your God".

Joel 2:15 *Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly-* This repeats the call made in Joel 1 1, to hold a day of atonement style fast [the only 'day of Yahweh' where fasting was prescribed]. Whether or not it was the right time of year was immaterial- the fact Joel 1 calls for it to be held could imply it was not. But our spiritual

desperation drives us beyond all mere legalism. "Solemn assembly" is definitely the language of the feasts, especially the day of atonement; and the trumpet was blown at that time to proclaim the year of release. But now the trumpet was being sounded also as a warning that the Babylonian armies were approaching (see on :1).

Joel 2:16 Gather the people. Sanctify the assembly. Assemble the elders. Gather the children, and those who nurse from the breasts. Let the bridegroom go forth from his room, and the bride out of her room- Absolutely everyone was to be involved in this repentance; even children. For children can also sin. And no human situation was to be allowed to distract or excuse- if you had just given birth or were in the midst of your wedding, all the same, you needed to repent. And it is the experience of otherwise legitimate human experiences which often serves as an excuse for us not to repent, not to deeply engage with our sins. But the language is as ever hopeful; for Isaiah envisaged a repentant Judah as going forth as a bride from her room (Is. 49:18; 61:10; 62:5) into the Messianic kingdom. And this is Joel 1's vision. If they had repented, then the Messianic Kingdom could then have been established, as he goes on to describe. Male or female, elder or prole... all were guilty and needed to repent. For relationship with God is individual, and not predicated upon an eldership or priesthood.

Joel 2:17 Let the priests, the ministers of Yahweh, weep between the porch and the altar- The offerings weren't being offered because there was no grain or wine or animals left to offer, as Joel 1 1 has made clear. So the altar was to be approached with a different sacrifice- genuinely broken hearts in repentance, exactly as David had taught in Ps. 51:17.

And let them say, Spare Your people, Yahweh- God had used this very word in saying that He would *not* "spare" His impenitent, rebellious people (Jer. 13:14; 21:7). The clearly stated purpose of God was open to change by repentance.

And don't give Your heritage to reproach- Again, as noted above, God had stated that he would bring Judah "to reproach" (s.w. Jer. 23:40; 24:9; 29:18). But Joel 1 knew God well and closely enough to understand that His stated purpose could be changed by human repentance. If as suggested on Joel 1 1:1 Joel 1 was contemporary with Jeremiah, this would explain his repeated references to Jeremiah.

That the pagan nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' - Joel 1 was clearly inspired by the reasoning of Moses, whose

single handed mediation led to the "evil" planned by God being 'repented of'.

Joel 2:18 *Then Yahweh was jealous for His land, and had pity on His people-* This section would be one of the clearest examples of the 'prophetic perfect' tense; that which was yet future being spoken of as if it had already happened. At the time of the Babylonian invasion, Yahweh ultimately did not have pity on His people (Jer. 13:14; Lam. 2:2,17,21; 3:43; Ez. 5:11; 7:4) in that the Babylonians showed no pity on the people (2 Chron. 36:17). The implication in Joel 1's context was that his appeal for repentance went unheeded. But ultimately, God would have pity, and would reestablish His Kingdom. For one day Judah would be repentant, and God's intended Kingdom purpose would come true.

Joel 2:19 *Yahweh answered His people, Behold, I will send you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied with them; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations-* Grain, new wine and oil were all required for the temple rituals. Joel 1 1:12 had lamented that the grain and wine offerings couldn't be offered because there simply was none left to offer. So the idea is that blessings would be given, so that they could be given back to God. And that principle remains to this day in our lives.

Joel 2:20 *But I will remove the northern army far away from you-* The vast majority of the many Biblical references to the northern invader are to Babylon- not Assyria, let alone Russia. The Babylonian invasion which Joel 1 sought to avert through his calls to repentance did actually happen. It was not 'removed' let alone destroyed. But the latter day invader will be. There are reports of those living in the Jerusalem area describing the locusts swarms which descended upon them as "the northern army"; but locusts typically enter Israel from the south and not the north.

And will drive it into a barren and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its back into the western sea- The language of driving suggests the invader is a now cornered beast, with a head and back part. Daniel and Revelation have much to say of the latter day invader as a beast. The seas referred to are the Mediterranean and Dead Seas. This never happened historically, so again we conclude that Joel 1's prophecies concern the latter days. This presumably is the same location as the valley of decision of Joel 1 3:2,12,14. However, if the allusion continues to locusts, the idea may be that this huge swarm is driven into a deserted area and some are driven into the Dead Sea and others into the Mediterranean. But in this case, the language of "stench" is difficult to understand.

And its stench will come up, and its bad smell will rise-
Continuing the image of the invaders being as a locust swarm, which is now over and lay dead and decaying. The same word is used of the "stench" of the Edomite nations who are judged in the last days (Is. 34:3). The smell of the destroyed nations led by Rosh is likewise noted in Ez. 39:11 AV. The latter day "northern" invader will comprise all these groups.

Surely He has done great things!- The reference is to God, as repeated in :21. This is again an example of the future being spoken of in the past, as God's word of gracious promise is ultimately so sure of fulfilment. This emphasis is given here in Joel 1 because Judah did not repent, and the tendency would have been to wonder if therefore God's purpose had totally failed.

