



# UPON ALL FLESH

Systemic Collapse, Radical Vulnerability, and  
Divine Restoration in the Book of Joel

## COMMENTARY OVERVIEW

This commentary offers a contemporary, multi-disciplinary reading of the Book of Joel, unearthing its ancient Hebrew roots to address the systemic, psychological, and cultural crises of the twenty-first century. Rather than treating Joel's apocalyptic visions as historical relics or distant predictions, this study frames the text as a universal map of human and structural disruption. Through a rigorous grammatical-historical exegesis of critical passages (Joel 1:1-4, 11, 15; 2:1-2, 11-14, 21-31; 3:10, 13-14, 16, 18-21), we unpack the profound linguistic wordplays—such as the transition from Gazam to Hasil as a lifecycle of compounding trauma, and the terrifying phonetic tension of ke-shod mi-Shaddai—to reveal their modern counterparts. The commentary bridges the ancient text with modern realities, drawing direct parallels between the Judean locust plague and systemic societal cascades, the collapse of agrarian harvests and the burnout of modern meritocracy, and the performative grief of "rending garments" and contemporary public relations virtue-signalling. Ultimately, this work highlights Joel's radical pivot: the transition from systemic deconstruction to a profoundly inclusive, decentralized democratization of the Divine Spirit (Ruach) poured out upon "all flesh" (kol-basar). By exploring the ironic reversal of agrarian tools into weapons in the "valley of decision," the study concludes with a vision of eco-theological restoration, arguing that Joel provides a timeless blueprint for navigating corporate collapse through the lens of radical vulnerability and divine realignment.

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Upon All Flesh

## Introduction

### The Anatomy of the Locust

The Book of Joel is not a relic of antiquity; it is a psychological, ecological, and systemic mirror for the modern world. It is a text that belongs to everyone because it maps the universal human cycle: the sudden collapse of our false securities, the agonizing demand for inner vulnerability, and the ultimate, decentralized democratization of the Divine Spirit.

## Section 1

### Joel 1:1-4 — The Generational Echo of Trauma

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

Joel—whose name defiantly claims, "Yahweh is God"—begins by shaking the cultural gatekeepers, the *zeqenim* (old men), who serve as the community's living archives. He asks if collective memory holds anything as devastating as the current crisis.

The core of this passage turns on four specific Hebrew words for the devastation:

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- **Palmerworm (*Gazam*):** From a root meaning "to shear" or "cut off."
- **Locust (*Arbeh*):** From a root meaning "to multiply" or "become many."
- **Cankerworm (*Yeleg*):** From a root meaning "to lick" or "strip bare."
- **Caterpillar (*Hasil*):** From a root meaning "to devour" or "consume."

Whether these represent distinct insect species, the metamorphic stages of a single locust lifecycle, or a poetic device for absolute ruin, the historical reality was catastrophic. An ancient locust swarm could blot out the sun, blanketing dozens of square miles, stripping a kingdom bare of foliage within hours. It meant immediate famine and economic death. Joel demands that this systemic stripping be deliberately spoken into the collective memory across four generations.

### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

- **The Systemic Cascade:** In modern terms, this describes a **compound crisis**. It is the terrifying reality of cascading failures where one disaster feeds the next. Consider how a global health crisis (*Gazam*) fractures global supply chains (*Arbeh*), triggering severe economic inflation (*Yeleg*), which culminates in a widespread mental health and social crisis (*Hasil*).
- **Psychological Trauma:** Psychologically, this is the blueprint of unaddressed trauma. What one generation cuts off and represses (*Gazam*), the next generation multiplies in behavioural patterns (*Arbeh*). If left unprocessed, the third generation is stripped bare of coping mechanisms (*Yeleg*), and the fourth is entirely consumed by the shadow (*Hasil*). Joel insists on radical honesty in our generational storytelling. We cannot heal what we sanitize; we must map the collapse accurately for our children so they can understand the landscape of their own souls.

### 4. The Core Takeaway

**"Unprocessed crisis does not vanish with time; it merely mutates for the next generation."**

## Section 2

### Joel 1:11 — The Burnout of the Meritocracy

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished."*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

Joel targets the *ikkarim* (farmers/husbandmen) and *koremim* (vinedressers). In the ancient Near East, these were not romanticized agrarian figures—they were the foundational engine of survival, economy, and religion.

