THE BOOK OF JOEL

The King Who Restores the Years

Joel, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Restores the Years: The Book of Joel, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Imagine waking up to a sound like a storm. You look outside, and the sky is dark, not with clouds, but with insects. Billions of locusts are pouring over the hills, devouring every leaf, every blade of grass, every crop in the fields. By the time they move on, the land looks like it's been burned. There's nothing left to eat.

That's how the book of Joel begins. A real disaster had hit the land of Judah, and it was so devastating that people would tell their grandchildren about it. But Joel saw something more in it. He saw a warning, an invitation, and, surprisingly, a promise.

Joel is one of the shortest books in the Bible, only three chapters. But it contains some of the most important promises in Scripture: that God will restore what was lost, that He will pour out His Spirit on everyone, young and old, sons and daughters, and that whoever calls on His name will be saved. Seven centuries later, a fisherman named Peter stood up in Jerusalem and said, This is what Joel was talking about.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Joel in four chapters: when the locusts hit (Joel 1), tear your heart, not your clothes (2:1-27), pouring out the Spirit on all flesh (2:28-32), and the valley of decision and the fountain of hope (3).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what we know and don't know about Joel, what locust plagues are like, and what the Day of the LORD means. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as when Joel lived or whether the locusts were also a picture of an army, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Joel in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-ninth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Joel is short but rich. This book explains the real locust plague behind it, the prophetic theme of the Day of the LORD, and the uncertain date of the book, presenting the early and post-exilic views fairly.

It highlights Joel's call to genuine rather than performative repentance, God's promise to restore the years the locusts have eaten, and the outpouring of the Spirit on sons and daughters, young and old, which Peter quotes at Pentecost. Where Christians hold different views on how that promise applies to roles in the church today, the book notes that sincere believers differ while affirming what Joel clearly says: the Spirit is for everyone.

Chapter 3 addresses God's judgment on nations that sold children into slavery. A Real Talk box connects this to modern human trafficking and exploitation, encouraging readers to recognize warning signs and to talk with a trusted adult. It lists the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888, or text 233733), the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453), and 911.

Other boxes address crisis, loss, regret, and 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Joel's promises come to life in Acts 2 and Romans 10:13, and how Jesus restores what sin and loss have stolen. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will tear their heart, not just their clothes, and discover that God is gracious and merciful.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Who Was Joel?

We know almost nothing about Joel except his name and his father's name. Joel means the LORD is God. His father was Pethuel. He seems to have lived in or near Jerusalem, since he talks a lot about the temple, the priests, and Zion. Beyond that, the book focuses entirely on his message, not his life.

When Did Joel Live?

Unlike most prophets, Joel doesn't mention any king, so his date is uncertain. Some scholars place him early, around 835-800 BC, during the reign of young King Joash, when priests and elders led the nation. They point to the book's position near Hosea and Amos and to the enemies it names, like Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt, and Edom. Others place him after the exile, around 500-350 BC, when the temple had been rebuilt and the people had no king. They point to the mention of Greeks buying slaves, the focus on priests and elders, and the way Joel seems to echo other prophets. Some propose a date in between. Sincere Christians hold different views, and the message of the book doesn't depend on settling it.

Locust Plagues

Locusts are a kind of grasshopper. Most of the time, they live alone. But when conditions are right, they change their behavior, gather in enormous swarms, and travel long distances. A single swarm can cover hundreds of square miles and contain billions of insects. Each

locust eats roughly its own weight in plants every day. A large swarm can eat as much food in a day as millions of people. Swarms still hit parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia today. In 2020, East Africa saw its worst locust outbreak in decades. In the ancient world, a locust plague meant famine.

The Day of the LORD

Joel's big theme is the Day of the LORD. It's a phrase used by many prophets for a time when God steps into history in a dramatic way to judge evil and rescue His people. People in Israel often thought of it as a great day when God would defeat their enemies. But the prophets warned that it would also bring judgment on God's own people if they were unfaithful. Sometimes the Day of the LORD refers to a disaster in the prophet's own time. Sometimes it points to the final day when God will set everything right. Joel uses it both ways.