Joel 2:21 Land, don't be afraid! Be glad and rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things!- This confident exaltation is because Joel 1 knows that even if his appeal for repentance is unheeded and Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, ultimately God's purpose of establishing His Kingdom would come true. And even when faced with the reality of sin and the spiritual weakness of God's people, and the inevitability of Divine judgment, those who are spiritual can see beyond that- to the wonderful reality of God's Kingdom that shall ultimately

come.

Joel 2:22 *Don't be afraid, you animals of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness spring up, for the tree bears its fruit. The fig tree and the vine yield their strength-* The judgments described in Joel 1 1 are now specifically undone. The present tenses mean that what God had prophesied as happening ultimately was so sure of fulfilment, that it could be spoken of in the past or even present tenses. The future Kingdom is indeed "now but not yet". Joel 1 could rejoice in the ultimate reality of the Kingdom, and encourage others to do so, even though on the eve of the Babylonian invasion of a Judah who had refused Joel 1's message that reality looked very distant.

Joel 2:23 *Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your God; for He gives you the former rains in just measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rains, as before-* As noted on :22, the immediate reality was bleak. Babylon was about to invade, and Judah had refused Joel 1's call to repentance; and so the potentially possible Messianic kingdom would not then come. But it would ultimately, so certainly that it could be spoken of in the present tense. And therefore Joel 1 specifically addresses "you children of Zion", the faithful, repentant remnant within Jerusalem. For them, there could be joy in the ultimate hope. And for us too, when we recognize

as Daniel had to that we shall maybe not see the Kingdom of God in our lifetime, and that God's people are not as they should be and we individually and collectively have missed the realization of so much that could have been and should have been... yet all the same, the hope of the Kingdom is so certain.

"The former rains" can be translated "the teacher or righteousness", perhaps a reference to the Elijah prophet who could have arisen to prepare the way for Messiah in Joel 1's time, had Judah repented. But this promise will be delayed until the last days, and Malachi 4 confirms that such a figure will indeed appear in the last days before the Lord's return. But former and latter rains may simply be read as meaning 'the blessings of the covenant as God intended'.

Joel 2:24 *The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil-* The tenses change here to the future, perhaps to emphasize the previous usage of the prophetic perfect tense. The Kingdom of the future was as good as already there- even when Joel 1 and the faithful remnant were at the low point of human experience. Their appeal for repentance had been unheeded for the most part, and God had chosen not to accept their personal repentance as enough to avert the destruction of His people and temple. But still, the Kingdom shall come. We see this same hope and approach in Habakkuk particularly.

Joel 2:25 *I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the great locust, the grasshopper, and the caterpillar, My great army, which I sent among you-* See on 1 Kings 22:22. Finally Israel will realize that the armies of invaders were sent by God. "The years" may need to be read as 'what your lost in the years...', as GNB. This fits with the whole prophetic theme of restoration. The Kingdom of God on earth will be the restoration of the Kingdom of God as it was in Israel (Ez. 21:25-27).

Joel 2:26 *You will have plenty to eat and will be satisfied, and will praise the name of Yahweh your God who has dealt wondrously with you-* This clearly didn't happen at the Babylonian invasion; it potentially could have done, but Judah didn't repent and so it didn't. But finally they shall, after the latter day Babylonian invasion. "Dealt wondrously" is the same term used of God's actions in delivering Israel from Egypt (Ex. 3:20; Neh. 9:17), and in making His first covenant with Israel (Ex. 34:10). If God had delivered Judah from the Babylonian invasion, He would have "dealt wondrously" for His people (Jer. 21:2). In the last days, the deliverance from latter day Babylon will issue in a new covenant between God and His people.

And My people will never again be ashamed- This therefore

refers to the final restoration of Israel, in the last days, at the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. Any previous fulfilment was at best an initial, primary fulfilment.

Joel 2:27 You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh your God, and there is no one else- If the restoration had happened as God potentially enabled, then the temple of Ez. 40-48 would have been built, and God's presence found there; it would have been called "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). This didn't happen, and most of the Jews preferred to remain in exile. But it shall ultimately come true. As noted on :26, Judah are to enter a new covenant with God, and this will involve their recognition of His exclusive relationship with them and they with Him.

And My people will never again be ashamed- This therefore refers to the final restoration of Israel, in the last days, at the Lord's return and the establishment of the Kingdom. Any previous fulfilment was at best an initial, primary fulfilment.

Joel 2:28 It will happen in the last days, 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- Judah's entry into a new covenant (:26) will result in the gift of the Spirit to them. Jer. 31:33 says that

the new covenant will mean God operating directly upon their hearts, giving them a heart to know Him and be obedient to Him. The spirit refers ultimately to the heart and mind, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of a new mind, a new pair of eyes, a new psychology. That this gift of the Spirit is part and parcel of the new covenant which even then was potentially possible for Judah is made explicit in Ez. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29. As Acts 2 makes clear, the receipt of the gift of the Spirit is the very reason to be baptized and enter the new covenant. We are thereby washed not only in water but with the regeneration of the Spirit (Tit. 3:5-8); born of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5). The essential gift of the Spirit is of moral and spiritual cleansing, but in the first century it was manifested through the visible miracles. These were specific things for specific times, a visible manifestation of the internal gift which is such a major part of the Christian Gospel- which is the new covenant which Judah could have entered (Heb. 8:8-13). They could have entered it if they had repented and averted the Babylonian victory over Jerusalem; but they didn't. When a minority did repent in the first century, they entered the new covenant and received the Spirit. But the main fulfilment will be when the remnants of the Jewish people in Israel repent, whilst under the latter day tribulation. Then the Spirit will be poured out for their usage against their abusers, as we see hinted at in several passages in Revelation.

Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of

Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a linear chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples). These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 1 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfillment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel 1 [i.e. you are seeing a fulfillment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]... and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]... the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also

referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?), before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21). Typical of the NT writers, Peter doesn't quote from the Masoretic [Hebrew] text, but from the Septuagint, and in Joel 1 2 there are significant differences. And yet Peter adds and changes things even from the LXX. The inspired writers don't quote exactly, and often mix interpretation with quotation.

"The last days" is a phrase doesn't have to necessarily refer to the last days before the Lord's second coming. It could equally refer to the last days of some other period- in the case of Peter's quotation of it in Acts 2, the Mosaic system. But the phrase is of course ambiguous- exactly because the Lord's second coming could have occurred then in the first century, but the various required preconditions were not met. The LXX also has as the Masoretic Text: "Afterward". "The last days" would appear to be Peter's inspired interpretation, choosing a minority reading of the Hebrew text [which the NEV follows].

"All flesh" shows that a prophecy apparently about "all" here has a specific fulfilment in a limited group. Other Biblical references to "all" must likewise be understood; from God's perspective, the believers are "all things" to Him.

Joel 2:29 *And also on the servants and on the handmaids I will pour out My Spirit in those days-* The servants / slaves and handmaids are emphasized. In order to see a fulfilment of this at that time of Pentecost, surely there were female believers who also began speaking in foreign languages- although that is not recorded. Often the NT quotes the OT selectively, omitting words and phrases which were not relevant to the fulfilment. The fact the "handmaids" and "daughters" (Acts 2:17) are mentioned would surely mean that there were women also given the gifts at this time. The fact this is not specifically recorded is yet another example of how the records are so abbreviated. That women aren't recorded as publically preaching at this time is no reason to think they did not. Likewise the fulfilment of the Joel 1 prophecy meant that there were both old and young men preaching (Acts 2:17). The "all" who were "together in one place" (Acts 2:1) were those who received the gifts, all within the house; not just the apostles. However, Acts 2:7 records the impression that "all" who were speaking in foreign languages were from Galilee. The women / sisters in view were therefore presumably also from Galilee. Peter "and the eleven" stated that "these are not drunk" (Acts 2:15)- rather than 'We are not drunk'. The use of "these" suggests that there were others apart from 'the twelve' who were preaching with the Spirit gifts. It was a shameful thing

for a Jewish man to talk publically to a woman, let alone for her to read the Torah, and for a woman to publically preach God's word would have been nothing short of scandalous. In this we have a challenge to our own sense of inadequacy in witness; women, Galileans, the illiterate and poorly educated... were those used by God to make history's greatest and most effective public witness to Christ.

Joel 2:30 *I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke-* Blood, fire and smoke columns suggest Mosaic sacrifices, in which the blood had to be poured out and then the carcass burnt. God's judgments are described as Him having a sacrifice (Jer. 46:10), and in the Acts 2 quotation, the AD70 judgment of Jerusalem is surely in view. This is the language of Mt. 24:5-7 about the same event. But AD70 was but a preview of the last days, which is the burden of Joel 1's prophecy.

Thomson (*Land and the Book*, vol. 2, p. 311) suggests the allusion in this passage is to the whirlwind sandstorms, which are appropriate figures of Divine judgment: "We have two kinds of sirocco, one accompanied with vehement wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sandcloud, through which the sun, shorn of his beams, looked like a globe of dull smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested that strong prophetic figure of Joel 1, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Wonders in

the heaven and in the earth; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran I have seen a score of them marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resemble ‘pillars of smoke’.

Joel 2:31 *The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes-* This would confirm the allusion to sandstorms noted on :30. Sun and moon represent the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9). In the primary application, Joel I was speaking of the destruction of the royal family under Zedekiah. This had to be removed before God's kingship in Messiah could be enthroned. But Judah's lack of repentance precluded the outcomes which were then possible, and so we can understand this to refer to the bloody destruction of the Israeli leadership in the last days.

Joel 2:32 *It will happen that whoever-* This clearly implies Gentiles. But that wasn't how the early Christians understood it when this was quoted in Acts 2. They chose to understand the Lord's universal preaching commission as meaning going out to preach to Jews of all nations, and they saw the response of Acts 2 as proof of this. And yet “all nations” is

used about the Gentiles in all its other occurrences in Matthew (Mt. 4:15; 6:32; 10:5,18; 12:18,21; 20:19,25). Such intellectual failure had a moral basis- they subconsciously couldn't hack the idea of converting Gentiles into the Hope of Israel. They allowed themselves to assume they understood what the Lord meant, to assume they had their interpretation confirmed by the events of Acts 2... instead of baring themselves to the immense and personal import of the Lord's commission to take Him to literally all. We too can read Scripture and assume we understand it, and thereby skip over massive implications for us.