The Hebrew word for "perished" is *abad*, which implies wandering off, being utterly lost, or destroyed. The tragedy strikes the core of existence because "wheat" (*chittah*) and "barley" (*seorah*) were the primary staples of daily life. When the harvest perishes, human survival is threatened, and the daily grain and drink offerings in the Temple stop. The human economy and the spiritual economy collapse simultaneously.

#### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

- **The Collapse of Identity:** This strikes directly at the heart of modern **hustle culture and meritocracy**. We anchor our identity, security, and ultimate worth in our "harvest"—our career metrics, financial portfolios, and professional output.
- **The Void of Burnout:** When a sudden macro shift (corporate downsizing, technological obsolescence, or profound personal burnout) causes our field to perish, we do not just lose an income; we lose our minds. We "howl" because the very mechanisms we relied on to prove our value to the world—and to God—have evaporated. Joel exposes the structural fragility of a life built entirely on human productivity.

#### 4. The Core Takeaway

**"When your work becomes your worship, the failure of your harvest will feel like the death of your soul."**

## Section 3

### Joel 1:15 — The Nearness of the Void

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come."*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

This verse turns on a chilling, internal phonetic wordplay in the Hebrew text: *ke-shod mi-Shaddai* ("as a destruction from the Destroyer" or "as devastation from the Almighty").

*El Shaddai* is the name traditionally associated with fertility, covenant, and motherly nurture in the book of Genesis. Joel deliberately subverts this expectation. The word for destruction (*shod*) shares a phonetic root with *Shaddai*. Joel declares that the very force which sustains life is now the force deconstructing it. "The Day of the Lord" (*Yom Yahweh*) is not a geopolitical victory over Israel's enemies, but God breaking into history to dismantle His own people's illusions.

#### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

- **The End of the Illusion:** "The Day of the Lord" is the exact moment when our illusion of control is violently stripped away. It is the sudden diagnosis, the systemic crash, or the existential crisis that shatters our naive optimism.
- **The Deconstructing Divine:** Modern spirituality often demands a safe, domesticated deity who exists purely to rubber-stamp our personal comfort. Joel introduces us to the terrifying, untameable aspect of reality. Sometimes, the most spiritual event that can happen to a corrupt or stagnant system is its total deconstruction. The "destruction from the Almighty" is the breaking of our idols so that something real can finally grow.

#### 4. The Core Takeaway

**"The God who breaks your illusions is saving you from the prison of your own comfort."**

## Section 4

### Joel 2:1-2 & 11-14 — The Anatomy of Radical Transformation

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"(1) Blow ye 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 cometh, for it is nigh at hand; (2) A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations...*

*(11) And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army... (12) Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: (13) And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. (14) Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?"*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

The *shofar* (trumpet) blown in Zion is not a call to liturgy; it is an air-raid siren. The imagery of "darkness" (*choshek*) and "gloominess" (*aphelah*) intentionally mimics the cosmic language of the Egyptian plagues—it signifies a reversal of creation, an undoing of Genesis light.

Yet, in verse 12, the text pivots on the word *shub* ("turn" or "return"). God demands a return *b'kol-lebab* ("with all your heart"). In Hebrew thought, the *lebab* (heart) is not the seat of raw emotion, but the center of the intellect, will, and critical decision-making.

To "rend your garments" (*qara*) was the standard ancient Near Eastern cultural performance of grief and public apology. Joel exposes this as empty theater. He demands the tearing open of the *lebab*. Why? Because God's character is anchored in Exodus 34:6: He is *channun* (gracious) and *rachum* (compassionate, derived from the word for "womb").

#### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

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- **Authenticity Over PR:** We live in a hyper-performative, garment-rending culture. When an institution or public figure errs, they issue a curated public relations statement, adjust a profile picture, or perform corporate rituals of virtue-signalling—this is the modern equivalent of rending the garment.
- **The Tearing of the Ego:** Joel states that God is entirely unimpressed by public relations. Real transformation (*metanoia*) requires a painful, internal tearing of the ego. It means cracking open our psychological defences to face our shadow. This message is universally inclusive because it bypasses religious pedigree; it doesn't matter who you are—the invitation to radical vulnerability applies to everyone.