How Joel Is Built

Joel moves from disaster to hope. Chapter 1 describes the locust plague and calls for mourning. Chapter 2 describes an even more terrifying invasion, then calls the people to repent, and promises restoration. Then it promises that God will pour out His Spirit. Chapter 3 describes God judging the nations and blessing His people. In the Hebrew Bible, the verses are numbered differently, with 2:28-32 as chapter 3 and chapter 3 as chapter 4. This book follows the English numbering used by the WEB.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Joel 1): When the locusts hit.

Chapter 2 (Joel 2:1-27): Tear your heart, not your clothes.

Chapter 3 (Joel 2:28-32): Pouring out the Spirit on all flesh.

Chapter 4 (Joel 3): The valley of decision and the fountain of hope.

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CHAPTER 1

When the Locusts Hit

Joel 1

Joel's book opens with a question for the oldest people in town. "Hear this, you elders, and listen, all you inhabitants of the land! Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?"

The answer was no. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. And Joel wanted the story passed down for generations. "Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children, another generation."

What happened? Locusts. Wave after wave of them. "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."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Four Kinds of Locusts**
>
> Joel uses four different Hebrew words for the insects. Some scholars think they describe four different kinds of locusts. Others think they describe four stages in a locust's life, from young hoppers without wings to fully grown flyers. Others think Joel is using four words for poetic effect, to show wave after wave of destruction. Whatever the exact meaning, the point is clear: what one wave missed, the next one devoured. Nothing was left.

Joel describes the swarm like an invading army. "For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number. His teeth are the

teeth of a lion." They stripped the grapevines and fig trees, even gnawing off the bark until the branches were white.

Then Joel goes through every group of people and tells them to mourn.

First, the partiers. "Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine." The grapes were gone, so there would be no more wine. The good times were over.

Then the priests. The grain and wine used for daily offerings at the temple had run out. "The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from the LORD's house. The priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn." For the first time in living memory, worship itself was being interrupted.

Then the farmers. "Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers, for the wheat and for the barley; for the harvest of the field has perished." The wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates, and apples were all gone. And Joel sums it up with a heartbreaking line: "joy has withered away from the sons of men."

REAL TALK **When Everything Gets Stripped Away**

Sometimes life hits like a locust swarm. A parent loses a job. A family member gets seriously sick. Your house is damaged in a storm or fire. Your family breaks apart. Suddenly, the things you counted on are gone, and joy seems to have withered away. If that's happening to you, it's okay to grieve. Joel didn't tell people to pretend everything was fine. He told them to mourn. Talk to a trusted adult about what you're going through. You don't have to carry it alone. And if the weight ever feels like too much, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Food in the Ancient World**

In Joel's world, there were no grocery stores, food trucks, or imports from other countries. People ate what they grew. Grain made bread, the most basic

food. Grapes made wine, which was a normal part of meals. Olives made oil for cooking, lamps, and medicine. Figs and dates were important sources of sugar and energy. If a swarm destroyed all of these at once, a family could starve before the next harvest, and the seeds for next year's crop might be gone too.

Notice what the locusts did. They stripped away everything people relied on: food, drink, income, even the ability to worship in the usual way. Everything they had counted on for security was suddenly gone.

That's what a crisis often does. It exposes what we've been trusting. When things are going well, it's easy to think we're in control. We have money, food, friends, plans, and routines. But when the locusts hit, we discover how fragile all of that really is.

So what does Joel tell them to do? Not panic. Not blame each other. Not just try harder. He tells them to turn to God.

"Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD, your God, and cry to the LORD."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fasting and Sackcloth**

In the ancient world, people showed grief and repentance by fasting, going without food, and by wearing sackcloth, a rough, scratchy cloth made from goat hair. Sometimes they also sat in ashes or put dust on their heads. These were outward signs of inner sorrow. A solemn assembly was a special gathering of the whole community to pray. Joel wanted everyone to come together and cry out to God, because this disaster affected everyone.

Then Joel uses a phrase that will echo through the rest of the book. "Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty."

The locust plague was a warning. It was a preview of an even bigger day, when God would step into history to deal with sin. If the locusts were this bad, how much more serious would the Day of the LORD be?

Joel ends the chapter with his own prayer. "LORD, I cry to you, for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field." Drought had followed the locusts. Even the animals were suffering. "Yes, the animals of the field pant to you, for the water brooks have dried up."