Will call on the name of Yahweh- This seems to prophesy of multitudes calling upon the name of the Lord in the 'last days'. The preliminary fulfillment of this in Acts 2:21 must surely be repeated in the ultimate 'last days'; and there, the name was called upon by calling upon themselves the name of the Lord Jesus in baptism and faith. And it may be that it is multitudes of Diaspora Jews who respond in the last days, as it was in Acts 2... The description of "the remnant" being saved out of Jerusalem and mount Zion, the temple mount, may mean that they go into the temple area in the last days to seek safety as the Jews did in AD70 and at the time of Hezekiah, and this is where they are at the moment of the Lord's intervention. Joel 1 2:32 could have had its primary fulfillment in the redemption of this remnant, and it therefore has an application to the salvation of the latter-day Jewish

remnant out of Arab-occupied Jerusalem: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord (i.e. truly pray for deliverance in faith, perhaps through calling upon themselves the Lord's name through baptism into Christ) shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 19:30,31 for the mention of those two terms) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah and his prophets), and in the remnant...". This passage is quoted in different contexts in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13, but this does not preclude its application to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem in the last days. This New Testament usage is regarding how a convert should eagerly call upon himself the Lord's salvation / deliverance from sin in Christ. This should therefore be done with the same sense of urgency and desperate intensity as the persecuted remnant of the last days will do, like their counterparts within Jerusalem in Joel 1's time could have done.

The urgency we have in our witness isn't only joyful; there's an element of dead seriousness to it because of the very urgency of our task. Joel 1 2:32 predicted that when Jerusalem was surrounded by her enemies at Joel 1's time , with all in Judah who could do so having fled into the city for safety, "It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered [saved]: for in Mount Zion [the temple mount] and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance [RV "those that escape"]". These words are alluded to by Peter when he stood near the temple mount and

urged people to be baptized into Christ, to call upon themselves the Lord's Name; and they are applied to all our witness by Paul (Rom. 10:13). Those refugees fleeing before the Babylonian war machine are the people of this world whom we urge to accept deliverance and salvation through baptism into Christ.

Shall be saved- Initially, saved from the Babylonian invasion. But Peter guides us to understand these words as referring to eternal salvation in Christ.

For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape- Literally, "a remnant", although a different word to that at the end of this verse. The idea is that most of the Jews would be destroyed, but a remnant would escape and be saved by the appearance of salvation on Mount Zion. That could have happened if Judah had repented; the Babylonian army would have been destroyed, the remnant of Judah saved eternally, and the Messianic Kingdom established. But they didn't repent, and so these promises were reapplied to all who would accept God's salvation in Jesus. The same word was used in Joel 1 2:3, where we learn that there would be none that escaped Babylon's invasion. But potentially, some could have been; and the word is used in Ez. 14:22 of how a remnant would survive the invasion. But that potential wasn't realized, at Joel 1's time.

As Yahweh has said, and among the remnant, those whom Yahweh calls- This called remnant are different to those just mentioned, who were a remnant of natural Jews. The idea may be that if Judah had repented, the Babylonian invader would have been destroyed and a Messianic Kingdom established in Zion, and Yahweh would have called out a remnant from the Gentiles, perhaps a remnant from the invading armies, who could also have found salvation in the hope of Israel. This potential scenario didn't happen, but it shall do in the last days.

CHAPTER 3

Joel 3:1 *For behold, in those days, and in that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem-* Joel 1 so far has spoken of the possibility of repentance to avert the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Had that happened, he foresaw that a Messianic Kingdom could then have been established, with blessings for even the repentant remnant of the invaders (Joel 1 2:32). He speaks in the prophetic perfect or present tense in Joel 1 2, of the Kingdom promises being so certain of fulfilment that they can be spoken of as present reality. He realized that this might not happen in the short term, but the Kingdom promises were certain of fulfilment in the long term. As noted on Joel 1 2:2, the scenario he predicted was the one final invasion of Judah and the establishment of the Kingdom. This didn't happen in his time, and it seems in Joel 1 3 that he recognizes that, and instead now focuses on the fact that the Kingdom promises will come true and the invasion scenario will be reapplied to the last days. And he adds some more details concerning that latter day scenario, which otherwise would be impossible to snugly fit with what happened during the Babylonian invasion (especially Joel 1 3:3-10,19).

Joel 3:2 *I will gather all nations, and will bring them down*

into the valley of Jehoshaphat- The "valley" in view is emphasized (:12,14), and is presumably located in the same area as the destruction of the invaders in Joel 1 2:20. This gathering of all nations [usually used about all the nations of the *eretz* around Israel] into a valley for final judgment is quoted in Rev. 16:16 as applying specifically to the last days. But there we read of the valley of Megiddo, in northern Israel.

"Megiddo" and the descriptions of Sisera *gathering* his chariots and God *drawing* them into battle (Jud. 5:19) must link with the nations being *gathered* to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). If this connection is valid, then "the kings of the earth (land - of Israel?) and of the whole world" which are gathered (Rev. 16:14) would primarily refer to the kings of the Islamic world within and around the earth / land promised to Abraham, Sisera of the latter days.

