

*The Word of Yahweh that Came to Joel Son of Pethuel*

*Hear this, you elders,  
give ear all inhabitants of the land:  
Has this ever happened in your days  
or in the days of your fathers?*

*Tell your children about this,  
and have your children tell their children,  
and their children tell another generation:*

*That which the cutting locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten;  
that which the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten;  
that which the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.*

"This is amazing," said Curious. "Joel is a first-rate poet."

All right, Curious, but it says it's the word of Yahweh.

"He didn't say 'thus says Yahweh,' so I'm not sure whose words I'm reading."

*Awake you drunkards and weep;  
wail all you bibbers of wine:  
the flow of juice  
has been cut off from your mouth.*

"The flow of juice cut off!—what a sense of humor!" said Curious.

*For a nation has come upon my land,  
strong and without number; ...*

"Seems this is Joel reporting as he observes the locust invasion," said Curious.

Is he not in a prophesying mode, then?

"I think he was surprised by the locust plague as much as anyone."

*... his teeth are the teeth of a lion:  
his biters are those of a lioness.*

Splendid hyperbole, don't you think?

"Joel must be amazed that the magnitude of the damage seems way out of proportion to its size of the insect."

*He destroyed my vine and barked my fig tree—  
stripped them bare and tore them down,  
leaving the branches white.*

"No wonder he's upset," said Curious.

*Lament as a girl wrapped in sackcloth  
mourns for the husband of her youth.*

You got the one about the lion. Now what does girl's lament mean?

"That is a powerful image!" said Curious. "Joel thinks life will never be the same."

*The meal offering and the drink offering  
have stopped coming to the house of Yahweh;  
the priests, Yahweh's ministers, mourn.*

Interesting priorities there.

"Apparently people don't think Yahweh has anything to do with this, and Joel isn't saying so either."

Yes indeed, morning, not praying, seems to be the order of the day.

*The field is laid waste and the land mourns:  
the grain is destroyed.  
The new wine is dried up,  
and the olive oil dwindles away.*

## Curious Looks at the Bible

"It looks like we're getting a full report of the damage," said Curious. Yes, but everything depends on the grain harvest, ultimately.

*Be confounded, O you husbandmen,  
and wail, O you vine-dressers:  
wail for the wheat and the barley,  
for the harvest of the field has perished too.*

"I imagine the damage to the trees is what really stands out, though," said Curious. Indeed, that would be disheartening.

"The damage to human spirit will be considerable; nobody will be happy."

*The vine is withered; the fig tree languishes;  
the pomegranate tree, the palm tree, and the apple tree—  
even all the trees of the field—are withered,  
and joy is withered away from the sons of men.*

*Wrap yourselves in sackcloth and lament, you priests:  
wail, you ministers of the altar.*

*Come, lie all night in sackcloth,  
you ministers of my God,*

*for the meal offering and the drink offering  
are withheld from the house of your God.*

"What kind of prophet is Joel, anyway?" Curious muttered.

I think Curious meant they should be appealing to God for deliverance.

*Declare a fast:  
call a solemn assembly.*

*Gather the elders  
and all the inhabitants of the land  
to the house of Yahweh your God;  
and cry out to Yahweh!*

"Finally he gets to the point. Apparently no other leader is on top of this."

Maybe they're all in shock and don't know who or what to blame other than the locusts.

"Interesting that Joel still hasn't quoted Yahweh."

*Alas for the day!  
the day of Yahweh is at hand,  
and as destruction from the Almighty  
it has come.*

"So he finally comes out with his interpretation of the locust invasion."

Joel knew, as they all did, that an a military invasion from the north had been predicted.

"But if this is the same 'day of Yahweh' others predicted, Joel will have to explain."

*Is not the food cut off before our eyes—  
joy and gladness from the house of our God?*

*The seeds rot under their clods;  
the storehouses are desolated;  
the barns are broken down,  
for the grain is withered.*

*How the beasts groan:  
the herds of cattle are perplexed.*

*Since they have no pasture,  
the flocks of sheep are desolate.*

"Maybe this is supposed to be like a prayer—or the start of one," said Curious. Do you mean he's telling Yahweh how bad it is before pleading for mercy?

*O Yahweh, I cry to you,  
for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness,  
and the flame has burned all the stalks of the field.  
Yes, even the beasts of the field pant unto you,  
for the water brooks are dried up,  
and the fire has devoured the wilderness pastures.*

Now what do you make of that, Curious? Where did this fire come from?

"Surely he means to liken the stripping of the fields by these insects to a wildfire, not that there are fires too. According to what has been said, there is little left to burn!"

What happened to that fast he called for?