REAL TALK **Even the Animals Cry Out**

Joel says the animals were panting to God. It's a striking picture: creation itself crying out in its suffering. The Bible cares about the whole world God made, not just people. Paul wrote that all creation groans, waiting to be set free. Today, many young people care deeply about the environment, animals, and the planet. That's a good instinct. Christians believe God made the world, called it good, and asked people to take care of it. Caring for creation is part of loving the Creator.

REAL TALK **What's Your Security?**

Joel 1 asks a hard question: What happens when everything you depend on is gone? If your sense of security comes from your grades, your friend group, your looks, your phone, or your family's money, a crisis can shake you to the core. Those things are good gifts, but they can't hold your whole life. Joel's answer is to cry out to the LORD. God doesn't promise that bad things will never happen. But He promises that He is a refuge who never runs out, even when everything else does.

Joel 1 is a hard chapter. There are no quick answers. But it shows the right first step in a crisis: be honest about the loss, come together, and turn to God.

KEY VERSE

Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD, your God, and cry to the LORD.

Joel 1:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Joel wanted people to tell their children and grandchildren about the locust plague?
2. What things did the locusts strip away from people's lives?
3. What do you rely on for security? What would happen if it were taken away?
4. Why do you think Joel told people to gather together and cry to the LORD?

TRY THIS *Make a list of the things you depend on most. Next to each, write whether it could be taken away. Then write one sentence telling God that you want Him to be your deepest security.*

CHAPTER 2

Tear Your Heart, Not Your Clothes

Joel 2:1–27

Chapter 2 opens with an alarm. “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 the LORD comes, for it is close at hand.”

Joel describes an army so vast and terrifying that the sky turns dark. “A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” In front of them, the land looks like the garden of Eden. Behind them, it’s a desolate wilderness.

They look like horses and run like warhorses. They sound like chariots and crackling fire. They climb walls like soldiers. They march in perfect lines, never breaking ranks. “They rush on the city. They run on the wall. They climb up into the houses. They enter in at the windows like thieves.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Fair Questions: Locusts or an Army?**
>
> Is Joel 2 describing locusts again, or a human army? Christians and scholars hold different views. Some think chapter 2 continues describing the locust plague, comparing the insects to an army. Locust heads really do look a bit like tiny horse heads, and their swarms can darken the sky and sound like fire. Others think chapter 2 describes a future human army, perhaps the Assyrians or Babylonians, using the locusts of chapter 1 as a picture. Others think it

points to the final Day of the LORD. Some combine these views. Either way, the main point is the same: a terrifying judgment is coming, and the only hope is to turn to God.

And then comes the most surprising part. Who is leading this army? "The LORD thunders his voice before his army, for his forces are very great." The army was God's. The disaster was a wake-up call from Him. "For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?"

That's the question. Who can survive the Day of the LORD? And then, right when things seem hopeless, God speaks.

"Yet even now, says the LORD, turn to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning."

Yet even now. Those might be the three most hopeful words in Joel. Even when the alarm is sounding, even when disaster is at the door, it's not too late.

Then God says what kind of turning He's looking for. "Tear your heart and not your garments, and turn to the LORD, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tearing Your Clothes**

In the ancient world, people tore their clothes as a sign of deep grief, shock, or repentance. Jacob tore his clothes when he thought his son Joseph was dead. David tore his clothes when he heard that Saul and Jonathan had died. It was a dramatic, public way of showing sorrow. But it could also become a performance, something people did because it was expected, even if their hearts weren't changed. God says He isn't interested in the show. He wants their hearts.

Notice why Joel says they should turn back. Not because God is harsh, but because He is good. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness." Those words go all the way back to Exodus 34, when God revealed His character to Moses on Mount Sinai. They're repeated throughout the Old Testament, by Moses, David, Nehemiah, Jonah, and others. It's like God's official description of Himself.

> **REAL TALK** **Real vs. Performative**
>
> It's possible to look sorry without being sorry. You can post the right thing, say the right words, put on a sad face, or apologize just to get out of trouble. That's tearing your clothes without tearing your heart. Real repentance is different. It means honestly admitting what you did, feeling the weight of it, and actually changing direction. It's not about how sad you look. It's about turning around. Jesus warned against people who fast with sad faces just so others will notice. God sees past the performance to the heart. And the good news is that He's gracious and merciful, so you don't need to put on a show to be welcomed back.