Rev. 16:14-16 and Rev. 19:19 appear to be based upon the ideas of the 'gathering together' of Israel's local enemies outlined in the commentary on Rev. 16:14, and also upon Zech. 12:3. "The kings of the earth" can be interpreted as in Zech. 12:3; "of the whole world" may refer to the world in relation to Israel (as in Dan. 2), or possibly to the fact that all nations literally will be incited to attack Israel, kidded by the beast that some "final solution" to the Middle Eastern problem is necessary. 'Armageddon' meaning 'the valley of Megiddo', takes us back to Zech. 12:9,11: "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem... in that

day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as... in the valley of Megiddon". The conclusion from this is that although a minority within Israel have repented before their victory in the valley of Jehoshaphat, according to the typology of Jehoshaphat's victory in 2 Chron. 20 and other passages, their full realization of the enormity of their sin of crucifying Jesus only comes home to them on seeing His complete rout of their enemies. Thus their returning to Jerusalem with joy (2 Chron. 20:27) will be preceded by, or mixed with, tears of pent-up emotional release. The similarity of the 'gather together' language has led us to associate the following:-

- The gathering together of Israel's neighbouring enemies against her at various times
- The gathering of the Arab nations into a valley near Jerusalem (2 Chron. 20:16, A.V. mg.) for destruction in Hezekiah's time
- Joel 1's prophecy of all nations being gathered into the "valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 1 3:2)
- The gathering together of the Arab nations into the 'valley of Megiddo' (Rev. 16:16) to fight Israel in the last days.

It could be objected that the valley of Megiddo is in the North of Israel whilst that of Jehoshaphat is in the South, near Jerusalem. However, the other similarities of language and context are so great as to suggest that they must refer to the same place. It may be that Megiddo having been the scene of

many previous Arab battles in Israel's history, it is being used symbolically in Rev. 16:16 rather than as a literal geographical reference. Back in Rev. 16, the sixth vial has described how the nations will be gathered to their place of judgment in Armageddon. The seventh vial then records the destruction of Babylon, who receives "the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" in the form of huge hailstones (Rev. 16:19,21). This equates the nations who are gathered to Armageddon with Babylon, which heads up the coalition elsewhere known as the beast. The cup of the wrath of God alludes to Zech. 12:2,3, where the peoples from the jihadist nations also are "gathered together" and have burdened themselves with Jerusalem are made to drink "a cup of trembling" by reason of doing so. The punishment with giant hailstones recalls how Israel's enemies were destroyed in the time of Joshua / Jesus (Josh. 20:11). This confirms our interpretation of 'Babylon' as having a Middle Eastern context.

But there is another possibility. The unclean spirits or teachings released from the beast and his publicity agents gather the nations together to Armageddon. "Armageddon" (Rev. 16:16) is from the Hebrew *har-magedon*. *Har* means 'mountain'. The assumption has been made that *magedon* is the same as 'Megiddo'; but the problem is, Megiddo is a plain and there is no mountain there. Also, the word *magedon* would be spelt slightly differently if it were simply the place name Megiddo. The suggestion has been made and

well argued that *magedon* is a form of the Hebrew *mo'ed*, and would literally mean “the mount of assembly / gathering”- the title of Jerusalem in Is. 14:13 [see Meredith Kline, ‘Har Magedon’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/2 (June 1996) pp. 207-222, available online. He explains the presence of the ‘g’ on the basis that the Hebrew consonant *ayin* is often represented by the Greek *gamma*]. Rev. 16 says that all nations are gathered to Armageddon, but elsewhere we read of all nations being gathered to Jerusalem. The two localities are surely identical, quite apart from the linguistic arguments. We can expect, therefore, far more focus specifically upon Jerusalem. For this is to be the centre to which all are gathered. This makes perfect sense if we see *magedon* as a Greek rendering of the Hebrew *mo'ed*- the nations are gathered to the mount of gathering. The king of Babylon / Assyria so wished to come to the “mount of assembly / gathering” (Is. 14:13), and it was that desire, and executing it, which was effectively his gathering to judgment. And so it will be with the Islamist obsession with Jerusalem- their gathering there will effectively be their gathering to judgment. Associating Armageddon with Jerusalem would more naturally fit with the upcoming description of "the great city", Jerusalem, being judged by an earthquake (:19).

And I will execute judgment on them there for My people and for My heritage Israel- AV "Plead with them". God's

pleading against Gog is the language of Joel 1 3:2, again about the destruction of Israel's latter day Arab enemies. Although indeed God is entering into a court case with Israel's abusers, His judgments are always an appeal or pleading for reformation, often on the part of those who observe the judgments rather than those who perish in them. In wrath He remembers mercy, and ultimately only seeks to save. This is His passion, and is to this day.

Whom they have scattered among the nations. They have divided My land- The scattering among the nations was primarily done by the Babylonians (Esther 3:8; Jer. 50:17 s.w.) and Assyrians. It is hard to see how this will actually be done in the last days. But the latter day beast is the summary and composite of all the other, historical beasts; just as the image of Dan. 2 stands complete in the last days, for the various metals are all broke to pieces together. The previous behaviours of Israel's abusers will as it were be placed upon the latter day invaders, and they will be punished for them. Likewise, punishment for the persecution of all the prophets was visited upon the generation of first century Jewry (Lk. 11:50,51).

'Dividing the land' can be read as a metaphor for 'considering it is ours to inherit' (as Num. 26:53; Ez. 47:21 and often). Perhaps the idea is that they got rid of the Jewish

inhabitants and then considered it was theirs to inherit- a position which exactly fits the theology of Israel's surrounding Islamist enemies.

Joel 3:3 *And have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a prostitute, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink-* This sounds very much like the selling of Jewish captives in the time of the Maccabees and after AD70 by the Romans. I suggested on :2 that this doesn't have to be literally repeated in the latter day invasion, but rather the entity of the last days known as "the beast" is seen as a composite of all Israel's previous abusers and embodies all the previous abuses of God's people.