"Apparently Joel has authority, because he called for a fast. But they don't seem to be following his lead."

No one in Israel pays much attention to a prophet.

"I still would like to know what he meant by the 'day of Yahweh,'" said Curious.

*Blow the trumpet in Zion:  
sound the alarm in my holy mountain;  
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble!  
For the day of Yahweh comes;  
it is near at hand:  
a day of darkness—thick darkness—  
a day of clouds and thick darkness  
approaching like dawn spreads over the mountains.  
So great are their numbers and so overwhelming,  
there has never been the like of them,  
and neither will there be another,  
not for the years of many generations.  
A fire devours before them,  
and behind them burns a flame:  
the land was like the garden of Eden before them,  
and behind them it is a desolate wilderness—  
yes, nothing escapes them.*

"Joel can't get over this," said Curious. "But does he really mean to call this locust plague 'the day of Yahweh'?"

*Their appearance is as the appearance of horses,  
and like horsemen they run.  
With noise like chariots  
they leap to the tops of mountains;  
with sound like fire devouring stubble  
they show their strength in battle.*

Maybe Joel is more of a poet than a prophet.

"He delights in writing metaphors, but I know it doesn't take many locusts to make considerable noise, and maybe they actually did sound like chariots."

*The people looking on are in anguish;  
their faces turn pale  
watching them run like mighty men,  
climbing walls like warriors.*

*Each one marches in his line,  
never breaking rank,  
and they never jostle one another:  
they march every one in his own line,  
breaking through defenses  
and never coming to a halt.  
They leap upon the city;  
they run upon the wall;  
they climb up into houses;  
they enter in at windows like a thief.  
The earth quakes before them;  
the heavens tremble.*

"I'm glad there's a context for that 'quake and tremble,'" said Curious. "Otherwise I'd think he meant an actual earthquake and not a metaphorical quake."

*The sun and the moon are darkened,  
and the stars withdraw their shining.*

"Now that's 'day-of-Yahweh' stuff," remarked Curious.

I don't know that locusts fly in swarms at night, so you could be right.

*Yahweh's voice is in this army,  
for his camp is great and he is strong  
who executes his word.*

There's some poetry for you, Curious. Give us a translation.

"Hmm. That would mean Yahweh speaks in great calamities and there's a message to be discovered in them."

Then is the middle line not of equal strength to the first?

"Or it could simply be the principle that great events occur at Yahweh's command."

Maybe the message is known beforehand. It says "executes his word."

"Or it could mean that the event carries out something like a warning that was given out previously in his word. Maybe the next verse will clarify it."

He's probably still thinking of the locusts.

*The day of Yahweh  
is great and very terrible—  
who can live in it?*

"Okay, now Joel is sounding like a prophet," said Curious.

Simply by his interpretation of what everyone can see?

"But the thing prophets commonly do is quote Yahweh."

*"Yet even now," says Yahweh,  
"turn to me with all your heart."*

*With your fasting, your weeping, and your mourning,  
rend your heart and not your garments, ...*

You can't pass that one up. What does he mean by "rend your heart," Curious.

"In other words don't put on a show, but rather submit to God sincerely is what he means."

*... and turn to Yahweh your God;  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, abundant in loving-kindness,  
and sorry for affliction.*

"That's one to inscribe on the wall, or better on the heart," said Curious. "I don't know how many times I've read this, but each time it means more to me."

*Who knows whether he will not turn and comfort you  
and leave a blessing behind—  
even grain and drink  
to offer to Yahweh your God?*

"Anyone can say 'let's cross our fingers and hope.' If you're a real prophet, give them a rousing call to prayer, Joel."

*Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
declare a sacred fast  
and call a solemn assembly.  
Gather the people for a solemn assembly;  
assemble the elders;  
gather the children  
and the nursing infants;  
let the bridegroom leave his chamber,  
and the bride get up from her canopy.  
Let the priests, the ministers of Yahweh,  
weep between the porch and the altar,  
and let them say,  
"Spare your people, O Yahweh,  
and do not reproach your heritage  
lest they become a byword in the nations—  
why should those people say, 'Where is their God?'"*

"That's better," said Curious approvingly. "I wonder if it made any difference."

*Then Yahweh was jealous for his land  
and had pity on his people.*

"That's a very quick turnaround," said Curious. "Joel apparently has lapsed into a vision of the future. So he's a prophet after all."

*And Yahweh answered his people:  
"Behold, I will send you grain, new wine, and oil,  
and you will be satisfied,  
and never again will I make you a reproach among the nations;  
but I will remove the threat in the north  
and drive it into a land barren and desolate,  
with its forepart to the eastern sea,  
and its hinder part into the western sea.  
and its stench will come up,  
and its ill smell will waft up,  
because it has done terrible things."*

"That's a scene I never heard of," said Curious. "It must be future yet, and it sounds like an enormous army if it stretches from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea."

*Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice,  
for Yahweh has done great things.  
Have no fear, you beasts of the field;  
pastures have sprung up in the wilderness.  
Trees are bearing fruit;  
the fig-tree and the vine yield their strength.  
Be glad then, you children of Zion,  
and rejoice in Yahweh your God.*

Curious Looks at the Bible

*For he gives you the early rain in just measure  
—he causes rain to come down for you—  
the early rain and the latter rain as before.*

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

*I will restore to you the years  
that the locust has eaten,*

*the cutting locust, the swarming locust, and the creeping locust—  
my great army which I sent among you.*

*And you will eat in plenty and be satisfied  
and will praise the name of Yahweh your God  
who has dealt wondrously with you ...*

“That could well have been fulfilled,” noted Curious, “—nothing too unusual there.”

What about the context, Curious?

“But since it comes right after the sound defeat of the northern foe, which I don’t think ever happened, I’ll assume it’s future.”

*... and my people will never be put to shame.*

*And you will know that I am in the midst of Israel,  
and that I am Yahweh your God,  
and there is none else;*

*and my people will never be put to shame.*

“Never be put to shame? ... They’re still waiting for that day!”

*And it will come to pass afterward  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all humanity:  
your sons and your daughters will prophesy.*

*Your old men will dream dreams,  
and your young men will see visions.*

*Also upon the servants  
and upon the handmaids*

*I will pour out my Spirit in those days.*

“Pouring out of his Spirit—that sounds like a whole new wonderful era!” said Curious.

*And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke;  
the sun will be turned into darkness,  
and the moon into blood ...*

“But now that’s not so wonderful. It must come later, at the end of the Spirit dispensation.”

*... before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.*

“So those are signs of the beginning of the day of Yahweh—a day of terror!”

*And it will come to pass*

*that anyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved,  
for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape;  
as Yahweh has said,*

*among the remnant are those whom Yahweh calls.*

“Thus some but not everyone escapes. This must mean that Jerusalem is besieged in the day of Yahweh. That sounds like the Babylon situation or 70 AD when the Romans razed Jerusalem.”

Remember the context, Curious.

“But I don’t know where that Spirit dispensation would fit in before either of those events. So the whole thing could be a sequence of future events.”

*For, behold, in those days,  
and in that time,  
when I bring back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,  
I will gather all nations  
and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat;  
and I will execute judgment upon them there ...*

“This has to be future, although bringing back the captivity sounds like the days of Cyrus. But the gathering of all nations to a valley in Jerusalem never happened, in fact it couldn’t happen. They must be envoys from all nations gathering to hear Yahweh’s judgments.”

*... for my people  
and for my heritage Israel,  
whom they have scattered among the nations.  
And they have parted my land,  
and have cast lots for my people,  
and have given a boy for a harlot,  
and sold a girl for wine,  
that they may get drunk.  
Yes, and what are you to me, O Tyre, and Sidon,  
and all the regions of Philistia? Will you render me compensation?  
Even if you repay me, swiftly and speedily,  
I will return your payment upon your own head.  
Because you have taken my silver and my gold  
and have carried my valuable treasures to your temples  
and have sold the children of Judah  
and the children of Jerusalem  
to the sons of the Geeks,  
to remove them far from their border,  
behold, I will stir them up out of the place  
to which you sold them  
and will return your payment  
upon your head;  
and I will sell your sons and your daughters  
into the hand of the children of Judah,  
and they will sell them to the Sabeans,  
to a nation far off.  
Yahweh has said it;  
proclaim this among the nations ...*

So the judgment is pronounced, but will they accept it without a battle?  
“They’re not going to take that punishment without a fight,” said Curious.

*... prepare war; stir up the mighty men;  
let all the men of war draw near; let them come up.  
Beat your plowshares into swords,  
and your pruning-hooks into spears:  
let the weak say,  
I am strong.*

"Where have I seen that before?" said Curious.

It wasn't quite like that.

"It was in Isaiah, I think."

Curious looked back and found near the beginning of Isaiah where it said, "*they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks.*"

"But that's just the opposite!"

Curious had already decided by the mention Hazael that Joel lived before Isaiah's time.

"Isaiah must have been familiar with Joel's scroll."

Then Isaiah's readers would have recognized the reference to Joel too.

"So he negated Joel's 'prepare for war' and made it 'prepare for peace'!"

That would bracket the initial and terrible part of the Day of the Lord.

"That's clever, Isaiah," said Curious. "Like a sign at the end of the trouble to go with the sign at the beginning."

