

Joel 1–2: The Progression of Thought and the Use of Tenses in Translation

Tentative suggestion with unfinalized notes, PS, 2020

Genre	Reference	Theme / Progression	Remarks	Hebrew & Translation
V. 1 vocative: Hear ... V. 2 imperative: Tell ... Vv. 5/8/11/13 Calls to mourning and repentance	1:2-14	Joel describes a real plague of locusts (past).		V. 4ff. (<i>qatal</i>): present perfect (e.g. “the locust has eaten”, v. 4 NASB)
Exclamation	1:15	Joel takes the plague of locusts as a harbinger of the Day of the LORD.	The plague is the occasion to look beyond and consider the Day of the LORD, here mentioned briefly (cf. ES, NIV StudyB.).	Lay out as a separate verse.
Rhetorical question / description / The prophet’s own lament to the LORD	1:16-20	Joel continues after vv. 2-14 to describe a drought (ongoing present).	Drought (cf. NIV StudyB.), or indirect and long-term effects of the locust plague (cf. CBC 116)?).	<i>Qatal</i> is used in the lament, describing the state of affairs. Translate with present perfect, or with present tense, as appropriate (e.g. “the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed”, v. 17b NRSV).
Oracle of judgment	2:1-11	Building on the description of the past plague of locusts, the prophet develops that and describes the looming Day of the LORD (either as an invasion of locusts even worse than the former one, or moving on to picturing the invasion of a real army). It is “about to come” / “near” (v. 1).	In 2:1-11, the poetry seems to move subtly from describing locusts to picturing an army of soldiers. There is the question whether Joel describes a second locust plague and uses military similes for it, or whether the text is about a real army of an enemy. The same question comes up in the LORD’s promise of restoration, in 2:20 & 25.*	V. 4-9 mostly <i>yiqtol</i> , used for expressing future. All English versions except KJV use present tense, either because the prophet describes the pictures in his vision, or because futuristic present creates a dramatic effect.
Call on people to repent	2:12-17	Joel calls the people to repentance.		Imperatives.

	–	[Not reported: the people did repent.]	(NICOT on vv. 18-20; <i>Exegetical Summary</i> pp. 117f.)	(a) Mention this in the book introduction? (b) Add section heading like “God’s Response and Promise” (NRSV)
Narrative (picks up from 1:4)	2:18	The LORD’s response: he listened (already) ...	Cf. <i>Handbook; Exegetical Summary (ES)</i> . Go with NRSV (and most versions): “Then the Lord <u>became</u> jealous”, rather than NASB: “Then the Lord <u>will be</u> zealous”; similar NLT07.	<i>Wayyiqtol</i> . Use past tense. (English versions: “Then ...”. German versions more idiomatically “Da ...” (expressing reaction to what preceded; ≈ ‘consequently / at that’).
Oracle of salvation (v. 19 נִחַם + participle = assurance oracle (ES)) Addressing - the land (21), - the animals (22), - the people of Zion (23).	2:19-27	... and promises a reversal (to be experienced soon [or partly in the more distant future?])	“The crisis was to be averted;” (NICOT) * [Comments/Notes:] One arguments for seeing a real army is that they come from the north (v20), which is not typical for locusts (CBC 123 :: NIV StudyB.). :: NICOT: eschatological overtones but just locusts; what fits this is that the locusts die in the seas (v. 20). Dillard (McC.): the “northener” in v. 20 is ambiguous (locusts / Israel’s historical enemies / apocalyptic foe); but seems to favor mainly thinking of locusts. Not much of an extra comment at v. 25. 2:19-27 is probably a promise applicable to the current situation, but to be extended to an endtime disaster (enemy on Day of the LORD). Good discussion in Meißner (EditionC) 153-158 (cf. Wolff). 2:19-20 good harvest & riddance of enemy from north. 2:25 repaying for the loss from the locusts (with those four terms, but also calling them “my great army”). Meaning of “forever” in v. 27? Is this promising rescue from an enemy who is still to come? + Open question: If 2:1ff. is not about the present locust plague, but about a plague on the Day of the LORD, then how can the people be called to repent with regard to it in vv. 12ff.? > ?!: The disaster in ch. 1 gives Joel reason to alert to the Day of the LORD, which will be <i>even</i> worse. The repentance and reversal in ch. 2 show that both are the pattern that applies for any present and future disaster (intertwined here); (Dillard 286: “almost studied ambiguity in Joel”).	<i>Yiqtol</i> (v. 20a) followed by <i>wəqatal</i> (interrupted by imperatives: “Do not fear ...”). Translate with future: “I will ...”. Special case v. 21 “the LORD has done great things”: prophetic perfect (cf. ES). As most English versions in Ps 126:3 (quotation), except KJV, NJPS. – If this is not readily understood, turn into present-future: T4T “He does wonderful things”, cf. CEV. Menge “der Herr vollbringt etwas Großes”, FCL “le Seigneur accomplit de grandes œuvres” (similar PDV). ... Or real future tense: “He will do ...”.
	3:1ff. [English 2:28ff.]	<i>Not dealt with here.</i>		