Joel 3:4 *Yes, and what are you to Me, Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia?-* These areas were confederate with Babylon. But they geographically refer to Lebanon and the Gaza strip- the very areas of hatred for Israel in the last days. They will have their judgment in the last day.

Will you repay Me? And if you repay Me, I will swiftly and speedily return your repayment on your own head- This could allude to the radical Islamist usage of the Koran to justify their conquest and abuse of Israel and Jewish people on the basis that they are 'repaying' Israel for their sins, on

God's behalf. Islamic theology has a lot to say in justification of Muslims giving a recompense to the Jews- e.g. Quran 5.60: "Say (O Muhammad to the people of the Scripture): "Shall I inform you of something worse than that, regarding the recompense from Allah: those (Jews) who incurred the Curse of Allah and His Wrath, those of whom (some) He transformed into monkeys and swines, those who worshipped Taghut (false deities); such are worse in rank (on the Day of Resurrection in the Hellfire), and far more astray from the Right Path". Or 2.191-193: "And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you [Palestine]; persecution is more grievous than slaying... such is the recompense of unbelievers... Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is Allah's".

Joel 3:5 *Because you have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried My finest treasures into your temples-* This exactly fits what the Babylonians did to the temple vessels. The motivation for the latter day invasion will be "to take a spoil" (Ez. 38:12).

Joel 3:6 *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-* This happened after the AD70 destruction of Jerusalem and to a limited extent during the invasions by "the king of the north" during the time of the Maccabees. But this will be the policy of the radical

Islamists who will form the latter day Babylonian invader, following the teaching of the Quran that the Jews must be expelled from Palestine unless they accept Islam: "And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you [Palestine]" (2.191-193).

Joel 3:7 Behold, I will stir them up out of the place where you have sold them, and will return your repayment on your own head- As noted on :4, the "repayment" or recompense is defined as expelling the Jews from Palestine. And this is exactly the belief of latter day radical Islamists; see on :4,6.

Joel 3:8 And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the men of Sheba, to a distant nation; for Yahweh has spoken it- "Sheba" may simply be used here to denote the furthest part of the known world to Joel l's hearers (Mt. 12:42; Jer. 6:20). It's hard to imagine that this will literally be done in the latter day application. The idea may simply be that what Israel's abusers did to them, shall be done back to them. This is a major theme of Revelation, where the seals speak of the latter day abuse of the land and people of Israel, and then the vials speak in similar terms of what is then done back to the abusers at the Lord's return.

Joel 3:9 Proclaim this among the nations: Sanctify war!-

Literally, "sanctify". The proclamation of holy war against Israel by her neighbours is exactly the situation we see today, with the Islamic Jihadists using the Koran as justification for a holy war against Israel, justifying thereby any amount of deception and cruelty. "The nations" in view are those around Israel; a fair case can be made for the view that Bible prophecy concerns the nations in the *eretz* promised to Abraham. These nations are specifically defined as the "surrounding nations" in :11.

Stir up the mighty men- "Stir up" is used of how God stirs up the spirits or minds of men to act according to His plan (2 Chron. 21:16; 36:22; Is. 13:17; Ez. 23:22). God can act directly on the hearts of men; and this, more positively, is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The word is used of how the latter day invader will be stirred up by God from the borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham (Jer. 25:32). His hand in history is leading Israel's enemies into a psychological position whereby they will fanatically desire to attack her. And clearly radical Islam is being used by Him in this 'stirring up'. See on :12. It could be that in this section we have some words addressed to Israel's invaders, and some to the weak remnant of Israel whom God will use against the invaders. They are to be stirred up and made strong, fighting a holy war ["sanctify war"] as they did against the inhabitants of the *eretz* under Joshua-Jesus.

Let all the warriors draw near. Let them come up- Coming near and coming up are terms associated with sacrifice;

coming near to the altar to offer a sacrifice which comes up to God. These nations are bringing themselves in sacrifice. And they are propelled forwards in this by God's psychological action upon them through His Spirit.

Joel 3:10 *Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears-* This will be specifically reversed after the Lord is established as king in Zion (Mic. 4:3); as if there is a repentant remnant amongst the invaders who realize their error and wish to reverse it.

Let the weak say, 'I am strong!'- As Israel's enemies make themselves strong, so the weak shall become "strong"- *gibbor*. As suggested on :9, I take this as a reference to the repentant and feeble remnant of Israel becoming strong, rather than [as we could read it] of weak Gentile nations becoming strong in the last days. Thus there will be a standoff between the 'mighty men' of the Gentiles (Joel 1 3:9) and the 'mighty ones' of God, the Angelic hosts working through the feeble remnant on earth whom they will make into 'mighty ones'. Hence the many references in the prophets to the 'mighty men', the *gibborim* of the Gentiles, being slain in the last day. It will be the final showdown, screened world-wide, between the hosts of God and those of men- although we live it all out, we see it all, in our daily experience now.

Joel 3:11 *Hurry and come, all you surrounding nations, and*

gather yourselves together- Again as noted on :9 we see the Divine encouragement of men in the path they wish to go; that is consistently His way with us. The gathering together will be because of a common theological and psychological obsession with Jerusalem. And this is where jihadist theology is increasingly focused.