### 4. The Core Takeaway

**"God is not interested in the performance of your grief; He wants the surrender of your pride."**

## Section 5

### Joel 2:21-31 — The Democratization of the Divine

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"(21) Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things... (28) And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: (29) And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (30) And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. (31) The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come."*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

Once the people return and the ecological matrix is healed (vs. 21-26), a staggering metaphysical shift occurs. The word for Spirit is *Ruach* (breath, wind, or divine life-force).

In the ancient world, the *Ruach* of Yahweh was a highly exclusive, aristocratic commodity, granted temporarily only to kings, military liberators, and high priests. Joel shatters this ancient social pyramid. God declares He will pour (*shaphak*, meaning to dump out in unmeasured abundance) His Spirit upon *kol-basar* ("all flesh").

He specifically targets the most marginalized tiers of ancient society:

- **Gender:** "Sons and daughters"
- **Age:** "Old men and young men"
- **Class:** "Servants and handmaids" (the lowest tier of the economic ladder).

The cosmic signs in verses 30-31 (blood, fire, smoke) represent the collapse of old cosmic, political, and social structures to make room for this new era.

#### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

- **The Decentralization of Wisdom:** This is the ultimate spiritual democratization. In a modern context, it means that divine intuition, wisdom, and spiritual

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authority are no longer locked inside institutional ivory towers, corporate boardrooms, or exclusive religious hierarchies.

- **The Voice of the Forgotten:** The Spirit bypasses traditional gatekeepers and speaks through the unconventional, the young, the forgotten, and the systematically oppressed. It is a profound psychological levelling: every individual has direct, unmediated access to the divine source. The old world's "sun and moon" (our rigid, elite power structures) are darkened because a new, decentralized spiritual reality has emerged.

### **4. The Core Takeaway**

**"The Divine Spirit cannot be monopolized by institutions; it belongs to anyone broken enough to breathe it in."**

## Section 6

### Joel 3:10, 13-14, 16, 18-21 — The Crisis of Polarization and Ultimate Alignment

#### 1. The Text (KJV)

*"(10) Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong... (13) Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision... (16) The Lord also shall roar out of Zion... (18) And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk... (19) Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land... (21) For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion."*

#### 2. The Groundwork (Exegesis)

Verse 10 is an aggressive, intentional subversion of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. While those prophets envision a utopian peace where weapons become farming tools, Joel orders a total, desperate mobilization for judgment. The "valley of decision" is *emeq he-charuts*, which literally means the "valley of the sharp threshing instrument." It is not a place where humans wander around making up their minds about God; it is the place where God sifts, cuts, and threshes human history.

"Egypt" and "Edom" represent Israel's historic exploiters—symbols of empires built on the subjugation and "innocent blood" (*dam naqi*) of others. Their eventual desolation is the natural karmic harvest of their systemic violence. The book closes with a roaring God who establishes a restored eco-theological reality: mountains dripping wine and hills flowing with milk.

#### 3. The Mirror (Modern Parallel)

- **The Weaponization of the Ordinary:** Look closely at our current cultural landscape. We have done exactly what verse 10 describes: we have beaten our

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plowshares (tools meant for connection, education, and culture-building, like social media, journalism, and the internet) into swords and spears to tear one another apart. The "weak saying I am strong" is the perfect psychological profile of the modern ideologue—hiding behind a digital screen, projecting false strength through online vitriol because they lack internal spiritual substance.

- **The Algorithm of the Valley:** The "valley of decision" is our highly polarized modern reality. Our algorithms and tribal politics force "multitudes, multitudes" into echo chambers where neutrality is impossible, and the harvest of our collective choices is ripe for a reckoning.
- **Eco-Justice and Rebalancing:** Joel concludes with an uncompromised vision of restorative justice. Empires and systems built on exploitation, environmental degradation, and the shedding of innocent blood are inherently unsustainable and will eventually collapse into a "desolate wilderness." True, lasting vitality belongs to communities anchored in divine justice, where life flows organically rather than through systemic exploitation.

### 4. The Core Takeaway

**"When we weaponize our cultural tools for division, we condemn ourselves to be threshed by the very systems we created."**