Then Joel says something humble. "Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him." Joel doesn't treat God like a vending machine, where you put in repentance and get out blessings. He leaves room for God's freedom. But he hopes in God's mercy.

So Joel calls everyone together again. "Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly." Everyone was invited: the elders, the children, even nursing babies. Even a bride and groom were supposed to leave their wedding celebration. Nobody was too young, too old, or too busy. And the priests were to weep between the porch and the altar and pray, "Spare your people, LORD."

REAL TALK **Everyone Is Invited**

Notice that Joel called the children too. Even the youngest people in the community were part of turning back to God. Sometimes teens feel like church and faith are mainly for adults, and they're just along for the ride. Joel says no. You're part of God's people right now, not someday. Your prayers matter. Your repentance matters. Your faith matters. Paul told young Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe." You can lead in your family, your school, and your church by turning to God with your whole heart.

And then everything changes. "Then the LORD was jealous for his land, and had pity on his people."

God answered. He promised to send grain, wine, and oil again. He promised to drive away the invading army. He told the land, the animals, and the people not to be afraid. The rain would come again, the early rain in the fall and the latter rain in the spring. The threshing floors would be full of wheat, and the vats would overflow with wine and oil.

And then God made one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible. "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."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Restoring the Years**

Notice that God doesn't just promise to restore the crops. He promises to restore the years. You can't actually get time back. A year lost to locusts is gone. But God promised to make up for it, to bring such abundance that it would be as if those years hadn't been wasted. It's a promise that God can redeem loss in ways we can't imagine. That doesn't mean everything lost will be replaced in the same form. But it means loss doesn't get the final word.

REAL TALK **Lost Years**

Maybe you feel like you've lost time. Maybe you spent years in a bad situation, like a hard home life, an illness, a toxic friendship, an addiction, or just running from God. Maybe you look back with regret and think, I wasted so much. Joel 2:25 is for you. God specializes in restoring what was eaten. He can bring good out of the hardest seasons and make your story count. That might take time, and it might not look exactly the way you expect. But your past doesn't disqualify you from a good future with God. If you're struggling with regret or shame, talk to a trusted adult, pastor, or counselor about it.

God ends this section with two more promises. "You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied, and will praise the name of the LORD, your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and my people will never again be disappointed. You will know that I am among Israel, and that I am the LORD, your God, and there is no one else."

The greatest blessing wasn't the food. It was God Himself. He would be among His people.

KEY VERSE

Tear your heart and not your garments, and turn to the LORD, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity.

Joel 2:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the words yet even now are so important?
2. What's the difference between tearing your heart and tearing your clothes?
3. Why does Joel point to God's character as the reason to turn back to Him?
4. Is there an area of your life where you feel like the locusts have eaten years? How might God restore it?

TRY THIS *Write a short, honest prayer telling God about one area where you need to turn back to Him. Don't worry about saying it perfectly. Just tear your heart.*

CHAPTER 3

Pouring Out the Spirit on All Flesh

Joel 2:28–32

Joel has just promised that God will restore what the locusts ate. Then he looks further ahead, beyond the next harvest, to something even bigger.

"It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit."

This is one of the most amazing promises in the Old Testament. To understand why, you need to know how the Spirit worked before.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Spirit in the Old Testament**
>
> In most of the Old Testament, God's Spirit came on specific people for specific tasks. The Spirit came on craftsmen to build the tabernacle, on judges like Gideon and Samson to rescue Israel, on kings like Saul and David, and on prophets to speak God's word. But most ordinary people never experienced the Spirit that way. Moses once said he wished all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit on them. Joel says that day is coming. The Spirit won't be just for a few special leaders. He will be for everyone.

Notice the word poured. Not sprinkled, not dripped. Poured out, like rain after a drought. After a chapter about dry land and withered crops, God promises a downpour, not of water, but of His own Spirit.

And look who receives Him. All flesh. Then Joel spells out what that means.

Sons and daughters. Both young men and young women. Not just men.

Old men and young men. Not just the experienced and respected. Young people too.

Servants and handmaids. Not just the powerful and wealthy. Even those at the bottom of society, who had no status at all.