Cause Your mighty ones to come down there, Yahweh- This may speak of God manifestation through Angels to destroy the latter day invader, the latter-day Sennacherib. The connection is with the "mighty ones" of :9, which could refer to the mighty ones of the surrounding nations, as if this is the ultimate clash between Zion and Babylon, human might and Divine. Or it could be that the "mighty ones" of :9 are the revived remnant of Israel, now repentant. And they are the vehicle of God's manifestation or coming down.

Joel 3:12 Let the nations arouse themselves- This is the same word translated "stir up" in :9. God stirs them up psychologically against Israel, but they do this to themselves. This is how the Spirit works, positively and negatively; we are confirmed in the mental path we ourselves wish to take. Anything else would be manipulation; anything less would leave human beings too weak minded to propel themselves to their chosen ends.

And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat- See on :2. The invaders in the Jehoshaphat context were the surround

nations of the *eretz*.

For there will I sit to judge all the surrounding nations- This may mean that God is as it were already enthroned in Zion when the nations come to Him. They come to destroy and capture Zion, but they are speeding to the judgment seat of Christ. Perhaps there is here the scenario of Ps. 2, where the Lord Jesus is enthroned in Zion when the invaders come; or even the Kingdom scenario of Ez. 38, with Israel dwelling without bars and gates when the invader comes, because the Lord is already enthroned in Zion.

Joel 3:13 Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread- This is God bidding the surrounding nations to put in the sickle; but in reaping Israel in judgment they are reaping themselves. They will destroy and judge themselves in their attempt to judge Israel. Those bidden "come" are the surrounding nations who themselves wish to "come" and destroy Israel, and who are confirmed in this desire to "come" (see on :9,12). But they are coming to tread the winepress of their own judgment. They will judge themselves, just as God's preferred method of destroying Israel's historical invaders was by setting them against each other. And this is not unimaginable in the context of Islamic jihadism.

For the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great- The idea would be that their sin has

come to the point where judgment must come. This concept is first enunciated in the context of the Amorites, the local inhabitants of the land, being judged once their iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16).

Joel 3:14 *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!*-"Multitudes" is Heb. *hamon*. Clearly there is a connection with "the destruction of Gog and all his multitude in the valley of Hamongog" (Ez. 39:11,15). I suggested on :12 that the aspect of things described here could be as in Ez. 38, when the Lord is enthroned in Zion and is attacked unsuccessfully, as in Ps. 2. What are we to do with all the prophecies of the latter day invasion when the details appear to clash with each other? Some have worked out detailed schemas and timelines whereby there are several invasions. But all those schemas seem to me to run into difficulties of harmonization somewhere. And they smack of literalism. My approach is to accept that prophecy is conditional, and may have various possible outcomes. Just as Joel 1 could have had a fulfilment in his time, had Judah repented. This would mean that there are various possible outworkings; but they may not all come precisely true. The quicker Israel repent, the less of the judgment prophecies will need to be fulfilled. And God's grace and love may cut short the days, for the sake of His love for the chosen (Mt. 24:22).

For the day of Yahweh is near, in the valley of decision-"The day of Yahweh is near" is the very phrase used about

the Babylonian invasion (Ez. 30:3; Zeph. 1:7,14). It is also used in Joel 1 2:1; the day of Yahweh is the same day envisaged throughout Joel 1. The outcome of that day is the judgment of the nations opposing God's people in a valley, and then the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in the land of Israel. This didn't happen after Babylon took Jerusalem; so we can conclude that the scenario Joel 1 had in mind for Babylon and Judah didn't work out. But the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days. This is perhaps why "Babylon" is not named; another nexus of powers will fulfil the terms of the prophecy as a perfect fit, and will come to their end at the valley mentioned in other prophecies, at the return of the Lord Jesus.

Joel 3:15 *The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars will withdraw their shining-* From Gen. 37:15 onwards, the heavenly bodies represent the leaders of Israel. This may be inserted at this point to remind us that although multitudes of Gentiles are to be judged (:14), the Israeli leadership also will as they are no better. Joel 1 2:10 has used the figure to describe the eclipse of Israel's leaders in the face of the invasion. But there may well be a literal element to all this, some kind of eclipse of the heavenly bodies. But that kind of literalism is not in accordance with the generally symbolic language being used in this section. "Darkened" is the same word as in the description of the darkened skies in 1 Kings 18:45 at the time of Israel's

repentance due to Elijah's ministry. Another such repentance due to a latter day Elijah's work may therefore also be in view. For repentance is a major theme in Joel 1.

Joel 3:16 Yahweh will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem- Am. 1:2 says this will happen when Yahweh emerges to judge both Judah, Israel and her surrounding neighbours. And we have that idea here too- for in :14 we read of the judgment of the nations, and in :15 of the judgment of Israel. The idea of a thunderous roar likens Yahweh to a lion (as in Rev. 5:5, in the person of the Lord Jesus); but the invader is likened to a lion in Joel 1 1:6. This is a standoff between two lions; just as Yahweh's mighty ones face off against the mighty ones of the Gentiles (:9,11). This thunderous roar can be associated with the Lord's return being with a great shout (1 Thess. 4:16; Jn. 5:28,29), the 'calling' for the sword of judgment to fall upon the invaders (Ez. 38:21; Is. 11:4). This is the "roar" of Jer. 25:30, which Yahweh will utter as He treads the winepress, which is the context here too (:13). I suggested on Joel 1 1:1 that Joel 1 was contemporary with Jeremiah and was giving Judah the same message as Jeremiah, so the many points of overlap with Jeremiah are to be expected.