Was it Isaiah's idea or Yahweh's?"

"I don't suppose it matters that Isaiah wasn't quoting Yahweh at that point," said Curious. "He was inspired anyway, so I'll give Yahweh credit."

Okay, but who was calling the preparation for war and was it offensive or defensive?

"It sounds like Yahweh is raising an army to protect Jerusalem, but somehow I think that's ridiculous," said Curious.

How many times do I have to tell you to explain yourself?

"It sounds like there are no weapons and no training. What are they against the armies of several nations?"

Then who are the mighty men and the men of war, Curious?

"I don't get it about the mighty men. It's paradoxical. Let me see what it says next."

*Hasten and come, all you nations round about,  
and gather yourselves together.*

*Cause your mighty ones to come down, O Yahweh.*

*Let the nations bestir themselves*

*and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat;  
for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about.*

"I'd like to think the mighty ones here are angels called down to defeat the attack, but from the immediate context I take it to be the opposite."

Good observation, Curious, but don't be too sure.

*Put in the sickle,*

*for the harvest is ripe:*

*come, tread, for the winepress is full*

*and the vats overflow—their wickedness is great.*

*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!*

*The day of Yahweh is at hand in the valley of decision.*

"No mention of hastily made swords and spears here; this is no ordinary war," said Curious.

Who says "put in the sickle"?

"Yahweh was speaking and still is, I think. But it sounds rhetorical."

Where is the valley of decision?

"Those three couplets are of one piece, and they're all rhetorical. I don't think geography is addressed. It's a horrendous judgment of wicked nations, which I take it is defined by their treatment of Israel."

Then what of the winepress?

"I've seen this harvest language before. It's like blood sacrifice for sin."



Joel

*The sun and the moon are darkened,  
and the stars withdraw their shining.  
Yahweh will roar from Zion,  
and utter his voice from Jerusalem;  
and though the heavens  
and the earth will shake, ...*

"So in keeping with the context, I take this to be saying that the dark cloud of divine wrath envelops the earth," said Curious.

*... Yahweh will be a refuge to his people,  
and a stronghold to the children of Israel.  
Thus you will know that I am Yahweh your God,  
dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain;  
and then Jerusalem will be holy,  
and no strangers will pass through her any more.*

"This is definitely about punishing nations for their treatment of Judah especially." Does that seem over-reaching and unjust?

"But if there is ever to be peace on earth, either the nations have to go or Israel has to go. I don't understand it, but clearly that's the way it's been except for that brief period under David and Solomon, and that peace didn't last."

*And it will come to pass in that day  
that the mountains will drop down sweet wine,  
and the hills will flow with milk,  
and all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters;  
and a fountain will flow forth from the house of Yahweh,  
and it will water the valley of Acacia.*

Now how much of this is literal, Curious?

"The first two couplets are clearly predicting abundant crops and herds due to plenty of rain in a land that tends to be dry. So I think the third one is parallel and means spiritual health flowing from Yahweh."

The water in the first stanzas is literal, is it not?

"But I can't be sure that the water flowing from the temple isn't an actual stream if the brooks in Judah are literal streams of water."

*Egypt will be a desolation  
and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness  
for the violence done to the children of Judah,  
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.*

"That's not surprising. I suppose the weather patterns will help Yahweh manage the earth in that day."

*But Judah will abide for ever,  
and Jerusalem from generation to generation.  
And I will cleanse their blood,  
that I have not cleansed:  
for Yahweh dwells in Zion.*

"It would be difficult to throw this out," said Curious. "There's nothing conditional in any of this. As far as I can tell, if they don't like this, the whole Bible is suspect, and I think that's why I never encountered someone who read it until this year."

## Curious Looks at the Bible

Joel started out describing a plague of locusts and then used it as a springboard to visualize the effect of “day of Yahweh.” Curious recognized in Joel’s writing some phrases that Isaiah had used. He assumed that Joel was quoting Isaiah until in Joel’s last chapter he came upon a quote with its terms reversed: *Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears*. Isaiah had used the same words but made them apply to the transition to peace. Curious decided it was more likely that Isaiah was making a parody on the words that Joel had written earlier. Another thing he noticed was that Joel never mentioned idolatry, which might indicate that Joel wrote before Judah had departed from the temple in Jerusalem being the center of their worship.

Only once did “says Yahweh” occur in Joel’s book. It seemed to be a more generic sort of writing, recognizing the purpose of judgment and connecting blessing with repentance. But there was something about the “afterward” too. For example, one passage that Curious thought was most curious was: *I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh*. This favor was apparently apart from any merit. It seemed to speak of a new dispensation.