> **REAL TALK** **The Spirit Is for Teens Too**
>
> Joel specifically mentions sons and daughters and young men. That's you. God doesn't wait until you're an adult to use you. In the Bible, God worked through young people again and again: Samuel heard God's voice as a boy, David faced Goliath as a teenager, Mary was probably a teenager when she said yes to God, and Timothy was a young pastor. When Joel says the Spirit will be poured out on sons and daughters, he means God wants to fill and use young people. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to be willing.
>
> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fair Questions: Sons and Daughters Prophesying**
>
> Joel's promise that both sons and daughters will prophesy was radical in the ancient world, where women were often excluded from religious leadership. The New Testament shows women prophesying, like Philip's four daughters in Acts 21 and women in the church at Corinth. Christians today hold different views on how this applies to specific roles in church leadership, and sincere, Bible-loving believers come to different conclusions on that question. But

Joel and Acts are clear on the main point: the Holy Spirit is poured out on women and men alike, and God speaks through and uses both. Paul wrote, "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

What does it mean to prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions? In the Bible, prophecy means speaking God's message, often encouraging, warning, or comforting people. Dreams and visions were ways God sometimes revealed Himself. Joel's point is that everyone would know God personally and be able to share His message. The New Testament says the Spirit gives different gifts to different people, but everyone who belongs to Jesus has the Spirit.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Prophecy Today**

Christians have different views on how gifts like prophecy, dreams, and visions work today. Some believe these gifts continue in the church in much the same way as in the New Testament. Others believe some gifts were especially for the time of the apostles, while God still guides His people today through Scripture and the Spirit. Many take positions in between. All agree that any message claiming to come from God must line up with the Bible, and that the Spirit's most important work is helping people know Jesus and love one another.

Then Joel describes signs that will accompany the Day of the LORD. "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Blood Moon**

During a total lunar eclipse, the moon can turn a deep reddish color, which is why people sometimes call it a blood moon. Some people have tried to connect specific eclipses with Joel's prophecy and predict the end of the world. Those predictions have repeatedly turned out to be wrong. In the Bible, darkened sun and blood moon are common prophetic images for times

when God shakes the world in judgment. Peter quoted these lines at Pentecost, and many Christians connect them both with the darkness that covered the land when Jesus was crucified and with the final day still to come.

And then comes the climax. Of all the promises in Joel, this might be the greatest. "It will happen that whoever will call on the LORD's name shall be saved."

Whoever. Not just the people of Israel. Not just the religious leaders. Not just the good people. Whoever. Anyone who calls on the name of the LORD.

REAL TALK **Calling on His Name**

What does it mean to call on the name of the LORD? It means turning to God for help and trusting Him to save you. It's not a magic formula. It's a cry from the heart, like someone who's drowning shouting for a lifeguard. In the Bible, a name represents a person's character and authority. Calling on God's name means trusting who He is. You don't need fancy words, a perfect past, or a special location. You can call on Him anywhere, anytime: in your room, in a car, in a hospital, at school, or in the middle of the night.

Seven hundred years or more after Joel, his words came to life in a way no one expected.

Jesus had died and risen. Before He returned to heaven, He told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the gift His Father had promised. Then, on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, they were gathered together in one place. "Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." Something like tongues of fire rested on each of them. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Pentecost**

Pentecost, called Shavuot in Hebrew, was a Jewish harvest festival held fifty days after Passover. Jewish tradition also connected it with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem for it. That's why, in Acts 2, people from many nations heard the disciples speaking in their own languages. The timing is beautiful. Joel had promised a great harvest after the locusts and an outpouring of God's Spirit. At Pentecost, the harvest festival became the day the Spirit was poured out, and about three thousand people joined the church.

A crowd gathered, amazed and confused. Some mocked, saying the disciples were drunk. Then Peter stood up. "For these aren't drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel."

Peter quoted Joel's whole prophecy, and then he told them about Jesus: His life, His death, His resurrection, and His exaltation. The Lord on whom they should call was Jesus. When the people asked what they should do, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are far off."

REAL TALK **The Promise Is to Your Children**

Peter said the promise was for the crowd, for their children, and for all who were far off. That includes you. You don't have to be a Bible scholar, a pastor, or an adult to receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's gift to everyone who turns to Jesus. He helps you understand the Bible, pray when you don't know what to say, resist temptation, and love people you find hard to love. If you've trusted Jesus, the Spirit Joel promised lives in you. Ask Him to guide you every day.