The heavens and the earth will shake- As noted on :15, this would appear to refer specifically to Israel and particularly her leadership. Yahweh was to roar against them just as He would against their Gentile enemies; see Am. 1:2 and

context. The apostate Jewish leadership in Jerusalem had 'roared' (s.w.) against the souls of ordinary people; and so this judgment was appropriate for them (Ez. 22:25; Zeph. 3:3). Hence the next clause goes on to say that God's true people, as opposed to the 'heavens' of the rulership, would be saved.

But Yahweh will be a refuge for His people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel- I suggested above and on :15 that the leadership of Israel stand condemned, especially for how they 'roared' against the ordinary people in their society and destroyed their spirituality. But a remnant amongst those ordinary people would find Yahweh as a refuge. The allusion is to how the faithful remnant had fled into Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time, and there been saved by Yahweh from the Assyrian invasion. And perhaps something similar may happen in the last days (Is. 4:6 s.w.), when Yahweh will be a stronghold [s.w.] to "the poor... the needy" within Israel (Is. 25:4). Then, His people will literally find deliverance on His holy mountain (Obadiah 17).

Joel 3:17 So you will know that I am Yahweh your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain- The "you" addressed is the faithful, poor remnant within Israel of the last days; see on :16. They may literally flee into Jerusalem for safety and there come to "know" by experience and in terms of

relationship, that Yahweh is really there.

Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no strangers will pass through her any more- The implication is that Jerusalem in God's eyes was not "holy" at Joel 1's time, and yet He still refers to Zion as "My holy mountain", here and in Joel 1 2:1. We have here an example of how God calls His people by status what they are not yet in reality; but His purpose is to make us in reality what we are by status. Romans 1-8 is all about this; He counts us righteous, and so His Spirit works to make us righteous in practice.

Joel 3:18 It will happen in that day, that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters- These are the blessings for obedience to the covenant. There will be a super abundance of such blessings. The brooks of Judah only flowed with water intermittently, according to the season. But the picture is of permanence; no longer will spirituality be occasional, with occasional blessing. Rather will obedience and deep covenant bonding with God be continual and permanent, with the associated blessings.

And a fountain will come forth from the house of Yahweh and will water the valley of Shittim- As with the darkening of the heavenly bodies, we can understand this literally as well as figuratively. Clearly these words are alluded to in

Rev. 22:1, where a figurative river of water of life proceeds from the Lamb's throne, the restored throne of David in Jerusalem, and meets the chronic thirst of a dry world. "Shittim" is literally 'the acacias', trees known to grow in dry areas. Various attempts to literally locate the "valley of Shittim" would all require a major series of topographic changes if a literal stream of water were to flow there from the temple. But Zech. 14 suggests major earthquakes and topographical changes to the area around Jerusalem.

Joel 3:19 *Egypt will be a desolation, and Edom will be a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the children of Judah; because they have shed innocent blood in their land-* We wonder why Egypt and Edom are particularly selected for mention; the historical invader in view was Babylon, who was only assisted by mercenaries from Egypt and Edom in the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Why are not the main culprits, Babylon and Assyria, mentioned by name? Perhaps because God was particularly angry that people on the sidelines watching a fight jump in with all the bloodlust imaginable, and start even further kicking down the losing party. And that loser, historically, was God's people. The minor prophets are often billed, and rightly so, as "minor prophets with major messages". And that was never clearer than at this point.

We note likewise that the Jews murdered by them are called "innocent blood". But Joel 1 and all the prophets emphasize

that the entire society was guilty and the invasions were from God as deserved judgment. We need to connect this idea of "innocent blood" therefore with the final verse of the prophecy, where we learn that God has finally cleansed His people of their guilt (:21); and therefore, their murder was seen in retrospect as the murder of innocent blood, such was and is the extent to which God totally justifies and cleanses His people.

Joel 3:20 But Judah will be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation- The contrast seems to be with Egypt and Edom being a perpetual desolation (:19) whereas Judah would be eternally inhabited. Yet we know from other prophecies that Egypt will have a definite part in God's eternal kingdom on earth (Is. 19:25). We may again be exposed here to the Divine grace which changes His stated judgment purpose against people. Egypt indeed was to be an eternal desolation, just as God at times had promised to eternally destroy and disinherit Israel; but their repentance and His grace means that this will not be the final outcome, just as Nineveh was to be destroyed in 40 days, but it wasn't.

Joel 3:21 I will cleanse their blood that I have not so far cleansed: for Yahweh dwells in Zion- See on :19. The prophecy concludes not simply with the promise of eternal physical blessing for Israel, but with the most essential and

important reality- all their guilt will be cleansed. That forgiveness and cleansing will be required, because Yahweh Himself will dwell in Zion; the kingdom of Heaven comes down to earth, as Revelation concludes. And Ezekiel concludes likewise with the promise that Zion shall be the place where "Yahweh is there" (Ez. 48:35). God's final dwelling with man involves our total and eternal cleansing. "Cleansed" translates a Hebrew word which is equally translated "unpunished" (Jer. 46:28; 49:12). Israel were to indeed suffer for their sins, but that judgment and suffering was to bring about their cleansing. As ever, God's judgments have spiritual intent, and are not simple statements in anger of an offended Deity. Rather they are part of His path towards the salvation of His people which is at the core of His very being.