KEY VERSE

It will happen that whoever will call on the LORD's name shall be saved

Joel 2:32 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why was Joel's promise of the Spirit on all flesh so surprising in his time?
2. What does it mean to you that the Spirit is poured out on sons and daughters, young and old?
3. What does it look like to call on the name of the LORD?
4. How did Joel's prophecy come true at Pentecost?

TRY THIS *Read Acts 2:1-41. Underline every place where Joel is quoted or echoed. Then ask God's Spirit to help you live for Him this week.*

CHAPTER 4

The Valley of Decision and the Fountain of Hope

Joel 3

In chapter 3, Joel's focus widens to the whole world. God says that when He restores His people, He will gather all the nations into "the valley of Jehoshaphat," and judge them there.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Valley of Jehoshaphat**
>
> Jehoshaphat means the LORD judges. No one is sure exactly where the valley of Jehoshaphat was, or whether Joel meant a literal place. Since the fourth century AD, some traditions have identified it with the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem between the city and the Mount of Olives, where many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim graves now lie. Others think the name is symbolic, describing the place where God judges. It may also remind readers of King Jehoshaphat, who saw God defeat an invading army without a battle in 2 Chronicles 20.

Why would God judge the nations? Joel gives specific reasons. They had scattered God's people. They had divided up His land. And they had done something horrifying: "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."

They treated children as cheap merchandise. They traded a boy or a girl for a night of drinking. Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia had also stolen

treasures from God's temple and sold the people of Judah "to the sons of the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their border."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Slave Trading**

Tyre and Sidon were wealthy Phoenician trading cities on the Mediterranean coast, and the Philistines lived along the southwest coast. Ancient sources show that the Phoenicians were major traders across the Mediterranean, and that human beings, including prisoners of war, were among the goods bought and sold. Amos also condemned Tyre and Gaza for selling whole communities as slaves to Edom. Joel shows that God sees and cares about every person who has been bought, sold, or treated as property.

God promised that He would turn their actions back on their own heads. The people they had sold would be brought back, and the traders would face justice. The God of Israel does not ignore the exploitation of the vulnerable.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety First: Human Trafficking Is Real**

Human trafficking still happens today, including in the United States. Traffickers use force, fraud, or manipulation to exploit people for labor or sex. Teens are often targeted, sometimes online through social media, gaming platforms, or messaging apps. Warning signs include someone who offers you a job, modeling deal, or relationship that seems too good to be true; who showers you with gifts and attention, then asks for favors; who asks you to keep your relationship secret; who wants to meet in person after only knowing you online; or who pressures you to send pictures. If anything like that is happening to you or a friend, tell a trusted adult right away. You can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733. If you're being abused, call or text the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. It's never your fault.

Then God issues a challenge to the nations. It's like a battle cry, mocking their pride. "Prepare for war! Stir up the mighty men. Let all the warriors draw near." And then: "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am strong."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Plowshares and Swords**

Joel's command to beat plowshares into swords is the reverse of a famous promise in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." A plowshare is the metal blade of a plow, used for farming. Isaiah and Micah describe a future of peace, when weapons will be turned into farm tools. Joel describes the opposite, a final rebellion when the nations turn their farming tools into weapons to fight against God. It's as if Joel is saying, Go ahead and gather every weapon you can make. It won't be enough. After God's judgment, Isaiah's peace will finally come.

Then Joel describes the nations gathering. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

The valley of decision isn't mainly a place where the nations decide something. It's where God's decision, His verdict, is announced. Joel uses the picture of a harvest. "Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe." The wickedness of the nations was ripe, ready for judgment. Revelation uses the same imagery for the final judgment.

REAL TALK **Justice Is Coming**

It can feel like people who hurt others get away with it. Bullies, abusers, traffickers, and corrupt leaders sometimes seem untouchable. Joel 3 says God sees it all, and He will hold every person and nation accountable. That's good news for anyone who has been hurt. It means injustice won't have the final word. It's also a reason not to take revenge into your own hands, but to trust God's justice and support people who work for justice now, like police,

courts, advocates, and organizations that help victims. If someone has hurt you, you don't have to stay silent. Telling a trusted adult is a step toward justice.

And then the sun and moon go dark, and the LORD roars from Zion. "The LORD will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth will shake; but the LORD will be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel."

The same God whose voice shakes heaven and earth is a safe place for His people. His power is terrifying to His enemies and comforting to those who trust Him.

Then Joel ends with a picture of paradise. "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; and a fountain will flow out from the LORD's house."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Fountain From God's House**

Joel's fountain flowing from the temple connects with Ezekiel 47, where a river flows from the temple and heals the Dead Sea, and with Zechariah 14, where living waters flow from Jerusalem. The valley of Shittim, which Joel mentions, may refer to a dry valley where acacia trees grew, possibly near the Dead Sea. Water flowing into a dry valley is a picture of life coming to barren places. At the end of the Bible, John sees "a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

Remember how Joel began? Dry fields, withered crops, dried-up streams, animals panting for water, and joy withering away. Now the book ends with mountains dripping with sweet wine, hills flowing with milk, streams full of water, and a fountain flowing from God's house. Everything the locusts took has been restored and more.

The last line of Joel is simple and powerful. "For the LORD dwells in Zion."

That's the final answer to every disaster, every injustice, and every loss. God is there. He lives among His people. And where God is, there is life.

> **REAL TALK** **From Dry Ground to a Fountain**
>
> Joel's book moves from total loss to overflowing abundance. Maybe your life feels more like chapter 1 right now, dry, empty, and stripped bare. Joel's message is that it doesn't have to stay that way. God can bring life to dry places. It may not happen overnight, and it may not look exactly like you expect. But the God who restores the years and pours out His Spirit is still at work. Keep turning to Him. Keep calling on His name. And if you're in a dry season that feels hopeless, please talk to someone you trust, and remember that 988 is available any time.

KEY VERSE

The LORD will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth will shake; but the LORD will be a refuge to his people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel.

Joel 3:16 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God takes the exploitation of children so seriously?
2. How does Joel's plowshares-into-swords image reverse Isaiah's?
3. What does it mean that the LORD is both a roaring lion and a refuge?
4. How does the ending of Joel compare to its beginning?

TRY THIS *Learn more about how to recognize and prevent human trafficking. Talk with a parent or trusted adult about online safety, and agree on a plan for what you'll do if anyone online ever makes you uncomfortable.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Joel ends with a fountain flowing from God's house and a promise that the LORD dwells in Zion. Jewish readers treasure Joel's call to repentance, and Joel 2 is read in some Jewish communities during the season of return before the Day of Atonement. Christians believe Joel's greatest promises came to life after Jesus rose from the dead.

Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, His followers were gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. "Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind." Something like tongues of fire rested on each of them, and they began speaking in languages they had never learned. A crowd gathered. Some said they were drunk. Then Peter stood up and said, "But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel." He quoted Joel 2:28-32. The Spirit had been poured out, on men and women, young and old. And he ended with Joel's promise: "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Peter told the crowd that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the Lord on whom they should call. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are far off." About three thousand people believed that day. Years later, Paul quoted the same promise in Romans: "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved," adding that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. And the God who promised to restore the years the locusts had eaten does that in Jesus, who takes lives devoured by sin, loss, and regret and makes them new.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Joel calls everyone, from elders to children, to turn back to God. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus opened the way.

Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Then He poured out the Spirit Joel promised, so everyone who calls on His name can be saved.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

God's Spirit is poured out as a gift, not a wage. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Call on His name.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Joel says, Tear your heart and not your garments. You don't need perfect words. You can call on the name of the Lord right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way, and I can't fix that myself. I'm tearing my heart, not just saying the right words. Thank You that You are gracious and merciful. Thank You that Jesus died for my sins, rose again, and poured out Your Spirit. I call on His name. Forgive me, fill me with Your Spirit, and restore the years that have been lost. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Joel 2, then Acts 2, from the promise to Pentecost.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized, like the three thousand at Pentecost.

Ask for the Spirit's help. Each day, ask God's Spirit to guide you, strengthen you, and use you.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Joel asks, Who knows? God may turn and leave a blessing behind. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Joel is right, the promise is for you too. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten

Joel 2:25 (WEB)